
Angola Monitor

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The Angola Monitor covers the politics, economics, development, democracy and human rights of Angola. It is published quarterly by Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA)

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Political news

MPLA secure victory at the polls, swearing in first new president in 38 years

The Angolan general election took place on 23rd August, with the ruling Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA) emerging victorious with 61.1% of the vote. The result marked a relatively comfortable victory for the party, who have been in power since independence in 1975, but was notably lower than in previous elections with a 10% drop in vote share from 2012. The election also marks the appointment of Angola's first new president in 38 years, as former defence minister Joao Lourenco takes the helm from his predecessor José Eduardo dos Santos, who has been head of state since 1979.

Despite calls of electoral foul play from the main opposition party União Nacional para a Independência de Angola (UNITA), on Tuesday 26th September Lourenco was sworn in as President of Angola. UNITA boycotted the inauguration (see below), which was otherwise well-attended with the Heads of State of South Africa, Portugal, Cote d'Ivoire, Cape Verde, Namibia, Zambia, Rwanda and Guinea Bissau amongst those in attendance.

Angola's Constitutional Court reject appeal to annul election result

The main opposition party UNITA have had their appeal to challenge the results of Angola's general election in August thrown out by Angola's Constitutional Court. UNITA rejected the results of August's general election, which saw the MPLA retain power with 61% of the vote, on the grounds of irregularities and bias in the electoral process. UNITA claim to have collected notably different results from their own tallies at voting stations to those confirmed by the Angolan Electoral Commission (CNE) in early September. Initial questioning of the CNE's conduct was sparked by the organisation's failure to provide

detailed explanations of how provisional results, which stated the MPLA held a majority of almost 65%, were calculated. There have been further allegations of misconduct concerning media bias in the run-up to the elections from both national and international rights activists as well as opposition parties UNITA and CASA-CE. Critics have suggested voters were manipulated by the media which deprived opposition parties of equal coverage. Both the CNE and SADC declared the elections free and fair. The Constitutional Court ruled the evidence presented in the appeal by UNITA did not offer proof of irregularities or bias in the electoral process. The ruling cannot be appealed. Following the Constitutional Court's verdict UNITA are left with little recourse to continue the dispute.

This is not the first time that UNITA have contested the results of a general election in Angola on the grounds of electoral irregularities. In 2012 UNITA launched an appeal against discrepancies in vote-counting, insufficient access for party delegates to polling stations and problems with the electoral roll. The Constitutional Court ruling for the 2012 case found the appeals to be unfounded. At the time smaller opposition parties CASA-CE and PRS also filed similar appeals.

Samakuva stepping down as UNITA opposition party leader

Isaias Samakuva the man who has led Angola's main opposition party UNITA since 2003 has announced he will be stepping down as leader of the party. In an announcement made the day after Angola's new president was sworn into office Samakuva stated that he would be honouring statements made during the electoral campaign to step down following August's general election. Samakuva has led UNITA since the death of the party's founder Jonas Savimbi whose demise contributed to the end of the protracted war which gripped Angola until 2002. Under Samakuva the party has enjoyed a fairly significant increase of the vote share, from 10% in 2008 to 27% in 2017. Samakuva stated that his successor will be chosen by a congress. It has been reported that the son of UNITA's founder, Rafael Massanga Savimbi, and Samakuva's 2003 running mate Lukamba Paulo, are amongst those in the running for the position.

New First Lady is former World Bank official

The new first lady of Angola, Ana Dias Lourenco is expected to be influential in the newly appointed administration. Ana Dias Lourenco is an Angolan politician in her own right and, as a long standing member of the MPLA, has served in numerous roles in government including Minister of Planning and President of the National Council of Statistics. On the international stage she has most recently served as the Executive Director at the Board of the World Bank Group representing Angola, Nigeria and South Africa. Lourenco is reported to be running for a parliamentary seat under the new administration and commentators have suggested she is the one to watch for hints as to the incoming president's planned economic direction for the nation.

Joao Lourenco – will the new president be able to step out of Dos Santos' shadow?

Angola's new president Joao Lourenco has taken office last month amidst a great deal of speculation as to the kind of leader he will be given the 38 year shadow cast by his predecessor José Eduardo dos Santos. Whilst some have dismissed the political change as cosmetic, there are notable differences between the two men and many are optimistic that the transition will signify change for Angola. Unlike the former president Lourenco is not known for his wealth, lacks any public history of mendacity, and is untarred with allegations of corruption. The 63 year old MPLA veteran joined the party as a young man and fought in both the Angolan War of Independence, and subsequent civil war against UNITA. A military man, he completed training in the Soviet Union in the late 70s and shortly after returning to Angola a few years later moved into politics. Since then Lourenco has held numerous positions within the party, including party secretary-general, deputy speaker of the National Assembly, and for the last 3 years, Minister of National Defence.

