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Transcript

Angola's External Relations in Africa

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Alex Vines:

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. If you can take your seats please, we are about to start.

Good evening, everybody. My name is Alex Vines, I'm head of the Africa Programme here at Chatham House, and also head the Angolan Forum here. As many of you know Angola is a key part of the work that Chatham House has been doing particularly on Africa; it has been focusing on Angolan politics, Angolan reconstruction, and Angola's future for some 13 years now. It was created in 1998, and I'm very pleased to be hosting tonight the foreign minister of Angola, Georges Chikoti. Chatham House is not a new place for Minister Chikoti, he has visited the institute before as a vice-minister, but I am very pleased to be hosting him tonight as minister.

The minister will give a presentation on Angola's vision in Africa, and then we will have a question and answer session. This meeting is not under the Chatham House rule; it is on the record, which is why there are cameras and plenty of journalists in the audience. I won't say anything more now, but to welcome the minister to the podium. Minister, very welcome to Chatham House, we look forward to what you have to say. *Bem-vindo aqui en Chatham House* [Portuguese: 'Welcome here in Chatham House'].

HE Georges Rebelo Chikoti:

[Applause] Thank you.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, Lady Margaret Anstee [actually Dame, DCMG], Alex Vines I am very hopeful that there will be a time such that some of these debates will be done also in Portuguese, where Alex will speak in Portuguese and I will do the English part. [Laughter] But just to say how close we are becoming between the United Kingdom and Angola.

Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to be here today to talk about Angolan foreign policy, and particularly how do we stand in Africa. Well, it is first of all important to understand that Angola is coming from a background of political strife; but, we, as a nation since 1975, have preserved our principles, which are in the constitution today – the recent constitution approved – where we think it is very important for us to be a sovereign country. So, we do work in that sense, strengthening sovereignty to build our economy, which is now an economy of reconstruction, in order to develop our country and catch up on all the set backs that we have had over the last 35 years.

It is also important in our foreign policy to defend Angolans abroad, to improve that, and, as such, we have been developing our relations with all our partners across. We do have today more than 72 embassies and consular representations, which are allowing us to get closer not only to our partners, but also closer to Angolan communities abroad, and we want to continue to do that.

Our foreign policy is also based on principles to guarantee peace for Angola, stability along our borders, with our neighbours, good relations, and we have been building on that with nearly all our neighbours in the north and the south. And, as such, we do work not only with regional organizations, but also in the United Nations system. With the United Nations, we are committed to the prevention [sic] of peace, management and peaceful resolution of conflicts, we think that all conflicts should be avoided if possible, and whenever we can, manage them the best way we can, so that we can save human lives. Our foreign policy is also committed to the defending of human rights in as best as we can, and we do recognize that we've got to abide by international law, which is the best means to solve our conflicts, or defend our interests.

Ladies and gentlemen, with that being said, all of these aspects are in our constitution; it is open, it can be consulted. We believe that as a country we can only stand safe if we are with the international community at large, if we are part of the international system, and that international law governs us all with all its institutions. Angola is a member of the United Nations since 1976, and we have since then collaborated, participated, and have been a partner of and with the United Nations system since then.

And our engagements with the United Nations system started far back on the implementation of Resolution 435 of 1978 of the Security Council for the independence of Namibia. This is a very crucial resolution because it intended already at that time that the independence of Namibia should be granted, and Angola was a major supporter of independence not only of Namibia, but also committed to the liberation of southern Africa as a whole, and the end of apartheid in South Africa. And, as such, we have worked with all our partners, and fortunate [sic] enough we succeeded not only to end the war in Namibia, but to implement that resolution which brought the independence of Namibia, and later on we went on to work with the international community to bring about the end of apartheid in that region, or in our most immediate region.

