

**UNHCR**  
**Emergency & Security Service**



**WRITENET Paper No. 10/2001**

**ANGOLA: AFTER THE DEATH OF JONAS SAVIMBI**

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**March 2002**

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ISSN 1020-8429

## **Table of Contents**

<b>1</b>	<b>Overview of Recent Events.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Analysis .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>6</b>

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## 1 Overview of Recent Events

On 22 February 2002 Jonas Savimbi, the founder and lifelong leader of UNITA, was killed in a gun battle with Angolan government forces in the forests of Angola's eastern Moxico province.<sup>1</sup> It will be months, perhaps even years, before the full implications of his death become apparent. However, the early indications are that his demise may represent Angola's best hope for peace in at least 25 years.

Jonas Savimbi's death came at the culmination of a protracted military campaign waged by the Angolan Armed Forces (Forças Armadas Angolanas – FAA) in Moxico. During the campaign tens of thousands of civilians were forcibly displaced from their homes, apparently in a bid to deny UNITA vital civilian support.<sup>2</sup> Having thus largely depopulated the area, the FAA finally succeeded in tracking down and cornering Jonas Savimbi's column. It has been suggested that his exact position was given away by the signal from his satellite telephone. Jonas Savimbi died as he had lived, in the bush with a gun in his hands. The Angolan government transported television crews to the site of his final battle to film his body, in order to convince a sceptical Angolan public that the apparently indestructible rebel leader truly was dead. Jonas Savimbi was then hastily buried, in the forests of Moxico.

A few days after Jonas Savimbi's death, the Angolan President, José Eduardo dos Santos, travelled to Washington to meet US President George Bush. The US Administration took this opportunity to "call upon both sides, in conjunction with the peaceful opposition, civil sectors and international community, to fulfil their obligation to bring peace to the Angolan people".<sup>3</sup> It was widely hoped, both in Angola and in the international diplomatic community, that the Angolan Government would capitalize on the disarray in UNITA's ranks by declaring a cease-fire and offering a genuine amnesty to any UNITA troops who laid down their arms. This appeared the best hope for turning Jonas Savimbi's death into an opportunity for peace. However, the early indications from the Angolan Government were not encouraging. In an interview given in Washington President dos Santos dismissed the idea of a unilateral government cease-fire as "absurd".<sup>4</sup>

There followed a two week period of uncertainty, when Angolans could not tell what the impact of the UNITA leader's death might be. This uncertainty was fuelled further by the rumour that UNITA's Vice President, General Antonio Dembo, had also apparently been killed during fighting in Moxico.<sup>5</sup> General Dembo had widely been expected to take on the leadership of UNITA's fighting forces in Jonas Savimbi's absence. This period of limbo ended on 13 March when the Angolan Presidency performed an apparent U-turn and issued an eloquent statement declaring that "the Government has instructed the General Staff of the

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<sup>1</sup> Angola, *Statement by the Government of Angola on the Death of Jonas Savimbi*, Luanda, 22 February 2002, <http://www.angola.org/referenc/pressrel/prst022202E.html> [accessed 30 March 2002]

<sup>2</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Situation in Angola: Reporting Period 1-15 Feb 2002*, Luanda, 15 February 2002, <http://www.reliefweb.net> [accessed 30 March 2002]

<sup>3</sup> United States, Department of State, *Statement on the Death of Jonas Savimbi, Angolan Rebel Leader of UNITA*, Washington, 24 February 2002, <http://usinfo.state.gov> [accessed 30 March 2002]

<sup>4</sup> *Voice of America* [Washington], Interview with José Eduardo dos Santos, President of Angola, 27 February 2002

<sup>5</sup> *Voz de America* [Luanda], Antonio Dembo morto, 4 March 2002

Angolan Armed Forces to cease all offensive movements beginning at 0001 on 14 March 2002. This is in order to permit the establishment of ‘in situ’ contacts between the military commands of the FAA and UNITA military forces.”<sup>6</sup> The statement set out a 15 point framework for peace, based broadly on the terms of the Lusaka Peace Accords, agreed by the MPLA and UNITA in 1994, but never fully implemented. It offered UNITA’s members a full amnesty for all crimes committed in the context of the war, and participation in the country’s political life, in exchange for the complete demilitarization of UNITA.