Lourenco was appointed by Dos Santos as his successor earlier this year and launched an electoral campaign on the platform of guaranteeing the nation's development and progress, creating job opportunities, and improving health and school systems. However it is his ongoing pledges to tackle corruption within the MPLA that has attracted both interest and scepticism amongst commentators. Whilst many point to the new president's reportedly disciplined style and clean record as indicative of a

new way for Angola, others question whether he will be able to break away from the legacy and will of Dos Santos. Despite stepping down as leader of the country the former president has retained a high degree of political and economic clout. He plans to continue as leader of the MPLA and his familial presence notoriously touches every productive part of the economy.

Even moving beyond the efforts of Dos Santos himself, it remains to be seen how the nation will take to a new leader. Whilst many Angolans have welcomed the change, Lourenco could be seen to lack the symbolic esteem claimed by Dos Santos who led the country through the bitter and long-running civil war to times of peace. This could significantly affect Lourenco's ability to maintain support in the persistently hostile economic climate that Angolans have endured since oil prices crashed in 2014. Meanwhile concerns that power will remain concentrated in the military under the former general are also circulating amongst some of the new president's critics. Only time will tell whether Lourenco can carve out a new path as the third president of Angola, and what this will look like. He is undoubtedly a very different man from Dos Santos but it remains to be seen what this means for the Angolan public, and whether this will play in his favour or to his detriment.

Economic news

Angola spends almost 45% of government revenue on external debt

Angola is the country in the Global South with the widest proportional discrepancy between spending on external debt payments and spending on public healthcare. This is one of the findings in a report recently released by the UK non-governmental organisation Jubilee Debt Campaign. Using data gathered from the IMF and World Bank Debt Sustainability Assessments, the report calculates Angola spends 44 percent of government revenue on the repaying of external debt, juxtaposed by the mere 6 percent spent on public health expenditure. Angola is one of 29 governments in the global South which spend more on external debt payments than they do on public healthcare.

Angola pressured to pay 850m rand owed to South African Airline

Angola owes a reported 850 million rand (\$66 million) to South African airline South African Airways (SAA) according to South African finance minister Malusi Gigaba. Angola is the single largest debtor to the South African airline who are owed a total of approximately 1 billion rand by various African countries who have failed to repatriate revenue. The news comes just months after Emirates prematurely terminated their strategic partnership with Angolan national carrier Taag, simultaneously cutting back the number of flights between Dubai and Luanda (Angola Monitor 2017:3). A spokesperson for SAA has suggested that should Angola fail to pay their debt, the airline may follow suit with similar action. SAA has already reduced the number of flights to Luanda following cuts to scheduling across a range of regional routes. The airline received 3 billion rand (approximately \$222 million) from the South African government in September 2017. It is reported that as of June this year Angola owed 12 airlines internationally a sum of \$477 million, meaning it is the second largest debtor to foreign airlines in global rankings after Venezuela.

President Lourenco's plans for the economy – a real commitment to diversification?

The need to diversify Angola's oil centric economy has long been cited as crucial for the development of Angola by commentators from across the board. Angola is the second largest exporter of oil in sub-Saharan Africa after Nigeria and is heavily dependent on exports from its off-shore oil reserves. As a result the economy suffered drastically following the crash of oil prices in 2014, when prices fell by approximately 50%, plunging the country into recession. In the aftermath, politicians from across the board have emphasized the need to diversify the oil-centric economy. However, 3 years on the commitment seems to have been largely rhetoric, with off-shore oil exports still making up 50 per cent of Angola's GDP and 75 per cent of government revenues. The nation's newly elected president, Joao Lourenco, has stressed the primacy of economic diversification throughout his electoral campaign, citing

investment in agriculture and tourism, and the creation of an enabling environment to attract foreign investors. Whilst there is clear coherence as regards the importance of economic diversification, a statement from the newly appointed State Minister for Economic and Social Development, Manuel Nunes Júnior focused on decreasing importation and increasing internal production without mentioning foreign investment and tourism. All involved do seem to agree on the importance of recuperating foreign exchange, although this is unsurprising given that Angola suffers from a liquidity crisis - a situation which has been exacerbated by a lack of trust from foreign banks in their Angolan counterparts. Many are sceptical that Lourenco will take action where his predecessor has not and translate rhetoric into policy and practice over the coming months. However some commentators have noted that a lack of immediate action in other sectors of the economy may not be out of choice. Dr Alex Vines of UK based independent policy institute Chatham House, has commented that despite the undeniable need to stimulate other parts of the economy in the long term, as the main source of government funds the oil industry will have to be 'nurtured and reformed' in the short term.

