

Angola: Tensions rise, journalists attacked at protest

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8 Sep 2011

Africa's second biggest oil producer, Angola, is in turmoil - a real turmoil for the first time since the war ended in 2002. Analysts believe last weekend's anti-government protest in Luanda was a clear sign that over 80% of Angolans were tired of living in extreme poverty, while the MPLA elite and their cronies - led by veteran president Jose Eduardo dos Santos - continue to enrich themselves. And journalists paid a heavy price of that turmoil.

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) this week strongly condemned the Angolan security forces' use of violence and intimidation to prevent journalists from covering anti-government protests.

"The authorities must return all confiscated journalistic material and pay compensation for damaged equipment. They should also hold to account all those responsible for the violence against the media", CPJ Africa advocacy coordinator Mohamed Keita said in a statement.

But that could be easier said than done, as the country lacks any sense of social justice and respect of human rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of the media, despite claiming that it is governed under the democratic principles.

Angolan prisons are said to be full of outspoken journalists and critics as the regime continues its crackdown on anyone seen as opposing its reign.

Ailing dos Santos, who has been in power since 1979, last week chose Manuel Vicente as his successor, Reuters reported, quoting the weekly newspaper *Novo Jornal*. The report also said Vicente had already indicated earlier this year that he would be stepping down as chief executive of the national oil company, Sonangol.

However, as poverty worsens amid a surprising economic boom, primarily driven by oil and diamonds exports, mostly towards repressive China, the disgruntled protestors believed that the time is now to get rid of the ageing leader and its corrupt entourage.

Attack on journalists

When journalists gathered to cover the anti-government protest, they were assaulted by security forces.

According to CPJ, the following journalists were attacked:

- Alexandre Neto, a local correspondent of the U.S. government-funded broadcaster Voice of America
- Cameramen Hugo Ernesto and Nicolau Chimbila of Portugal's state broadcaster RTP, and,
- Reporters Coque Mukuta of Radio Despertar and Ana Margoso of Novo Jornal.

Angolan state broadcaster Televisao Publica de Angola also reported that its news team had been attacked, allegedly by protesters, CPJ said, citing news reports.

Security agents also attacked Portuguese journalist António Cascais, who was conducting journalism training in Angola, as he left his hotel to walk toward the demonstration, CPJ quoted news reports as saying. The agents threw Cascais on the ground, searched his pockets, and confiscated a digital camera and two phones, according to local journalists.

In the absence of a strong opposition force, analysts believe an MPLA candidate, in this case Manuel Vicente, will likely win the presidential elections scheduled for 2012.

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Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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