



SPECIAL REPORT

NGOs and the Peace Process in Angola

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

David Smock is director of the Grant Program and coordinator of activities on Africa at the United States Institute of Peace. Previously he was vice president of the Institute of International Education and executive director of International Voluntary Services. Earlier, as an official for the Ford Foundation, he lived in various parts of Africa for eleven years. He has authored and edited six books on Africa, the most recent of which are *Making War and Waging Peace: Foreign Intervention in Africa* and *African Conflict Resolution: The U.S. Role in Peacemaking*, co-edited with Chester Crocker, both published by the United States Institute of Peace.

John Prendergast directs the Horn of Africa project at the Center of Concern and is a Visiting Fellow at the University of Maryland's Center for International Development and Conflict Management. His several books on Africa include *Without Troops and Tanks: Humanitarian Intervention in Ethiopia and Eritrea* and *Humanitarian Aid and Conflict Prevention in the Greater Horn of Africa*, which he wrote under a grant from the Institute.

April 1996

Executive Summary

A United States Institute of Peace team spent time in Angola in February to explore how Angolan and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) can promote reconciliation in Angola as part of the postwar peace process. The recommendations the team prepared are directed primarily at Angola but could apply to other countries engaged in peacebuilding.

On November 20, 1994, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the Angolan government signed the Lusaka Protocol, which provided for a ceasefire, the integration of the two armies, and a government of national unity at central and provincial levels. The implementation of the Lusaka Protocol, which has been slow and uneven, has occurred at the higher official levels involving military structures and government leadership, but practically no attention has been given to the promotion of reconciliation at the middle and grassroots levels of society. This is a gap that NGOs need to address.

The most serious barrier to the promotion of reconciliation at the middle and grassroots levels is the fact that Angola is still a divided country with very little travel permitted across the demarcation lines. Human contact across these borders could help build peace. In addition to free movement, both government and UNITA authorities must also permit free expression and free assembly if NGOs are to promote reconciliation effectively and if civil society is to emerge.

The report contains a detailed set of suggested activities that could be organized by either Angolan or international NGOs to promote peace and reconciliation. This list includes the following:

- Organize joint training programs and development projects that bring together local groups from the two opposing sides.
- Use the media to promote peace, in part by training journalists.
- Undertake policy analysis of constitutional, economic, and educational issues to ensure that future government policies promote reconciliation.
- Develop a corps of trained mediators to mediate local and national disputes.

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Introduction

The United States Institute of Peace sent a two-person team consisting of staff member David Smock and consultant John Prendergast to Angola in February. The purpose of this mission was to recommend ways for Angolan and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to promote reconciliation in Angola as part of the postwar peace process.

Much has been written about the mediation of peace accords, the creation of peace agreements, the management of international intervention, and the deployment of peacekeeping forces. But little attention has been given to the process of reconciliation, the mending of broken relationships, and the rebuilding of societies so that peace can be sustained.

This report summarizes the insights and recommendations of the United States Institute of Peace team. While this report is directed principally to NGOs and officials in Angola, many of the ideas apply to other war-torn countries engaged in reconstruction and reconciliation. The issues addressed in Angola are similar in many ways to what organizations confront in Bosnia and in African countries such as Mozambique, Ethiopia, Liberia, South Africa, and Uganda—all of which face peacebuilding challenges.

Background

Angola has been in a state of war almost continuously for thirty-five years. The armed struggle for independence from Portuguese colonial rule began in 1961. Even before the Portuguese departed and independence was granted in November 1975, fighting broke out again among Angola's political parties—the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). During 1975, more than 50,000 people died in the fighting, 300,000 Portuguese fled Angola, and tens of thousands of Angolans crossed the borders into Namibia and Zambia. Moreover, the conflict became intertwined with the Cold War: The Soviet Union supplied arms to the MPLA; Cuba sent troops to support the MPLA; South African troops invaded to support UNITA; and the United States supplied arms and money at times to both FNLA and UNITA.