I think that with the end of conflicts in Namibia, in South Africa, but also in Angola this conflict which we started to solve, our hope then, or the hope of

the Angolan government during the 1980s and 1970s – or the 1970s and 1980s – was that if we finish with the problem of Namibia then there would be a better opportunity to have peace in Angola, which was, in fact, the case because the Bicesse Agreement which were the result of the 1988 agreement – or some call them the quadripartite, which involved Russia, the United States, Cuba, and South Africa – brought that new environment. We all know it led to the signing of the Bicesse Agreement in Portugal, and, naturally, the beginning of a democratic process in Angola, which we just commented about. We had the first United Nations mission led by Lady Margaret Antsee [Dame], which then took us to the first elections in Angola. Naturally, as we all know, we did not succeed in having peace, but the elections took place anyway. And, from that time, we only came to hold other elections in 2008, and Angola is now going towards its third elections this year.

So, our path has been a difficult one, our foreign policy has always been linked to, not only to our own internal problems between political parties during the era of the Cold War, but also linked to the whole environment of peace or conflict with our neighbours. One was the one we mentioned in the thousand part, but also to say that we had a very difficult relationship with our neighbours of the north, particularly the DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo]. For a long time, we did not succeed to have a peaceful relationship with that particular neighbour, which is our wish, and which is one of our positions in the constitution: to solve all our differences with our neighbours peacefully. We eventually ended up in a war – the war of the Great Lakes region – which you have all, naturally, Angola and other neighbours Rwanda and Uganda.

But finally all these conflicts ended in the late 1990s, and there if a constructive environment in our region, globally. Today, I can say that the global environment around Angola, with our neighbours, and our engagement, or commitment, with international organizations, is a very good one. This environment of peace has allowed Angola to engage in constructive relations not only with countries like the United Kingdom, but also with the European Union, who is an important partner. We also have very good relations with the United States, and for all those who saw the 1980s particularly, and the Cold War, will today understand that this has come from a history of instability and strife, which now is far behind.

Today, the environment that we have built in Angola is one of cooperation with all important international partners so that we can engage in the process of peace and economic recovery. I think that it became clearer that we will do better in this process after 2002, with the total end of the war, and that we have also committed most of our policies in attracting foreign investment to

Angola, cooperating well with economic institutions. We have, today, a very credible relationship with nearly all our friends.

Now, coming back to what is our relationship with Africa. I think that with the period of war which we went through, this has allowed us to mature on a number of political aspects. Number one is that, first of all, we identified that it was important for us to commit ourselves to regional development, so we are a part of SADC [Southern African Development Community]; but, we are also a part of the Central African Countries, we are also part of the CPLP [Community of Portuguese Language Countries], and we are also part of the Gulf of Guinea countries. And all these aspects are related: one, to our challenges in terms of security; number two, our challenges in terms of economic reconstruction and regional integration.

Now, what have we been doing? In SADC, we now have the chairmanship of SADC, and our challenge in this region is to contribute to peace. Globally there is peace in the SADC region, but we have also, in the past, faced problems in the DRC, problems in Zimbabwe, problems in Madagascar. As far as the [Democratic] Republic of Congo is concerned (DRC), it has been our policy to help that particular neighbour, who is very important to us, to contribute to peace and stability, and you are all aware that Angola committed a lot of its resources during the process of implementation which led to its elections in 2006. We have trained more than 20,000 soldiers in DRC, we have trained a considerable amount of police – police officers and policemen, about 15,000 – all this with a view to make sure the DRC is stable.

And it is a part of our policy to cooperate with our neighbours to make sure that they are stable, to make sure that there is peace, because whatever affects them can also affect us. And we have done this correctly, we succeeded to have the first elections in the DRC in 2006, and I may recall that since 1960 you have never had a credible election in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the last elections, which took place in November, there was a lot of potential for civil unrest, and the common position of SADC was that it was crucial and important to recognize those elections, and help them overcome the difficulties. Now, we are looking at a country which has 70 million people, we are a looking at a country which has more than 300 political parties, and about 19,000 people running for members of parliament. It is not an easy process; they are still counting the elections. I hope... there is hope that they will finish during the month of March, and eventually have a government. It is true that the process has some difficulties, but we believe that it is important to work with the government of the [Democratic] Republic of Congo to make

sure that this process holds, and that there is no civil war. At least we have been able to overcome that.