The FAA duly did cease fire from 14 March. With speed unprecedented in the long and tortuous history of Angolan peace talks, an “in situ” meeting between the FAA deputy Chief of Staff, General Geraldo Nunda, and the UNITA Chief of Staff, General Abreu Kamorteiro, took place the next day.<sup>7</sup> The meeting was held in the village of Cassamba, near to where Jonas Savimbi died. After four hours of talks the two sides announced that they had agreed to end hostilities throughout the country.<sup>8</sup>

The military leaders agreed to hold further talks, to work out the logistics of implementing a cease-fire. These, more formal peace talks, began in Luena, the capital of Moxico province, on 20 March<sup>9</sup> and have continued through several sessions, until 30 March. Generals Nunda and Kamortiero continue to lead their respective delegations. From 25 March both the FAA and the UNITA military commanders for the Central, Southern and Northern regions travelled to Luena to take part in the discussions.<sup>10</sup> The presence of these military commanders revealed a remarkable degree of cooperation and confidence between the negotiating parties. The UNITA delegation was also permitted to send envoys from Luena to consult with Paulo Lukamba “Gato”, UNITA’s Secretary General and, in the absence of General Dembo, its most senior surviving representative in the field.<sup>11</sup> He is said to be encamped somewhere in the forests of Moxico.

The talks focused on the practicalities of the quartering, demobilization, and demilitarization of forces, and the incorporation of UNITA’s troops within the ranks of the FAA. A framework for this demilitarization process already exists, in the form of the Lusaka Peace Accords<sup>12</sup>. However, during the four year peace process intended to implement those accords it took months and even years for the two sides to agree even to discuss these practicalities.<sup>13</sup> In contrast the negotiations in Luena appeared to forge ahead with unprecedented speed, in an

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<sup>6</sup> Angola, Statement by the Government of the Republic of Angola: Government Instructs the Angolan Armed Forces to Cease All Offensive Movements, Luanda, 13 March 2002, <http://www.angola.org/referenc/pressrel/prst031402.html> [accessed 30 March 2002]

<sup>7</sup> Agence France Presse, [Luanda], Leaders of Angolan Military, UNITA Rebels Meet, 15 March 2002

<sup>8</sup> Agence France Presse, [Luanda], Angolan Army and Rebels Agree to End Hostilities: Officials, 15 March 2002

<sup>9</sup> Angola Press, Government and UNITA Military Chiefs Meet Again Today, Luanda, 20 March 2002, <http://reliefweb.net> [accessed 30 March 2002]

<sup>10</sup> Angola Press, FAA, UNITA Chiefs Interrupt Talks for Consultation, Luanda, 25 March 2002, <http://reliefweb.net> [accessed 30 March 2002]

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>12</sup> *Lusaka Protocol: Annex 3: Military Issues - I*, Lusaka, 15 November 1994, [http://www.usip.org/library/pa/angola/lusaka\\_11151994.html](http://www.usip.org/library/pa/angola/lusaka_11151994.html) [accessed 30 March 2002]

<sup>13</sup> See Human Rights Watch, *Angola Unravels: The Rise and Fall of the Lusaka Peace Process*, New York, 1999

unfamiliarily cordial atmosphere. Incredulous UNITA representatives in Europe initially dismissed the Luena talks as an MPLA public relations scam. They alleged that the UNITA “delegation” were in fact prisoners who were being forced to play the part of negotiators. However, these allegations were subsequently retracted following contacts between the UNITA delegation in Luena and their colleagues in Europe.<sup>14</sup> On 30 March Generals Nunda and Kamortiero brought the initial round of negotiations to a close by signing a “Memorandum of Understanding”, in a ceremony witnessed by representatives of the United Nations, and of the governments of Russia, Portugal and the United States.<sup>15</sup> The memorandum formalizes the present cease-fire, and reactivates the Lusaka peace accords.

