

# Alternative voices

## the Angolan peace movement

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Throughout the 1990s, the emergence of civil society peace actors and the promotion of new peace initiatives were of considerable significance. Within a polarized political arena dominated by the Angolan government and UNITA, this development, which later became a peace movement, effectively led to the creation of a third 'national' voice. It helped break down simplistic notions that one either had to be a supporter of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) or of the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), and in effect created a 'vehicle' for mobilization outside these political structures. Particularly towards the end of the 1990s, a visible 'civic' constituency emerged that sought to influence political decision-making.

At first glance it would appear that this movement failed in its objective to achieve a negotiated settlement to the Angolan conflict, as the war was resolved militarily. A deeper analysis however reveals that the civic movement always differentiated between 'the ending of the war' and 'peace'. In many respects one of the greatest strengths of the Angolan peace movement is that it effectively understood 'peace' as the creation of an equitable and just society. Certainly peace meant an end to warfare, but it was also understood as inclusive political structures, accountable transparent government, economic and social development, freedom of opinion and association, the safeguarding of human rights, the elaboration of a representative national constitution, and so on. In other words, the Angolan peace movement adopted a broad peacebuilding approach to the question of the national conflict, an approach that remains valid and urgent beyond the cessation of military hostilities.

The key component institutions of this peace movement are undoubtedly the Angolan churches, the private media, civic organizations, associations or NGOs, and the coalition of 14 Civil Opposition Parties (POC). There is much continuity and similarity between these in terms of the activities and arguments promoted, and collectively they have played a most important role in opening up new political 'space' within which the peace movement itself developed. In fact, in assessing the impact of this peace movement, it is important to adopt a perspective based within recent Angolan history. The political space that the Angolan peace movement developed within was, and still is, a traumatized space that has been shaped by a number of factors.

Firstly, a repressive colonial history created little opportunity for popular participation, and certainly left few democratic institutions behind upon which the independent state could develop. Secondly, the attempted coup of 27 May 1977 led by Nito Alves in conjunction with the repressive state response created



terror across Angola, and instilled a fear of political participation that still echoes within national consciousness. Thirdly, the legacy of years of Marxist government did little to encourage public participation beyond or outside the official structures of the Party and its 'mass organizations'. Finally, the country's own experience of violent conflict has deeply marked the Angolan psyche. Each of these aspects of the past in its own way has taught Angolans that 'political activity' is dangerous and to be avoided. Collectively these factors provide some indications as to why such a peace movement did not emerge earlier in Angola. Arguably, one of the most serious challenges faced by the Angolan peace movement was the breaking of a self-imposed silence that had been adopted because of the above experiences, and the casting aside of learned behaviour. This challenge remains today and has been intensified by the ending of violent conflict in 2002, and a widespread belief that the war is definitively over.

## The churches

The Angolan churches have played a key role at the forefront of the peace movement. Their legitimacy and influence are strong within urban and rural areas, and also reach to grassroots levels, a factor which

differentiates them from the majority of other civil society organizations, whose legitimacy and influence is generally greater in urban areas among professional and working class Angolans.

Three church organizations have been influential in promoting peacebuilding initiatives. The Council of Christian Churches of Angola (CICA) and the Angolan Evangelical Alliance (AEA) are umbrella organizations which represent the major Protestant Churches (Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, etc), while the Angolan Catholic Church is known as the Episcopal Conference of Angola and São Tomé (CEAST). While the churches have clearly played a positive peacebuilding role, a major criticism has been the lack of a shared ecumenical approach to such a vital national question. Until the formation of the Inter-Ecclesial Committee for Peace in Angola (COIEPA) in 1999 by CICA, AEA, and CEAST, each church organization preferred to act and advocate for peace individually. Historical tensions and rivalries are often cited as reasons for the absence of a joint approach prior to 1999.