In 1988, Angola, Cuba, and South Africa signed an accord brokered by Chester Crocker, now board chair of United States Institute of Peace, for the withdrawal of Cuban troops, an end to South African support for UNITA, and independence for Namibia in 1990. In 1991, the Bicesse Accord, signed by Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos and UNITA President Jonas Savimbi, provided for an Angolan ceasefire, the creation of an integrated national army, and a multiparty electoral transition to be completed by the end of 1992. Following the elections in October 1992, Savimbi rejected the results and launched military attacks that, in turn, provoked a ferocious government response. It is estimated that 300,000 people—about 3 percent of

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate particular policies.

Angola's population—died between 1992 and 1994. The United Nations reported that during 1993 more people were dying from the war in Angola than in any other war in the world.

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The Peace Process and Reconciliation

Since its signing in November 1994, the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol has been slow and uneven. Details regarding the implementation are described elsewhere.¹ The focus of the implementation process has been at higher official levels involving military structures and government leadership. Practically no attention has been given to the promotion of reconciliation at the middle and grassroots levels of society. The views of the vast majority of Angolans have been neglected in the high-level negotiations and maneuvers.

Such a long period of devastating warfare inevitably creates hatred, fears, desire for revenge, and distrust. All these emotions are fully evident in the behavior patterns of leaders of both sides. What is not so clear is how deeply these emotions have penetrated into the middle and lower echelons of Angolan society. Observers generally agree that the intensity of these emotions is significantly less at local levels than among the leaders, but disagree about whether these feelings constitute significant barriers to popular reconciliation. Even at leadership levels there are significant variations. For instance, some provincial governors are more open to peaceful interaction and reconciliation than others.

Some of those who believe that popular reconciliation might not be a difficult or protracted process point out that many Angolans have members of their extended families on both sides of the ceasefire line. They assert that the desire for family reunification will provide a strong motive for reconciliation.

However, anger over the devastation enemy forces inflicted on their families and property has clearly generated some desire for revenge. It is not clear how widespread these feelings are or whether they are directed exclusively at the enemy leadership or also at enemy soldiers and villagers. Some observers worry about circles of revenge threatening the peace and reconciliation process.

Probably the most perplexing and important puzzle is the extent to which the war was fed by and, in turn, exacerbated ethnic hostilities. Jonas Savimbi has manipulated the ethnic factor to build Ovimbundu support for UNITA. Savimbi's argument (with some basis in reality) is that from colonial times the Ovimbundu were relegated to being plantation laborers and street cleaners. After the Portuguese departed, the argument goes, the Ovimbundu were oppressed by the mestizos and Mbundu who live in Angola's coastal cities and who hold most political and economic power.

There is no doubt that many Ovimbundu, who populate the central and southern regions, feel oppressed and distrust not only the MPLA leadership but many MPLA supporters. Moreover, before some recent demonstrations

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of ethnic sensitivity, the MPLA has not demonstrated much concern about the Ovimbundu sense of alienation.

However, some Angolan analysts identify the principal social cleavage as being between city and rural dwellers. According to this line of reasoning, village dwellers think that the urban elite inherited power and wealth from the Portuguese and have continued to exploit and deprive those living in rural areas. Savimbi also capitalized on these sentiments, particularly among the Ovimbundu, to build UNITA support. But according to this analysis, although the rural/urban division may coincide with some ethnic boundaries, the group of rural disinherited is much larger than just the Ovimbundu.

One complicating factor, and probably a basis for some hope as well, is that it is not always easy to identify "the enemy." It would be erroneous to assume that all those residing on the government side of the ceasefire line are MPLA supporters and that those in UNITA-held areas support UNITA.

