

PRESS RELEASE - THE OBSERVATORY

ANGOLA: José Marcos Mavungo acquitted and released!

Paris-Geneva, May 27, 2016 - The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (an FIDH-OMCT partnership) welcomes the acquittal and subsequent release of Mr. José Marcos Mavungo, former member of “Mpalabanda”, a civic group banned in 2006 after producing reports highlighting human rights abuses by security forces in oil-rich but poverty-racked Cabinda province.

On May 20, 2016, the Supreme Court of Angola eventually acquitted Mr. **José Marcos Mavungo** after concluding that there was insufficient evidence to uphold accusations of “rebellion” against him.

“While we welcome the long-awaited acquittal and release of José Marcos Mavungo, we strongly deplore the judicial harassment which led to his arbitrary detention for more than a year”, our organisations said today.

Mr. Mavungo had been arrested on March 14, 2015 for helping out on organising a peaceful demonstration promoting human rights and denouncing bad governance in Cabinda province. On May 27, 2015, he was formally charged with “rebellion”, but was only informed of his indictment on June 22. His trial started on August 25 and was marred with several irregularities. On September 14, 2015, he was convicted to six years’ imprisonment by the Cabinda Provincial Court on charges of “rebellion”.

The Observatory recalls that, as mentioned in its Mission Report issued in March 2015, human rights defenders and journalists remain widely exposed to judicial harassment, acts of intimidation, threats and other restrictions to their freedom of association and expression in Angola¹. The sentencing of 16 pro-democracy activists on March 28, 2016 by the Luanda Provincial Tribunal to jail terms ranging from two years and three months to eight years and six months for the alleged crimes of “preparatory acts of rebellion” (Article 21 of the Criminal Code) and “association of criminals” (Article 263), among other charges is emblematic of the criminalisation of human rights defenders. To date, they remain in arbitrary detention².

The Observatory calls upon the Angolan authorities to release all arbitrarily detained human rights defenders, and to conform in all circumstances with the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Defenders and other international and regional human rights instruments.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) 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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¹ See Observatory Report, Angola: “They want to keep us vulnerable” - Human Rights Defenders Under Pressure, March 2015.

² See Observatory Urgent Appeal AGO 001 / 0615 / OBS 053.3 of March 31, 2016.