Introduction

lessons from
the Angolan 'peace process'

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On 26 February 2003, the United Nations Under-Secretary for African Affairs and then Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Angola, Ibrahim Gambari, said the country's "experiences in conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding would… provide valuable lessons for the rest of the world". At first glance, it is difficult to see which lessons Mr Gambari may have been referring to. Firstly, the resolution of the Angolan conflict was largely achieved through a relentless military campaign by the government forces against their National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) adversaries. Peace was only achieved after UNITA's historic leader, Jonas Savimbi, was killed on the battlefield on 22 February 2002, just a year before Gambari's comments. What valuable lessons would such a strategy of 'peace-through-war' contain, besides the realization that the world is a wild and dangerous place in which force and violence are in the end the only factors that count? Not to mention the fact that the secessionist war in the enclave of Cabinda has still not come to an end. Secondly, Angola's experiences with post-conflict peacebuilding are still very rudimentary and there are at least signs that things are not going as smoothly as one might wish, as some of the contributions to this volume amply illustrate. In this light, doing an Accord project on the Angolan 'peace process' is something of a challenge. Having decided to take on this challenge, a word of explanation may be required.

The Accord programme and Angola

Conciliation Resources' Accord programme and its publication series *Accord: an international review of peace initiatives* is based on the premise that we can all learn useful lessons from our own painful history of violent conflict and all attempts at peacemaking and peacebuilding, as well as from the experiences of others. To make this learning possible, one needs access to basic information about these

experiences, the success stories as well as the failures. This issue of *Accord* is predicated on this conviction, as well as on the assumption that documenting contemporary history in a balanced, accessible and attractive way, does provide – especially in post-war situations or in contexts of ongoing armed conflict – a useful tool for further constructive action on the part of national politicians, civil society activists, ordinary citizens, foreign diplomats and international agencies. The stories of how to end decades of war, how to overcome obstacles and take advantage of opportunities, and how to mobilize for peace and justice in seemingly hopeless situations, might help the current generation in Angola, as well as people in other conflict-ridden countries, to better undertake the tasks that now lie ahead. These are the challenges of reconstructing the country and the nation, of justice and reconciliation, of democratization and political renewal, of economic development and the creation of a better life – not just for the few, but for the nation as a whole.

The history of the armed conflict in Angola is a long and complex one. The story of peoples' attempts to bring the conflict to an end cannot, therefore, be told in a simple or linear way. Neither can an overview of the many remaining challenges inherent in moving from the end of military violence to a situation that can be characterized as genuine peace be a simple one. In light of the specific features of the Angolan 'peace process', and in particular the way the war came finally to an end, it was decided to devote more attention and space than usual in this issue of *Accord* to post-conflict issues, in other words, to the long and multi-faceted task of peacebuilding.

Emerging lessons

A number of tentative conclusions and lessons emerge from this complicated history of armed conflict and peoples' efforts at finding a way out, as presented in the contributions contained in this issue.

Transforming national liberation movements

The first point regards the problems emanating from the character of *national* liberation movements in general, in Africa as well as elsewhere in the former 'Third World'. They not only aimed to liberate the nation from colonial rule, but equally to speak for the nation as a whole, in other words, to be the only legitimate

representative of all individual subjects. There is thus in such movements a natural tendency for hegemonic pretensions and exclusion. This was often a problem during the struggle for independence itself, since not everyone necessarily identified to the same degree with the political agenda of the movement in question, even if the goal of national liberation was universally accepted. It later turned into an almost insurmountable obstacle in the context of a pluralist democratic polity, the new norm in Africa at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. In a multi-party democracy, the parties that compete for political power by definition represent only part of the population, not the nation as a whole; the traditional liberation movements, transformed into political parties, did not for the most part easily adapt to such a new role and identity.

The situation is not unique to Angola, but it was certainly more complex than in most other cases. As David Birmingham and Guus Meijer point out in their overview of the historical context, there were three movements with such hegemonic claims – the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the Front for the National Liberation of Angola (FNLA) and UNITA – all competing with each other for domestic legitimacy and international recognition. This issue could not be resolved at the moment of independence in 1975 nor when the one-party state began to crumble and multi-party elections were held in 1992. This legacy of mutually exclusionist claims of representing the whole nation lies at the heart of the failure of successive peace accords, beginning with the *Alvor Accords* signed by the three movements under international pressure in January 1975, but equally so in the cases of the *Bicesse Accords* and *Lusaka Protocol*, signed in 1991 and 1994 respectively, between the MPLA-government and UNITA. As in many other cases, the fact that the party that won power after independence and dominated the country for more than two decades had strong Marxist-Leninist leanings did not make the transition to a more open and pluralist way of doing politics any easier. In Angola – a country exceptionally rich in oil, diamonds and other natural resources – this was exacerbated by the emergence, after the 'democratic' opening of the early 1990s, of a self-enriching and largely corrupt elite with deeply entrenched interests who will not easily be dislodged.

The limitations of the 'one bullet solution'

A further point emerging from the Angolan case is that it seems dangerous to accept uncritically the thesis that eliminating the leader of the armed rebellion and militarily defeating the insurgency will provide better prospects for sustainable peace and future stability than a negotiated settlement, with the concomitant recognition, however minimal and reluctant, of the other side's perspective as well as its inevitable compromises. This 'realist' position appears to be becoming more widely defended with regard to intractable conflicts such as the war between the Ugandan government and the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). It is even being promoted in some quarters as the only viable solution. This may be due in part to the influence of the rhetoric accompanying the global 'war on terror' unleashed by the US and its allies. Most Angolans would undoubtedly agree that bringing an end to four decades of internecine warfare was in itself of the utmost importance, and that sentiment should in no way be diminished. 'Negative peace' or the absence of war is by far preferable to no peace at all. But in circumstances such as those of Angola, with its long history of bitter rivalries, mutual exclusion, one-party rule and authoritarianism on all sides, the price for the way this result was finally achieved may be very high indeed. It is a price which is only gradually becoming known as the situation develops and many of the hopes and expectations are not being met.