Thus far the bilateral cease-fire appears to have been implemented with a surprising degree of success. Only a very few armed attacks have taken place in Angola since 15 March, and those occurred very soon after the declaration of the cessation of hostilities, suggesting that news of the cease-fire had perhaps not yet filtered down to every operational unit in the field.

## 2 Analysis

The current peace talks are still very new. Yet they are taking place in an extremely positive atmosphere, and already reveal a sincerity and pragmatism which were dramatically lacking in previous rounds of negotiations. The fact that the two sides appear willing to meet, face to face, for unmediated talks, day after day, gives great grounds for optimism. It is hard to imagine that such progress would ever have been possible had Jonas Savimbi still been alive.

However, enormous obstacles to lasting peace still remain. And some serious questions have yet to be answered.

Most immediately, it remains to be seen if the military commands of both UNITA and the FAA are really capable of enforcing a cease-fire on their troops, even should they genuinely wish to do so. The drastic reduction in violent attacks since 15 March has been very encouraging. However there are many factors which may undermine this early cease-fire:

- On the Government side, a large proportion of the FAA frequently go unpaid, or underpaid, and are infamous for their lack of discipline. For many years joining the FAA has been perceived as an opportunity for personal enrichment. Men possessed of a uniform and a weapon have frequently used these assets to rob civilians who lack them. It has not been uncommon for FAA soldiers to attack and loot civilian targets, and then attribute the attacks to UNITA. This tradition of FAA soldiers paying themselves by force has been tacitly condoned by a command structure which has been either unwilling or unable to pay all of the soldiers on its books. It will take more than the declaration of a cease-fire for this economy of military pillage to disappear. Rather, a wholesale change of culture within the military will be required, and FAA soldiers will have to be offered alternative economic options if they are to survive without pillage.
- As for UNITA, its troops are, in contrast, renowned for their ferocious discipline. However, as guerrillas, and particularly following the imposition of UN sanctions on

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<sup>14</sup> Agence France Presse [Lisbon], UNITA’s Europe Wing Says Both Angolan Sides Serious about Peace, 26 March 2002

<sup>15</sup> Angop [Luanda], Memorando de Entendimento para Cessar-Fogo marca viragem no processo de pacificação de Angola, 1 April 2002

UNITA, they too supply themselves largely through pillaging towns, villages and road traffic. It is unclear how long they will be able to survive if this avenue of supply is denied to them. Thus the troops of both sides may be forced to revert to mounting armed attacks merely to survive if alternative sources of material support are not rapidly arranged.

- In general, there are so many weapons in circulation in Angola, poverty is so widespread, and the rule of law is so feeble, that the risk of armed banditry is endemic.

The second question of immediate concern is who is now leading UNITA? Even, what is UNITA, and who can legitimately represent the movement? Prior to Jonas Savimbi's death the movement had divided into as many as five distinct sub-factions:

- The fighting force in the field, under the command of Jonas Savimbi, dubbed UNITA *Bellicista* by the MPLA. This faction is now controlled by Paulo Lukamba "Gato".
- UNITA representatives overseas who remained loyal to, and in touch with, Jonas Savimbi, but who were (particularly after the imposition of UN sanctions forbidding them from travelling) somewhat divorced from the reality of UNITA's war. This group now seems to be lead by Isaias Samakuva, formerly UNITA's chief negotiator during the Lusaka peace process.
- Those UNITA parliamentarians in Luanda who remained loyal to Jonas Savimbi.
- Those UNITA parliamentarians in Luanda who distanced themselves from Jonas Savimbi's policies, but refused to join the MPLA-endorsed UNITA *Renovada*. This group is lead by Abel Chivukuvuku, formerly leader of UNITA's parliamentary party.
- Those UNITA parliamentarians and politicians in Luanda who denounced Savimbi, joined the UNITA *Renovada* splinter faction, and are widely seen as government stooges by the other sub-factions. This group is led by former UNITA Secretary General, Eugenio Manuvakola.

