

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

ANGOLA: The Angola 15 must be released and their right to a fair trial guaranteed

Paris-Geneva, November 19, 2015 – As the trial against pro-democracy activists detained since June 2015 opened three days ago in Luanda, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (a joint FIDH-OMCT programme) reiterates its call on the authorities of Angola to release them immediately and unconditionally and to guarantee their right to a fair trial.

After almost five months of arbitrary detention, the trial of pro-democracy human rights defenders Messrs. **Henrique Luaty Beirão (a.k.a. Brigadeiro Mata-Frakuxz), Manuel Nito Alves, Nuno Alvaro Dala, Nelson Dibango Mendes Dos Santos, Alfonso Jojo Matias (a.k.a. Mbanza Hamza), Sedrick de Carvalho, Fernando António Tomás (a.k.a. Nicola Radical), Hitler Chiconda (a.k.a. Samussuku), Italiano Arante Kivuvu, Benedito Dali (a.k.a. Dito Dali), Albano Bingobingo (a.k.a. Albano Liberdade), José Gomes Hata (a.k.a. Cheik Hata), Inocêncio De Brito (a.k.a. Drux), Domingos da Cruz** as well as of **Oswaldo Caholo**, finally opened on November 16, 2015. Ms. **Rosa Kusso Conde** and Ms. **Laurinda Manuel Gouveia** are also facing the same charges, but are not detained. The hearings are expected to take place until November 20, 2015, before the Luanda Provincial Tribunal.

On the first day of the trial, the defense turned up not having been able to see the complete one thousand long file case, including part of the evidence against the Angola 15, which is standard and lawful procedure in Angola. Furthermore, although it was announced that the trial would be open to the public, only two relatives per detainee were allowed inside the court room during the November 16 hearing. Representatives from embassies, including the United States, the European Union and Portugal were barred from observing the court proceedings. On the second day of trial, observers, including journalists, were also barred and told to return only for the reading of the verdict. All this constitutes blatant violations of the right to a fair trial, a right that is guaranteed in Angola's constitution and a range of international human rights conventions binding Angola.

“The individuals unlawfully detained for nearly five months on trumped up charges of 'plotting against the Government' are not criminals, they are human rights defenders. The Angolan authorities must abide by its human rights commitments and release them immediately and unconditionally”, FIDH President Karim Lahidji said.

“The detention of the pro-democracy human rights defenders is arbitrary, as it clearly aims at sanctioning their peaceful human rights activities. Angola must commit to its obligation to respect and promote the rights to freedom of expression, opinion and peaceful assembly in all circumstances”, OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock added.

The Angola 15 are young activists arrested in June 2015 for discussing democratic reforms and peaceful protest. Most of them are known pro-democracy activists, who have been organizing peaceful protests against the 35-year-regime of Angolan President Eduardo Dos Santos since 2011. These protests were often repressed by the authorities. On September 16, 2015, they were charged with “preparatory acts to rebellion” and “plotting against the President and other institutions”, both of which constitute crimes against the security of the Angolan State. Several experts and institutions have called for their release, including the European Parliament and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders 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 situations of repression against human rights defenders.

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