Obstacles to Popular Reconciliation

The most serious barrier to the promotion of reconciliation at middle levels of society and at the grassroots is the fact that Angola is still a divided country with very little travel permitted across the lines of demarcation. UNITA generally does not permit Angolans to cross into UNITA-held territory or permit those resident in their territory to leave, even temporarily. UNITA's rigidity in prohibiting free movement seems to be based on its desire to maintain tight control of the populations under its control. Contact and interaction among peoples formerly at war is the most basic means of facilitating reconciliation, but this can rarely occur in Angola today. Even churches, whose memberships are spread throughout the country, have great difficulty in maintaining cross-line contact with their congregations or in holding national meetings.

Observers do report interaction at one outdoor market located on the ceasefire line. Residents from the UNITA side are permitted to attend the market and trade with those who come to the market from government-controlled areas. It is also reported that UNITA and MPLA soldiers are permitted by their local commanders at another location to socialize and play soccer.

Given the poverty of most local communities, residents understandably direct their energies and resources to survival rather than reconciliation. With local crime on the increase, attention is also directed to maintaining peace within communities rather than making peace with the enemy. As one commentator noted, "No work, the availability of guns, and economic discontent equal conflict."

Major socioeconomic disruption is also caused by the millions of landmines scattered undetected throughout the country. These mines inhibit free movement and seriously impede normal economic activity, particularly farming, pastoralism, and commerce.

NGOs in Angola

The focus of the Institute's mission was on how NGOs might promote reconciliation. While many international NGOs operate in Angola, there are few effective Angolan NGOs. More basically, what can be termed civil society hardly exists in Angola. The Portuguese discouraged the devel-

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opment of such institutions during the colonial era, and the MPLA government was hardly more hospitable to the free operation of independent organizations. UNITA control of its territory is also very tight. Some independent organizations are emerging in the government areas, but without a tradition to sustain their development and with limited human and financial resources, their development will be slow.

The list of registered Angolan NGOs is growing, but the scope of their activities is generally quite limited. Only two secular Angolan NGOs function at local levels in diverse parts of the country: the Association for Rural Development and the Environment (ADRA) and the Angolan Red Cross. Only the Angolan Red Cross functions in both government and UNITA territories. ADRA is unacceptable to UNITA because of its close ties to the government, and other NGOs that might want to work on both sides must walk a careful line to avoid being tagged as partisan.

Churches are the most important independent organizations, with the Catholic church being the largest and most important, followed by Methodist, Congregationalist, Kimbangoist Churches, and others. The Catholic Church is constrained in initiating programs relating to peace because the government returned the church's previously confiscated property only two years ago; in turn, the church is hesitant to be adventurous for fear of provoking government reprisals. In addition, divisions along political lines within the church's hierarchy may make agreement on reconciliation initiatives difficult, and the same holds for some other denominations.

Many international NGOs, such as Africare, World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, Caritas, and Save the Children, operate effectively in Angola, but they generally avoid addressing the issues of peace and reconciliation. One source of their hesitation is fear of alienating either the government or UNITA authorities and, in turn, jeopardizing access to areas where they currently operate.

The slowness exhibited by both MPLA and UNITA in implementing the Lusaka Protocol leaves a vacuum that ideally could be filled by pressure for peace and reconciliation from the middle levels and the grassroots. But the lack of assertiveness of international NGOs and the embryonic state of local NGOs limit their ability to develop peace initiatives that would fill this vacuum.

The problem is compounded by the absence of national figures who can provide moral leadership and articulate an inspiring vision for a peaceful Angola. There is also a need for courageous leadership that will allow civil society to flourish and peace to take root. Civil society develops best in a political environment that tolerates pluralism and competition. Even more fundamental is the failure of the Angolan government to demonstrate much concern for the well-being of the average Angolan worker and villager. Angola does not provide a fertile environment for nurturing local NGOs.