At present only the first group, which represents solely the military manifestation of UNITA, appears to be involved in negotiations. UNITA's overseas representatives have asked the UN Security Council to suspend the travel sanctions in order to allow them to fly to Angola to take part in the talks. Thus far none of the Luanda-based factions have been offered a seat at the negotiating table.

In the medium term, one key factor will determine the durability of the current cease-fire, namely, can the amnesty offered to UNITA deserters by the Government genuinely be trusted and enforced? During previous truces, amnesties have been offered, only to be betrayed. One of the key reasons cited by UNITA for the failure of the Lusaka peace process was the fact that often, after the extension of state administration into UNITA controlled territory, UNITA members were routinely rounded up and persecuted in contravention of the terms of the peace agreement.<sup>16</sup> If the current cease-fire is again interpreted as an opportunity to enfeeble UNITA, it will not last. After countless betrayals of confidence, by both sides, trust between

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<sup>16</sup> See Human Rights Watch

them is so lacking, that the slightest infringement could tip the country back into war. The vast majority of the people now living and fighting with UNITA do not choose to do so. They live in constant fear, and suffer enormous privations. Yet, they have demonstrated time and again, that they feel safer remaining within the UNITA system that they know, than in entrusting their fates to a remote government which has repeatedly demonstrated that it cannot be trusted. The Angolan Government will need to make a great effort to convince those people living with UNITA in the bush that they can lay down their weapons, and leave the only system which most of them have ever known, without fearing for their lives.

In the longer term, if the cease-fire holds and the negotiations continue, a range of other issues will need to be addressed:

- On paper, the Angolan Government's 15 point peace plan appears exemplary. It remains to be seen, however, if the Luanda administration is genuinely willing, or able, to implement this plan, and particularly if it will permit real political participation and democracy to take root in Angola. The MPLA's record on allowing the evolution of genuine political opposition has been poor.<sup>17</sup> Will it allow a demilitarized UNITA to evolve into a strong opposition party, with a real chance of taking power peacefully? Or will it interpret victory on the battle field as a license to crush all political opposition?
- Over the last three years a new civil society movement has begun to emerge in Angola, fuelled with generalized exasperation at the inability of either the MPLA or UNITA to make peace. One of the key complaints of this loosely bound movement has been the fact that the two belligerents have for so long excluded any other representatives of the Angolan people from peace talks and the political process. It is important that representatives of civil society somehow be given a stake in the current, nascent, peace process if it is to gain wider legitimacy.
- On 21 March UN Secretary General Kofi Annan dispatched his special envoy for African Affairs, Ibrahim Gambari, to Angola to see what role the UN can play in the ongoing negotiations.<sup>18</sup> Following two disastrous UN peace processes, both UNITA and the MPLA have, for different reasons, lost all faith in international mediation. However the Angolan people will need assistance in holding the two belligerents to account if another peace process does unfold. The international community needs to consider how it can constructively provide that assistance.

In the very long term, if an absence of war really can be turned into peace, Angolan society will face enormous challenges. The economic, physical and social damage wrought by forty years of fighting will take generations to mend. In a society so steeped in the culture of reprisals and revenge, trust, in neighbours, politicians, peace, and in the future, will have to be rebuilt. The entire political and economic culture of the country, for so long defined and driven by war, will have to be radically reformed. There is a powerful risk that slipping back into conflict may, to some people, seem easier than taking on the challenges of living in peace.

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<sup>17</sup> Richardson, A., *Angola: Civil War and Humanitarian Crisis - Developments from Mid 1999 to End 2001*, WriteNet for UNHCR, January 2002, pp. 9-10

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks [Johannesburg], *Angola: UN to Clarify Role in Peace Initiatives*, 21 March 2002

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