As an ecumenical peace forum, COIEPA has had mixed fortunes. It was successful to some extent in bringing the Angolan churches together structurally to work

for peace. It also provided a focus for dialogue with the international community and became the key advocacy institution of the Angolan peace movement. COIEPA won international recognition in 2001 when the European Union awarded the Zakharov human rights prize to COIEPA's president, Archbishop Zacarias Kamwenho (who accepted the award on behalf of all Angolans working for peace). However this international success was not shared at home as few Angolans had heard of COIEPA or its activities. The churches failed to raise the national profile of COIEPA after it was founded, and rather quickly decided it was most effective to employ COIEPA for international communication, but rely on their own institutions nationally. The churches were also involved in the creation of the Peacebuilding Programme (PCP) in late 1998, where CICA, AEA, CEAST are founding members (along with various other civic and religious organizations). PCP seeks to promote practical local responses in Angola's provinces and strengthen sustainable conflict management capacities at the grassroots level.

A key theme of the churches' analysis of the Angolan war has been that its causes lay in deep historical divisions within Angola's nationalist movement. While the international dimension was clearly evident in various stages of the conflict (Cold War dynamics, and indeed alliances forged by UNITA and the MPLA government in particular post-1992), the churches have consistently argued that the internationalization of the conflict was due to the inability of the nationalist parties to overcome their differences and reach consensus. Internal rivalries and divisions predate the forging of international alliances. It is this analysis that underpinned the solution proposed by the churches, namely that dialogue was the only means to achieve lasting peace. In fact the churches offered to mediate between the parties on various occasions (CEAST 1986; COIEPA 2000; church-based mediation 2001), so as to facilitate the envisaged dialogue. Although Jonas Savimbi did on one occasion in 2000 write to CEAST to encourage the churches to continue their search for peace through dialogue, these offers were never taken up by either of the parties to the conflict.

The creation by COIEPA in 2000 of the Peace Network (*Rede da Paz*) is located within this peace analysis. Membership of the Peace Network was premised on a shared belief in 'inclusive dialogue' as the preferred option for ending the war, envisaged as a process involving support and mediation by Angolan civil society and possibly the international community. The Peace Network brought together an interesting range of pro-peace actors; in addition to the churches, NGOs, private media institutions, women's organizations, and so on, a number of traditional authority figures and elders, including some of Angola's kings, expressed

their support and willingness to collaborate. Unfortunately, after its promising beginnings, the Network has virtually collapsed.

A further key theme in the churches' analysis which is shared by the peace movement as a whole is that those entrusted with securing peace in Angola have gained their place at the negotiating table through the use of arms. These players have in turn marginalized those who have fought for peace through non-violent means, frequently with the consent of the international community. At no point in the negotiation of any of the peace agreements (*Bicesse, Lusaka, Luena*, and indeed the earlier *Alvor Accords*) has there been a mechanism for civil society involvement either as negotiators or observers. The peace movement has argued that this deprived the various peace processes of a necessary 'domestic' Angolan perspective that could have helped 'monitor' the agreements, and of a moderating influence that could have been beneficial in building greater consensus.

The churches were a powerful force in the July 2000 Peace Congress held in Luanda under the auspices of CEAST's *Pro Pace* movement. The four-day conference was the first dealing with Angola to be held within the country (the previous month, an international conference with broad Angolan participation was held in the Mozambican capital, Maputo). It brought together representatives from the Angolan government, from political and parliamentary parties, from twenty-two churches, NGOs and civil society organizations. The congress was critical of both sides in the conflict, and among the numerous recommendations was a call for a ceasefire as a "first step towards peace." It also advocated the establishment of some form of permanent dialogue to include "the most representative levels of civil society, such as the churches, political parties and other institutions." The congress was highly criticized within the state media, where it was portrayed as a forum for "those who wanted peace at any price." By contrast, the private print media was very supportive and published many of the conference speeches. *Rádio Ecclésia*, the church run radio, broadcast the event live. Some have argued that the importance of the event is best measured, not with reference to the content of speeches or recommendations, but in relation to its influence on public opinion and its contribution to "breaking the taboo of silence regarding the road to peace," enabling Angolans to discuss the conflict in an open way.