Human rights news

Presidential Decree on NGOs declared unconstitutional by Angolan Constitutional Court

The Angolan Constitutional Court has ruled that a decree signed by former President José Eduardo dos Santos and passed in March 2015 which severely restricted the conduct of civil society groups violates the constitution. The decree stipulated civil society organisations must operate and obtain a 'declaration of suitability' before operating in Angola. The Declaration required organisations to register with multiple authorities, including the Foreign Ministry, who as a result could determine the programs and projects run by the organisations. It also gave the Public Prosecutor's Office the power to suspend the activities of national and international NGOs on grounds of money laundering, illegal or harmful acts, and threats to the sovereignty and integrity of Angola. The decree was widely criticised by human rights groups who feared the terms could be subject to dangerously broad interpretation.

Now, two years after its passing, the Constitutional Court has annulled the decree on the grounds that it represents 'unlawful interference' in civil society organisations. The court acknowledged the necessity for some legislation but stated the lack of competence to pass such bills on the part of the President rendered the decree unconstitutional. The court stipulated future legislation should come from the country's National Assembly. The ruling has been praised by Amnesty international's Director for Southern Africa, Deprose Muchena, who stated 'Angolan authorities must see NGOs as partners working in the public interest, not as enemies of the state'.

Amnesty International calls on new government to uphold human rights

Human rights group Amnesty International have called on President Lourenco to uphold the human rights of the Angolan people as he took office last month. The group have heavily criticised Lourenco's predecessor Jose Eduardo Dos Santos for 'repeated attacks on the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly'. Amnesty International's Regional Director for Southern Africa, Deprose Muchena stated 'Angolans have lived in a climate of fear' under the former president. Amnesty International have called on the new president to lift restrictions on criticising the government, which are currently viewed as a crime against the security of the state. Earlier this year ACTSA reported that two journalists had been charged with crimes against the state in relation to the publishing of an article which alleged a public official had illegally acquired public land (Angola Monitor 2017:3). Rights groups widely condemned the charges. It is hoped that the Lourenco presidency will usher in a new era in human rights in Angola, but many remain sceptical that treatment of those critical of the government will change.

Aid and development news

The Future of Demining in Angola

UK based NGO the HALO Trust has launched a new project, '100 Women in Demining in Angola'. The project hopes to train and employ 100 women in Angola as deminers, medics, drivers and mechanics empowering women from local communities and boosting land mine clearance efforts in the country. Following the recruitment of the first cohort in June, the project deployed the first 20 trained female deminers in Benguela Province in Western Angola in August. Since their deployment they have found 133 anti-personnel mines and cleared almost 8000 square metres of land. The second round of recruitment is due to begin this month. Land mine clearance in Angola has historically been largely male dominated, but HALO are looking to diversify their team, and provide training and employment opportunities in an otherwise hostile economic climate. Through incorporating women into the demining operations as skilled agents the women are recast as integral to land mine clearance which enables them to hold more prominent positions in general conversations about the future of their communities too.

It has been 15 years since the war in Angola ended, and whilst an estimated third of the country has been cleared of mines, efforts have been stunted by funding cuts which have led to many mine-clearance projects stalling. The UK ceased bilateral aid to Angola in 2011 but with the recent commitment of £100million to mine action globally, it is hoped Angola might receive for funding from this allocation.

Flow of Congolese Refugees to Angola Slows but Increase Anticipated

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reported the interagency response in Angola are preparing for the protection and assistance of an additional 50,000 refugees who are expected to flee to Angola from the civil conflict in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) before the end of the year. Violence in the Kasai region of the DRC which borders northern Angola has resulted in over 32,000 refugees fleeing to Angola's Lunda Norte Province since March 2017. The flow of refugees has slowed since July, however local head of the UNHCR in Dundo, the provincial capital of Lunda Norte, Guy-Rufin Guernas, stated the influx is likely to increase towards the end of the year. According to a report released in August by the UNHCR humanitarian agencies operating in the region have developed a response plan to accommodate the arrival of an additional 50,000 Congolese refugees by December 2017. The plan addresses protection, emergency shelter, food and nutrition, water, sanitation, emergency education and health for the anticipated arrivals. Angola are operating an 'open door policy' to those seeking refuge from the civil conflict in the DRC, but has closed its border to all trade and commerce from the nation.

Angolan satellite to enter orbit before the end of the year

The Angolan Satellite, AngoSat-1 is set to enter the earth's orbit in December of this year. The launch of the satellite has been delayed several times but is due to launch from Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan before the end of the year. The AngoSat-1 project was implemented in 2012. The satellite was built in Russia and will be controlled primarily from a control and mission centre in Funda, in the Luanda Province in Angola. Earlier this year the Minister of Telecommunications and Information Technologies, Jose Carvalho da Rocha announced that the facilitation of fibre optic technology for Angola would be one of the benefits enjoyed as a result of AngoSat-1. Da Rocha announced that following the satellite's launch a fibre optic line would be laid along the railroad of Benguela which would improve communications with surrounding countries. De Rocha named the DRC, Zambia and Rwanda as amongst those whom would benefit from the improved communications with Angola.

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