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Diamond activities and the expulsion of the “*garimpeiros*”

In the 1997 a ‘Gentlemen’s Agreement’ was made between UNITA and GoA relating to the control of diamond areas in order to facilitate the implementation of the Lusaka Protocol (Agenda 6 of Political and National Reconciliation). In 1998 large parts of the diamond areas in Lunda Norte, Bié, Kwanza Sul and Kuando Kubango were retaken by UNITA. In 2000 the UN sanctions against UNITA imposed stricter controls on diamond transactions. At about that time legal problems also began between GoA and De Beers. Between 2000 and 2002 FAA retook the majority of the diamond areas in Bié, Malange, Kwanza Sul, Kuando Kubango, Uíge and Lunda Norte. As a war dividend high-ranking officers of the army started mining activities in these areas. Through several massive investments equipment was deployed to the area and people from DRC, RoC and West Africa that were already working in the sector during the time of UNITA control were informally recruited. The national company ASCORP was created to control diamond transactions however due to the low trading prices used by ASCORP illegal activities continued. It was also observed at the time the arrival of Lebanese and new DRC citizens involved in diamond transactions in Bié and Malange. The security company “Alpha 5” increased its presence in legal diamond areas such as Catota in Lunda Sul. The company also increased its presence in less clearly defined areas and soon afterwards violations and abuses against illegal diamond workers and also the civilian population were reported. Additional private security companies, frequently recruiting FAA soldiers, proliferated especially in Lunda Norte province. Once again ‘Gentlemen’s Agreements’ on diamond activities was suspected during the negotiations with UNITA high-ranking officers during the final stages of the conflict and the start of the peace process. Profits were probably divided between high-ranking officers on both sides.

In early 2003 SDM (Sociedade de Desenvolvimento Mineiro) that was controlled by ENDIAMA and private interests connected with the President was created, including a not yet officially opened “Banco de Desenvolvimento Mineiro”. Rumours persist that members of the President’s family control a large part of the capital within the bank. In October 2003 the Council of Ministries approved the legal framework for a new security entity responsible for all action against illegal diamond trading, the CSD (Corpo de Segurança dos Diamantes). The new structure is under the direct supervision of the Chief of the Intelligence Service, General Miala, who is considered to be “one of the President’s men”.

Reports concerning executions of civilians were reported from Uíge at the end of 2003, as well as cases of harassment against the ‘Banhamulengues’ who arrived in the province during the quartering process. The root cause of these disturbances may also have been linked to the diamond trade.

On 15 of December 2003 FAA issued a communiqué reporting that a “progressive attack against the internal economic and social stability [of the country] had been launched by nationals and foreigners involved in the illicit diamond trade”. Operations to confiscate mining equipment started in Bié and Kwanza Sul provinces.

During the second week of January 2004 a UN Mission in DRC informed OCHA Angola that roughly two thousand Angolans crossed the border into DRC from northern province of Lunda Norte. At the same time the “Jornal de Angola” reported that under the new campaign, the army had recently expelled hundreds of Congolese citizens from the northern provinces. In February, following complaints by a DRC-based NGO and a report on CNN, the GoA offered an official apology regarding the treatment of Congolese miners during the government crackdown on illegal diamond mining. The Ministry of Interior admitted soldiers used excessive force in the rounding up of nearly 10,000 “*garimpeiros*”. The NGO still claims that some people were beaten and killed and many were forced to leave without any belongings. Many today remain stranded at the border.

On 5 of April the FAA Chief of Staff General Sanjar denounced that a “silent invasion” from DRC and Zambia had negatively affected the country. He also declared that “FAA was aware on these movements and the army will take measures against all of those trying to illegally enter into the country. For this reason the army said it was deploying the necessary resources to intervene to defend the integrity of the territory.

On 9 of April GoA issued an extensive Communiqué explaining that, “FAA and the National Police under the instructions and mandate of the Government to maintain internal order and stability and following the constitutional law and the International law, started in 2003 a massive operation to stop this intolerable situation [referring to illegal diamond trading by garimperos...].” The Communiqué underlined that “as a result of the end of conflict and the lasting peace in Angola the conditions that were needed to normalise the economic and social dimensions of the country had been created. However this new situation had also led to increased arrivals of foreigners, exposing the weakness of our border controls and the allowing profiting by organised crime which exploited national resources, especially diamonds.” The Communiqué claimed that “the foreigners were inciting criminal behaviour and as a result of their activities they were destabilizing public order, so negatively affecting the view of national workers and damaging the peace and national reconciliation efforts”. It was highlighted that “within the framework of this operation, all of the those that are involved in these illegal actions, either national or international, are to be temporarily concentrated and housed in previously defined areas in which they will benefit from health care assistance, food distribution, shelter and clothes, before being transported to their countries of origin. In a message that was sent by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the relevant overseas Embassies in Angola the government wished to clarify that this operation should not be considered as xenophobic, as suggested by some governments of the countries from which diamond workers had come, but should be seen as a just act of sovereignty in order to defend the national economy and to re-establish the constitutional legality. The message also sought to reduce the risk of expulsions of Angolans from neighbouring countries in response to the operation against illegal diamond workers.