Previous peace efforts also had an impact on the final conclusion of the war. That it was possible to reach a ceasefire and complete peace package so quickly after the elimination of Savimbi, was certainly due in part to the fact that the parties could fall back on a series of failed agreements. Many of the issues had thus been addressed and worked out in detail on previous occasions and as a matter of fact, the *Luena Memorandum* is formally a mere supplement to the *Lusaka Protocol*, which in itself was based on the *Bicesse Accords*.

The end of the war has resulted in the victorious side – the MPLA government and the social groups which support it – getting a virtually free hand, not only in the political arena, but also socially and economically. The necessary incentive for change in order to address the issues that caused the conflict in the first place or perpetuated its continuation may be missing. Currently, more than two years after the formal end of the war, Angola shows some worrying signs that this may indeed be the case: growing social unrest, continuing mistrust and ostracization of political opponents, lack of economic opportunities and a sense of disillusionment and frustration on the part of broad sections of the population, not just people with UNITA sympathies. The process of democratization, including the elaboration of a new constitution and the preparation of elections, is a slow and cumbersome one, as Vieira Lopes indicates in his article. The social and physical rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country and the resettlement of internally displaced persons and refugees require massive efforts. Imogen Parsons describes the need for ongoing support for the

reintegration of ex-combatants and for programmes to disarm the civilian population. These were always going to be huge and challenging tasks, but the fact that there are few opportunities for participation, for real debate and opposition and for a free exchange of ideas does not help.

As ending the war by military means consolidates the power of the victorious party, the democratic process, which depends on dialogue, negotiation, respect for other points of view and eventual compromise, has been sidelined as a preferable means of resolving conflict, not only in the political sphere but also more generally. Force and violence seem to carry the day. This may further marginalize those groups in society who are less adept at using those means, such as women, but also all unarmed citizens in general. The habits of strength and power prevailing over justice and rights, and of 'winner-takes-all' approaches, are not challenged effectively, despite the best efforts of some church leaders and other civil society actors.

Contributions by Christine Messiant and Manuel Paulo look closely at the reasons for the failure of the peacemaking attempts at Bicesse and Lusaka and the role of the UN at the various stages of its involvement. Messiant's provocative analysis not only sheds light on the underlying reasons for the failures of both processes (too many interests of what she calls the 'real international community', combined with the marginalization of the interests of the majority of Angola's population), but equally leads her to the conclusion that the way peace has finally been achieved at Luena necessarily has a negative impact on the very nature of this peace, in the sense referred to above that real democratization and participation will be not be easily attainable. One of the signs of hope – paradoxical in the light of UNITA's history of extreme authoritarianism and the ruthless leadership of Jonas Savimbi (but then, the history of Angola is full of paradoxes) – might be that the latest congress of the party, held in Viana in June 2003, showed greater openness and democratic procedure.

Prospects for peace in Cabinda

Given its successful application of a 'peace-through-war' approach in its campaign against UNITA, the Angolan government is not particularly inclined to find a negotiated solution to the war in Cabinda. As Jean-Michel Mabeko-Tali describes in his contribution, despite the many attempts at negotiation over the years and despite recent moves that seem to indicate a willingness to talk on the part of the government, there are few concrete signs that a speedy end of the war is in sight and even less a solution that might satisfy the various sides to the conflict – not least the majority of the population of Cabinda itself. Paradoxically, but not unlike other cases of intractable conflict in which identity plays a major part (such as Northern Ireland), the rough outlines of such a solution seem to be clear: in the Cabinda case, this would involve a form of autonomy and a special status for a relatively long period of transition, to be followed by negotiations between credible and democratically legitimized leaders who are not burdened by the painful events of the past. The real problems, however, lie elsewhere, namely in designing and carrying through a process that could lead to the acceptance of such an outcome by all parties concerned.

Resources for conflict vs. resources for peace

The Angolan civil war, especially in its later stages, has often been described as principally a matter of access to the country's riches (of *greed* rather than *grievance*). Without doubt, the availability of these resources to the warring sides (oil for the MPLA-government, diamonds for UNITA – especially between 1993 and 1997) enabled them to sustain their respective war efforts, but it does not necessarily mean they were the source or the motive for the conflict. That Angola's natural resources, including its vast tracts of fertile land, can be used for reconstruction and development, as well as become a source of further conflict and turmoil, is illustrated by the contributions of Fernando Pacheco and Tony Hodges. Participation and inclusion, and transparent and accountable governance at all levels are the necessary conditions for the situation to develop in a progressive direction and for Angola's riches to be exploited for the benefit of its people.

The articles of Ismael Mateus on media, of Michael Comerford on civil society, of Carlinda Monteiro on reconciliation and of Henda Ducados on women describe some of the difficulties still being faced in this regard. Many people in UNITA and other opposition parties, in the churches and in civil society organizations, women and youth in particular, feel excluded from the possibility of participating in public affairs. This resentment may well grow if political renewal, unpartisan public service and a new spirit of genuine reconciliation are not cultivated. In the absence of other effective countervailing powers, the principal hope must lie with civil society activism and mobilization, supported by free, independent, competent and active media. The challenge ahead will be to use Angola's riches – not only the natural ones like oil, diamonds and fertile soil, but equally its cultural and social resources like motivated women, youth and other 'grassroots' activists, as well as its 'traditional' knowledge and practices – for constructing peace instead of waging war.