

NAMIBIA

DR. DR. ANTON BÖSL

August 18, 2008

Angola votes!

www.kas.de

FIRST PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS FOR 16 YEARS

On the 5th of September 2008 the first elections of parliament for 16 years and the second elections in the country's history will take place in Angola. After several postponements of the parliament elections the government has created the necessary legislative and administrative conditions to hold formal and politically accurate elections. After violent confrontations during the run-up to and after the elections in Kenya and Zimbabwe and the difficult establishments of governments, a great number of people sceptically face the elections in Angola, which has a very small democratic tradition and whose first and up to now only election ended up in a bloody civil war in 1992.

It was only six years ago (2002) that the Angolan civil war, which lasted 27 years and saw more than 1 million dead in comparison to a total population of about 14 million, came to an end. It precipitated Angola that was released totally unprepared into independence by Portugal in 1975 into a humanitarian, social and economic chaos, which has affected the country up to now. In the meantime the majority of the 4.5 million internally displaced persons returned to their homelands and more than 300 000 people who mainly stayed in neighbouring countries were repatriated. The post-conflict situation with a destroyed infrastructure affects the country up to now, with the highest concentration of landmines worldwide which still claims its victims. A whole generation of Angolans grew up in a very brutally operated war, from both sides. This also damaged the social cohesion in Angola and made the process of national reconciliation a great challenge. The greater part of the people who are supposed to elect a new

parliament in September 2008 in Angola associate elections with a return to civil war and chaos. Finally, the outcome of the 1992 elections and for many a surprising victory of the, since then governing, MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) led the UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), to feel deceived by the election victory, and tried to exact themselves into power by force of arms. Only the death of their leader Jonas Savimbi in 2002 facilitated a return to the peace process, which had already been negotiated in 1994 in Lusaka and which provides for a government of national unity with the involvement of the UNITA.

Since the end of the war in 2002 a strong dynamic can be observed in a lot of areas in Angola. Significant incomes, especially in the area of natural resources (oil, diamonds), are invested into several actions for reconstruction of the destroyed infrastructure. Roads and bridges as well as a new airport have been build. In Luanda new buildings are being constructed all over the place. In the south of the capital, in which a total population of about 6 million people live, a new suburb for a few hundred thousand people has been developed.

However, only a very small part of the population is benefiting from the significant state incomes. The bigger part lives under most difficult conditions and is cut off from the dynamic economic development of the country. This is why Angola which belongs to the group of 'least developed countries' (LDC) is regularly placed on the bottom of the 177 rated countries in the Human Development Index (HDI). Despite the enormous economic growth Angola even fell

NAMIBIA

DR. DR. ANTON BÖSL

August 18, 2008

www.kas.de

from place 160 to 162 (HDI Report 2007). About 2/3 of the population live under the absolute poverty level of 1 US-Dollar per day. Life expectancy is about 40 years and the childhood mortality rate is 250 deaths of every 1000 children, one of the biggest worldwide. Every three minutes a child dies in Angola. Because of the restricted mobility during war the HIV/Aids-rate is lower than in the neighbouring countries. Officially 2,1% are infected, however, unofficially the number is much higher with an upward trend.

Even though the country is extremely rich in natural resources there are no benefits for the wider population. The government and its kleptocratic network of patronage privatises big parts of the oil revenues. The IMF identified the lack of internal control and transparency of the government and the central bank as a key problem. Since the government finances itself from the revenue gained from selling the natural resources (50% of the GDP have its origin in the oil business), it does not depend on tax revenues and a diversified economy or rather industry. This 'paradox of plenty' seems to be a reason for the weakness of the state and its inability to provide public goods and services to the population. The high oil price and the increasing oil production led to high incomes and brought several reconstruction loans, especially from China. 50% of the oil production from 2 million barrels daily, therefore, go to China and 40 % to the USA.

A relatively low inflation rate of about 12% and a stable currency (Kwanza) for the last three years has resulted in expansion rates of 11,2 % (2004), 20,6% (2005), 18,6% (2006) and 20,7% (2007). This should, however, not deceive as the problematic economic environment with a destroyed infrastructure, an inadequate economic policy and an exorbitant corruption cannot go unnoticed, which is why the economy only develops under its real potential. Because of its resources Angola could in the last few years have won the highest foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa, which by now could have been twice as much as that of South Africa.