On 10 of April the National Police controlling the Angolan borders issued a Communiqué stating that, “28,000 illegal persons have been repatriated from Kwanza Sul, Malange, Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul provinces. The majority of them had come from DRC and West Africa”.

Perspective

There is a popular phrase in Angola: *“There are only two reason to be killed in Angola: diamonds and ladies”*.

Diamonds and related mining activities have been used during the 1998-2002 conflict as a war dividend to encourage the army to retake control of the countryside and as a way to balance the oil profit that is concentrated in Luanda and generally out of reach to FAA officers. Legal disputes between the GoA and De Beers opened the door to official diamond trading by Russian and Israel citizens who managed to link the trade with the sale of arms as well as exchanges in military intelligence. The newly created CSD is an attempt to readjust the balance of control and therefore profits between different government bodies, so rewarding and giving extra power to those that are considered deserving within FAA and the Intelligence services.

During the first quarter of 2004 bi-lateral agreements on mining and prospecting have been concluded between Angola and the main mining company of Brazil. This may be leading a compensation agreement following the hand-over of Capanda hydro-electrical power station to the Government. Capanda has been set up in the Kuango valley by a Russian-Brazilian consortium and sits on a traditional seam of rocks that are rich in diamonds.

From time to time the GoA needs to launch a campaign against different Governments or international organisations that are usually accused of orchestrating a plot against the internal economic interest of Angolan or its overall sovereignty. These campaigns are normally used also

to deviate attention from internal problems. The end of the conflict was quite sudden and a lot of questions still have not yet been solved internally among the previously warring parties, including on how to manage the mining industry.

After two years of peace very little progress has been made to stabilise the social and economic conditions of large parts of the civilian populations. Government interests continue to be concentrated in selected provincial capitals, mainly Luanda, and the overall growth of the internal economy continues to be controlled by bi-laterally driven Government agreements. Opportunities in the formal job market continue to be limited and the recent aggressive attitude taken by the Government against informal jobs and localised coping mechanisms, including street sellers and *garimparios*, contribute to a growing discontentment and frustration among urban and rural populations alike. The result may be an increase of poverty stricken civilians that will be excluded from informal livelihoods as well as an increase of the military presence in certain provinces, such as Luanda Norte and Sul. Sudden increases in the military presence in selected provinces may also hamper the national reconciliation effort. The extreme intervention taken in Cafunfo in Lunda Norte province by National Police against civilians who demonstrating over the removal of the only generator of the town may indicate the manner to which the Government intends to control the civil population in the lead up to the electoral campaign.

The “*garimpeiros*” have worked in illegal mining areas in conditions that have been comparable to slaves. Human rights abuses and violations against the “*garimpeiros*” and the civilian population have been widely reported especially by churches over the years. Lack of any basic social services versus the high prices on goods imported from Luanda to the northern provinces has aggravated the precarious conditions of the population. Lack of basic health services and the absence of vaccination coverage have created several outbreak of disease, in particularly meningitis, over the years. In addition humanitarian interventions have been severely hampered due to the restrictive rules imposed by the local authorities and powerful security companies to conduct assessments and follow-up interventions.

Recommendations

- 1) Due to the alert raised by the OCHA DRC on the massive rounding up and expulsion of civilian populations, including vulnerable groups, from Lunda Norte to areas in DRC, an inter-agency assessment mission should be organised soon.
- 2) The UN should further integrate efforts to ensure an early warning system focused on at-risk areas in which potential security and political problems may start to take place in the coming weeks. In addition considering that the cross-border transport of civilian populations are apparently under the FAA responsibility, analysis on security and diplomatic implications should be made.
- 3) Regular sharing of information among agencies should be also encouraged, considering that the northern-east region has been selected for the organised repatriation programme starting in June.
- 4) A UN regional information management approach should be set up through a regular flow of information and analysis.
- 5) A more flexible regional approach by UN staff should be considered to increase the monitoring and advocacy role and to facilitate rapid needs assessments in at-risk locations.
- 6) HC/RC should raise with relevant line ministries advocacy messages endorsed by the CT and donors should be regularly updated and encouraged to adopt advocacy measures.