Current NGO Peace Activities

For the reasons indicated previously, NGO-sponsored peace activities hardly exist in Angola. Beyond the constraints already cited, some NGOs believe that peace is impossible without economic security and that the best way to promote peace is to stimulate economic activity. As some NGO leaders explain, material deprivation exacerbates animosity and, conversely,

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development aid is peace-enhancing. Some are encouraged by the limited economic interaction and trade that has developed across the ceasefire lines. Many of the territories controlled by UNITA have a surplus of food, while people on the government side want to trade clothing, tools, and medicine for food. This kind of economically motivated contact can contribute to an atmosphere conducive to reconciliation.

A few efforts have been made to bring people from the two sides together. For instance, the Angolan Lutheran Church organized a meeting for UNITA and MPLA women to meet and talk about reconciliation.

Some international NGOs are launching programs to build civil society. The Association of Western European Parliamentarians for Africa plans to organize workshops to promote local understanding of the Lusaka Protocol. Under USAID grants, Africare, Catholic Relief Services, and World Vision are conducting civic education in four of the quartering areas to facilitate reintegration of troops. Conflict Management Group has a grant from USAID to provide training in conflict-resolution techniques at the grassroots level by working with church groups, NGOs, and community leaders. The International Republican Institute will soon begin a two-year project to build political parties and train parliamentarians in the National Assembly, and the National Democratic Institute is also developing a program to strengthen pluralism.

Creative Associates is developing Community Revitalization Projects in both UNITA- and government-controlled areas. To promote reconciliation, Creative Associates plans to organize projects near the ceasefire line so villagers can cooperate across the border on joint projects. Creative Associates will give special attention to integrating demobilized soldiers into their home villages.

Institutional Requirements for Effective Reconciliation Activities

For NGOs, particularly Angolan NGOs, to promote reconciliation effectively, they must be independent of any political party or faction. If an NGO is seen to be associated with MPLA or UNITA, it will be difficult for that organization to serve as a bridge. Ideally, the board and leadership should reflect either a balance between those affiliated with the opposing sides or should consist of persons known for their independence and impartiality.

Strategically, any national peace program would benefit from the inclusion of churches, which are the only organizations that reach to the grassroots in all parts of the country. The Catholic Church is well represented throughout the country; certain Protestant denominations tend to be concentrated in particular regions. This means that a cross section of churches would need to be engaged to assure both diversity and geographic coverage. A small number of church leaders, Catholic and Protestant alike, have also emerged as potential peacemakers at both local and national levels. In addition, Catholic missionaries resident in UNITA-held territory sometimes serve as effective links between UNITA and the rest of Angola.

As they become stronger, professional organizations and trade unions will also be able to bridge political, ethnic, and geographic boundaries. They are

not yet large or strong enough to play a significant peacemaking role, but they have this potential.

Fundamental to the peace process is free movement. Without free movement, there will be very little opportunity for persons at the middle and lower levels on the opposing sides to interact or overcome their animosity. If freedom of movement were permitted and protected, the interaction of people across enemy lines would advance the process of reconciliation dramatically, even without carefully planned programs.

In addition to free movement, authorities must also permit free expression and free assembly if NGOs are to promote reconciliation and if civil society is to emerge. These conditions do not yet exist. Pressure from the international community will have to be sustained if Angola is to fulfill the basic conditions for a peaceful society respectful of basic human rights.

Programmatic Possibilities for NGOs to Build Peace

As conditions become more conducive to the effective operation of NGOs in Angola, there are many activities that could be productively organized by NGOs to promote reconciliation. Some activities are more appropriate for Angolan NGOs than international ones, but many could be undertaken collaboratively. The menu that follows is offered to stimulate the program planning of NGOs and also to encourage international donors to fund these kinds of programs.

