

**ANGOLA:**  
**“They want to keep us vulnerable”**  
**Human Rights Defenders Under Pressure**

**Publication of a Mission Report**

**Paris, Geneva, Pretoria, Luanda, March 19, 2015** – In a joint report released today, the Observatory and the *Associação Justiça Paz e Democracia* (AJPD) depict an environment where human rights defenders and journalists in Angola are subjected to judicial and administrative harassment, acts of intimidation, threats and other forms of restrictions to their freedom of association and expression. Our organisations release this report while the trial of prominent journalist and human rights defender, **Rafael Marques de Morais** will commence next week in Luanda. The report also comes in a context where the authorities of Angola have recently introduced a draft regulation aimed at regulating the activities of NGOs which, if adopted by the President in its current form, will considerably jeopardize any independent human rights reporting in this country.

***“The authorities of Angola voluntarily maintain human rights defenders and journalists in a situation of vulnerability. Unfair trials, recurring harassment, acts of intimidation and restrictive legislations are all methods of States which do not tolerate opposition. This situation must come to an end and Angolan authorities must accept dissenting voices”***, declared our organisations.

On March 24, 2015, a trial on charges of criminal defamation will commence in Luanda against journalist Rafael Marques de Morais. Marques is accused of defamation following the publication, in 2011, of his book, *“Blood Diamonds: Corruption and Torture in Angola”* where he denounces the corruption and human rights violations allegedly committed by some state agents and business entrepreneurs in the diamond-mining industry. The Observatory and AJPD call upon the authorities of Angola to drop the charges for criminal defamation pending against Rafael Marques and conform with regional and international recommendations calling upon the de-criminalisation of defamation and the protection of human rights work.

***“Rafael Marques has been targeted by the authorities for many years. This trial is another illustration of the regime's willingness to hamper his freedom of expression and undermine his reporting on human rights abuses committed in the sector of extractive industries. As illustrated in our report, the procedural irregularities observed since Marques was indicted in January 2013 clearly show that he may not benefit from a fair trial”***, added our organisations.

***Recent attacks against human rights defenders***

The report reveals that human rights defenders and journalists denouncing issues deemed to be sensitive such as corruption, bad governance, forced demolitions, forced evictions or the human rights situation in Cabinda are the main targets of the authorities. Recent cases clearly illustrate this trend: in Cabinda, on March 14, 2015, the police arbitrarily arrested **Marcos Mavungo**, former member of the organisation Mpalabanda, and lawyer **Arão Bula Tempo**, prior to a demonstration which was planned the same day to denounce the human rights abuses and bad governance prevailing in the province. Both men were transferred to the provincial office for criminal investigation where they are still detained. On March 16, they were both charged with “sedition”. The Observatory and AJPD call upon the authorities to proceed to their immediate release and put an end to what appears to be judicial harassment for human rights work.

Earlier, on February 18, 2015, the offices of the organisation Omunga, an organisation well-known for its stance against forced demolitions and evictions, based in the province of Benguela, were burgled by two armed men, dressed in military uniforms, who assaulted the guard and robbed a camera and a phone. Despite the complaint filed by **José Patrocino**, the Coordinator of Omunga, and while members of this organisation are often subjected to acts of intimidation, no serious and impartial investigation has been conducted by the police up to now. The Observatory and AJPD express serious concerns at these recent events as they illustrate the increasing insecure environment in which human rights defenders operate in Angola. Our organisations urge the authorities to identify the authors of this burglary and to bring before an independent tribunal.

## ***Attempt to further restrict freedom of association***

Our organisations further express serious concerns about the introduction, in February 2015, of a draft regulation on the activities of NGOs, which was proposed by the Ministry of Social Assistance and Reinsertion and the Service of External Intelligence. Under the guise of preventing terrorism, the draft regulation, which is to be adopted by Presidential decree, contains a number of provisions that, if applied, will considerably jeopardise the work of independent human rights organisations in Angola. Among others, the regulation requires NGOs to provide their certificate of registration to be authorised to carry out their activities, failing which they risk suspension or closure. However, as illustrated in the report, to date, most independent human rights organisations, including AJPD, have still not received the said certificate from the Ministry of Justice. Besides, several provisions of this regulation will result in an increasing control exercised by the authorities over the activities (design and planning of implementation), the accounts (origin of funding) and the internal management of NGOs (employment of staff, purchase of equipment). For example, NGOs will be required to solicit the approval of the authorities prior to implementing projects, to implement activities benefiting communities or purchasing equipment exclusively in the country. The Observatory and AJPD urge the authorities to refrain from adopting such restrictive regulation as it contravenes Angola's commitments and obligations to respect freedom of association.

Our organisations deplore the fact that ***“for many years, structural impediments to the work of human rights defenders in Angola have been commonplace. The NGO registration process remains complex, costly and opaque and the NGO sector is crippled by a lack of human resources and financial sustainability. The regulation, if adopted in its current form, might simply lead to the extinction of independent human rights organisations in Angola”***.

### **The report is available for download and on the FIDH website:**

in English ([https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/angola\\_obs\\_eng\\_19\\_mars\\_2015\\_ok.pdf](https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/angola_obs_eng_19_mars_2015_ok.pdf))

in Portuguese ([https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/report\\_angola\\_obs\\_por.pdf](https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/report_angola_obs_por.pdf))

### **and on the OMCT website:**

in English and in Portuguese (<http://www.omct.org/human-rights-defenders/reports-and-publications/angola/2015/03/d23045/>)

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

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