Due to the increased international interest in Angola and in light of the upcoming elections, the government strives more towards poverty reduction, reconstruction of the country and national reconciliation initiatives. This positive efforts may not hide the fact that the political system with a strong executive president allows the parliament only a marginal role. The governing MPLA makes up 129 of 220 representatives and UNITA 70. On the bases of the disagreement within the nine opposition parties the legislative can not effectively perform its parliamentary mandate as corrective of the executive. The few representatives of the opposition that are members of the national unity and reconciliation government which is in office since 1997 have only very limited influence and political power. Angola's President, dos Santos, had triggered the process of voter registration already in 2006, hence 14 years after the last democratic elections and after several postponements of the overdue elections of parliament. As soon as this process is concluded nothing is, in fact, contradicting the elections. Furthermore, the parliament passed already in 2005 a package of laws to prepare the elections. It includes a new citizenship law, a law for political parties, a law for voter registration, a law for election monitoring and a code of conduct for the elections. The laws were created in a participative process together with the parties and civil society and constitute a reasonable framework for the elections. A national election commission was created who inter alia instructed election observers. The government has, with great effort, created a technically impressive voter register that can be reckoned as the most advanced in Africa. Eight million voters were registered between November 2006 and May 2008 in mobile centres in all of the 18 provinces. Helicopters were used to reach remoted areas. The mobile teams took biometric data of the eligible voters which were printed, together with a digital picture, on a cheque card. These information was saved in a national data centre to avoid multiple registration. It is, however, dubious that the election commission denies access to this register and an external inspection. The eight million registered voters may now vote in 220 electoral wards a total

NAMIBIA

DR. DR. ANTON BÖSL

August 18, 2008

www.kas.de

of 5200 candidates of ten single parties and four coalitions. The election indeed takes place in election wards but after proportional representation and by means of a list of parties the voters basically decide in favour of the parties and not the actors. But, despite of the technically well-developed voter register it has to be doubted that the election process will be free and fair due to the current situation.

President dos Santos and his governing MPLA have occupied the most important offices in politics and economy, decisive positions in the judiciary and society with family members, members or sympathiser of his party. Many people see the state and the MPLA as one entity, particularly because the party uses state resources for its election campaign purposes. Whereas the election campaign is restricted to the 31 days before the day of elections, the MPLA has campaigned for months and uses, besides concerts and parades, also presents financed from the state resources. The opposition parties complain about intimidation manoeuvres and harassment during the preparation and performance of their election events. Although Angola, as a member of the South African Development Cooperation (SADC), signed the guidelines of free and fair elections the government or rather the MPLA is obviously not willing to implement them. These guidelines developed and passed by African governments and parliaments provide criteria for free and fair elections, *inter alia*, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, free access to media, the constitution of an independent election commission and adequate safety arrangements for political parties as well as the guarantee of an environment of tolerance and free participation of voters. International and independent human rights organisations, such as Human Rights Watch, state, however, that political violence especially emanates from the sympathisers of the MPLA in rural areas and that the police does not intervene leads to a decrease of confidence in the country's police. Civil society groups are affected by this violence, too. The catholic commission 'Justitia et Pax' indicates that in the rural areas of Angola very influential traditional authorities

are pressurised and instrumentalised by the MPLA.

Opposition parties have only limited access to media, especially electronic media. Recently the government wanted to ban 'Radio Despertar', a station that is close to the UNITA, because they apparently broadcasted beyond their granted license. Due to a procedural error of the government the probably most popular radio station of the country can nonetheless continue to be on air. Print media is irrelevant outside the capital Luanda. The destroyed infrastructure that still isolates big parts of the country results in an information shortcoming which the MPLA manipulates in their interest via the public media institutions, especially the national radio station.

In the Angolan exclave, Cabinda, a violent conflict has taken place between the military and a separatistic guerilla movement for many years. Despite an agreement from January 2008 unlawful arrests and convictions occur.

In the beginning of July 2008 the government renewed a decree that requires diplomats and representatives of international organisations to inform the ministry of foreign affairs three days before travelling from Luanda into the inland of the country. This restriction is connected with the reference to the Vienna Convention that warns diplomats against the intervention in internal affairs of the host country.

Whereas the opposition parties could revoke the extension of the election procedure from one to two days and therewith involving danger of manipulation of the counting of votes, doubts remain that the election procedure is coordinated by two different commissions which are mainly occupied by members of the governing MPLA. However, it can be hoped that the international election observers (the EU was, after persistent insistence, finally invited for election monitoring) will not only monitor the election procedure itself on 5th September but even the counting of ballots. During the last election in Angola in 1992 this took place at nighttime without international election ob-

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

NAMIBIA

DR. DR. ANTON BÖSL

August 18, 2008

servers. They had returned to their hotels after the polling stations closed. The result of the computation eventually astonished many observers. The consequences, the second and bloodiest phase of the civil war are sufficiently known.

www.kas.de