Promote Contact and Interaction

- Push for expansion of contact across the ceasefire line at open markets.
- Organize meetings to bring together church members from the opposing sides.
- Bring village leaders (Sobas) from the two sides together.
- Hold joint training programs for the relief staff of UNITA and the government.
- Facilitate functional cooperation in training projects, agricultural activities, public health programs, and public works, similar to what the Croatian Democracy Project has done in Bosnia.
- Use food aid as an incentive for collaborative activities across the line.
- Bring young people together in camps or conferences, similar to the Seeds of Peace Program for Arab and Israeli youth.
- Gather professional groups from various parts of the country to discuss their professional interests, national issues, and peacemaking.
- Send joint teams to other countries that are experimenting with peacebuilding to bring back new ideas for Angola.
- Provide opportunities for group confessions, apologies, and forgiveness by organizing sessions for people from both sides to hear about each other's suffering as well as their hopes for the future. This has been done effectively in Lebanon.
- Organize women's groups and exchanges. In countries such as Somalia, women are a powerful force for peace.

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Use the Media to Promote Peace

- Exert pressure on government and UNITA radio stations to further reduce hate propaganda.
- Help the United Nations make effective use of the radio station it is inaugurating.
- Cooperate with the Voice of America (VOA) on the conflict resolution program it is organizing for Angola over VOA.
- Provide training for journalists to help them serve as agents of peace in their reporting, as has been done in South Africa.

Organize Think Tanks and Policy Analysis Devoted to Peace Issues, such as:

- Power-sharing and decentralization;
- Role of elections in the peace process and alternative electoral systems that might be more conducive to peace than the winner-take-all approach followed in the 1992 elections;
- Economic policy to address regional economic disparities;
- Educational policy to address disparities in educational achievement;
- Analysis of school texts and teaching to reduce ethnic and political stereotyping and misinformation;
- Transitional justice options including amnesty, limited amnesty, or, alternatively, punishment for war crimes;
- Policy options on military demobilization, reintegration of those demobilized, and use of the proposed fourth branch of the military to advance the peace process; and
- Options for resettling and reintegrating those who were internally displaced by the war.

Provide Training in Conflict Resolution

- Train NGO staff and leaders. Training in peacemaking skills has been done effectively in South Africa, and South African trainers could be used in Angola.
- Train military and party leaders.
- Study traditional Angolan dispute resolution processes and adapt them for contemporary use.
- Help local Sobas settle disputes over land ownership and cattle that will arise as those who are dislocated and demobilized return to their home communities.

Train a Corps of Mediators

- Develop a corps of trained mediators to deal with local conflicts and disputes or even national political disputes.
- Ensure that the mediators are politically independent and widely respected for their wisdom and good judgment.

Promote Peace Monitoring and Fact-Finding

- Monitor compliance with the various components of the Lusaka Protocol, perhaps on issues that the UN Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM) and UN human rights monitors are not addressing, such as free movement.
- Sponsor citizen peace missions on particular issues.
- Document and disseminate case studies of successful local peacemaking initiatives.
- Bring to national attention critical issues that may threaten the peace.

Foster Grassroots Economic Development

- Help ensure that basic human needs are met and that workers and villagers can be confident about their economic future. Economic improvement could help people move beyond the war and their desire for revenge.
- Introduce functional cooperation objectives in development planning.

Advocate Peace

- Help the media communicate messages of tolerance and peace.
- Encourage churches to advocate peace and reconciliation.
- Help schools teach tolerance and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.
- Organize a national peace conference, bringing together all segments of society.
- Organize a national Day of Peace with local observances and discussions as was done in South Africa.
- Organize peace marches, peace festivals, and peace tents, as was done in the Philippines.
- Invite highly regarded Africans (such as President Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu) or other international figures associated with peace to come to Angola to reinforce the peace message.

Conclusion

Angola, and more specifically Angola's NGOs, are not yet ready to undertake all or even many of these peace initiatives, but these suggestions are offered as options for future consideration. In addition, they may be suitable options for NGOs in other countries that are in the process of recovering from civil war or even those that are experiencing continuing cycles of conflict.

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¹ CSIS Africa Notes, March 1996.