## Media

The Angolan private print and broadcast media have been important instruments and allies of the peace movement. The emergence of private newspapers throughout the 1990s, and the (re)launch of *Rádio Ecclésia*

in 1997 created new arenas for communication and debate, above all in relation to the conflict. The print media published 'opinion pieces', and radio schedules included debates and phone-in programmes where key issues were discussed. The issues had generally not been open to public debate within the state-run institutions, and their public consumption on private radio especially, was something totally new and engaging. Generally speaking, the state-run media considered the peace movement as anti-government because of its public rejection of government military policy in pursuing the post-1998 war.

## Civic organizations and associations

The growth and visibility of national civic organizations and associations has been a most noticeable feature of change in Angola over the past ten years. The political reforms which preceded the signing of the *Bicesse Accords* in 1991 legalized the creation of independent associations. Among the first civic organizations to be formed were Angolan Action for Development (AAD) and Action for Rural Development and the Environment (ADRA), which both focused initially on reconstruction and agriculture, and the Angolan Civic Association (ACA), which was concerned with civil and political rights. The outbreak of war in late 1992 severely restricted the activity and development of these and other organizations, and also saw the arrival of a great number of international organizations responding to the humanitarian emergency. After the signing of the *Lusaka Protocol* many new national organizations emerged, often with the financial support of international organizations, revealing a particular engagement with human rights awareness programmes.

With the resumption of war in 1998 something quite new happened in Angola, as civic organizations, churches, and private media institutions stepped forward to express disagreement and outrage. It is from this time of frustration and anger that the birth of the 'Angolan peace movement' can be dated. A broad alliance of religious/secular, political/civic actors were opposed to the war. In the words of one organization, the Angolan Group for Reflection on Peace (*Grupo Angolano para Reflexão sobre a Paz*), the war was described as "the will of half a dozen Angolans immune to the sufferings of an entire people and estranged from ... the majority of the people. This re-ignited war is about disguising a deliberate process of disengagement from issues related to the identity and the unity of the Angolan people. The current war, imposed on the Angolan people, is nothing but a disguise for the lack of political and ideological arguments."

Other groups also published similar reflections severely criticizing the return to war. Does the fact that these

criticisms did not bring about a change of policy by the government or UNITA reflect negatively on the peace movement, highlight a weakness in their approach? Perhaps so, but as we have seen in the case of the 2003 war in Iraq, mass rallies, appeals from churches, civil society organizations and others mostly fail to change the minds of the political and military leaderships. The real issue at stake here is the nature of 'power' enjoyed by governments (executive and military) and civil leaders (public opinion and influence).

While the peace movement continued to advocate renewed dialogue and negotiation throughout the conflict, other themes were promoted within its broad peacebuilding approach. For example, there was emphasis on the promotion of human rights, undertaken through the training of human rights activists and through constructive use of the media, both state and private. Radio programmes, especially on *Rádio Ecclésia*, were particularly effective in this regard, as was the publication of material in the print media. All of this served to build citizen awareness of a most crucial issue. This was reinforced by increased civil society commitment to the importance of influencing the content of the new Angolan constitution. At the initiative of AAD, ADRA and *Mosaiko* Cultural Centre, civic organizations met from December 1998 and put forward position papers to the constitutional commission dealing with 'rights, freedoms and fundamental guarantees'. Also around this time, the question of land rights became a key concern of the peace movement and other actors, and continues to be so today.

The end of the military conflict has presented the Angolan peace movement with new challenges, while the work begun during the years of conflict continues to be equally valid in peace time. In November 2003 CEAST and *Mosaiko* organized the second National Social Week on the theme of political participation, followed by similar initiatives in various provinces. Several coalitions of civic organizations, church groups and political parties launched or revived campaigns for peace in Cabinda, democracy, transparency, human rights, land rights and other peace-related issues and they are beginning to have some resonance. One such coalition is Jubilee 2000, which played an important role in galvanizing Angolan civil society, initially around the issue of debt relief, but later taking on wider social and political themes.

Angolan civil society is becoming an important force for change in the country. While the movement remains heavily dependent on international financial assistance, and key institutions need strengthening, it also reveals the presence of important national capacities committed to building a more peaceful and just society.