

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

Angola: Rafael Marques de Morais sentenced to a six-month suspended jail term

Paris-Geneva, June 18, 2015 – *The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights defenders strongly condemns the sentencing of journalist Rafael Marques de Morais to a six month suspended jail term, despite an out of court settlement previously announced.*

Following the backtracking in Rafael Marques de Morais' defamation case and the announcement of the public prosecutor's intention to move forward with a sentencing in spite of an out of court settlement reached between parties, the Luanda Provincial Tribunal sentenced Mr. Marques de Morais to a six months jail term on defamation charges.

The sentence, which can be served at any time for two years if Mr. Marques de Morais is found guilty of any crime, was handed down on May 28, 2015, only three days after the announcement of the public prosecutor.

“The sentencing of Rafael Marques de Morais is yet another step in the uninterrupted judicial harassment that he has been the target of for more than two years and which aims at sanctioning his outstanding human rights work”, said Karim Lahidji, FIDH President.

Mr. Marques de Morais is a well-known Angolan journalist who has been facing continuous judicial harassment since the publication in 2011, of his book, *“Blood Diamonds: Corruption and Torture in Angola”*, in which he documents and denounces the corruption, allegations of homicides, torture, forced displacement of civilian settlements and intimidation of inhabitants of the diamond-mining areas of Angola's Lundas region by some state agents and business entrepreneurs.

“Authorities in Angola must immediately and unconditionally overturn Rafael Marques de Morais' sentence and stop harassing human rights defenders. This situation must come to an end and dissenting voices must be accepted”, concluded Gerald Staberock, OMCT Secretary General.

Originally facing nine charges for defamation, Mr. Marques de Morais was informed of fifteen additional charges being brought against him, shortly before the opening of his trial on March 24, 2015. Furthermore, several procedural irregularities were observed since Mr. Marques de Morais was indicted in January 2013.

The harassment against Mr. Marques de Morais has also taken the form of cyber-attacks and cyber-espionage. His blog, *Maka Angola*, has been blocked on several occasions and his personal laptop has been attacked with malware programs.

More generally, the Observatory calls upon authorities in Angola to ensure the respect of the rights of civil society actors in the country, where, as documented in a recent Observatory report¹, human rights defenders and journalists, remain subjected to judicial harassment, acts of intimidation, threats and other forms of restrictions to their freedom of association and expression.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OBS) was created in 1997 by FIDH and OMCT. The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy to situations of repression against human rights defenders.

¹ The report is available for download on the FIDH website (https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/angola_obs_eng_19_mars_2015_ok.pdf) and on the OMCT website (<http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/reports-and-publications/angola/2015/03/d23045/>).

For more information, please contact:

- **FIDH: Arthur Manet/Lucie Kroening: + 33 (0) 1 43 55 25 18**
- **OMCT: Miguel Martín Zumalacárregui: + 41 (0) 22 809 49 24**