With what regards to Zimbabwe, which is also an ongoing problem, there is a mediation. Normally, in SADC we do work under mediations, and it is our view, as the chair of SADC now, to make sure that their agreement, the GPA [Global Political Agreement] agreement is implemented in full, they go for the memorandum, the new constitution and then the elections, so that the agreement is met in full. There may have been temptations by one of the parties to avoid that process, but the common position of SADC is that the process should be respected in full. And, in that capacity, we have worked with both Prime Minister [Morgan] Tsvangirai and we have asked President [Robert] Mugabe to respect what has been agreed or signed by all parties. And we do, indeed, hope that the elections will not be avoided, and that the whole roadmap will be implemented as agreed.

And, still in SADC, we have a strong commitment...President [José Eduardo] dos Santos has appointed a representative to represent [sic] him in Madagascar. There is a roadmap that was negotiated by former President [Joaquim] Chissano [of Mozambique], it is endorsed and supported by SADC. We also want that process to continue to be peaceful, we do hope that the president of the transitional authority in Madagascar [Andry Rajoelina] will respect all the provisions of that agreement, which imply the full participation of all opposition leaders, and which will be based on the approval of an amnesty law, which allow all opposition leaders in exile to participate in that process. So, we are still waiting, and we are committed to make sure that that works. But that is as far as SADC is concerned. Angola is finishing its chairmanship in that organization in August this year.

As far as Central African Countries is concerned – which, again is another area and another organization we are committed to – Angola wants this area to accelerate its integration process, it is the most retarded region so far in terms of regional integration. Angola participates in the standby force and we have a chief of staff of the forces in this particular region. We do not have any major conflicts going on in this region, apart from the Republic of Central Africa [the Central African Republic (CAR)], where we need to help them to continue to guarantee peace and security in their country, because of some of the violations of their borders by organizations like the LRA [Lord's Resistance Army] and other smaller groupings within their country. But, so far, as far as Central African Countries are concerned, we have peace.

We have, in Angola, the headquarters of the organization of the Gulf of Guinea, the commission of the Gulf of Guinea. Our challenges in the Gulf of Guinea is to make sure countries like Angola, Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe, Gabon, I may have mentioned Nigeria as well, all eventually... other countries in West Africa, we can coordinate policy on protecting our natural resources, guaranteeing that we don't have a phenomenon of piracy as we do have in the Indian Ocean.

Due to the instability in the delta states of the Republic of Nigeria, there has been a concern that we should do a little bit more. The major issues in terms of policy have been defined, and I think that countries are trying to mobilize resources to make sure that we guarantee better security in this region, because attempts of piracy and rebel activity have happened not only in Nigeria, but also in Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. There is a possibility of eventually having an international conference on this particular point.

As far as our foreign policy is concerned with the CPLP [Community of Portuguese Language Countries] region – countries, sorry – Angola is right now committed to help the Republic of Guinea-Bissau. Guinea-Bissau has faced challenges over the last three years. Angola is holding the chairmanship of the CPLP until July, and we are in the second year. When we took office, the president of Guinea-Bissau had been killed [President João Bernardo Vieira] and the country face[d] a number of problems ranging from drug trafficking, which involved major personalities of the political elite of Guinea-Bissau, it involves members of the army. It is indeed a major problem here. However, we are all partners in the CPLP countries, are handling the problem in various ways. We have both a collective stand to work towards peace in that country, but also individually we are helping in providing the resources necessary, the technical support in cases, to help Guinea-Bissau to solve its problems.

What is the major political problem in Guinea-Bissau? The major political problem in Guinea-Bissau is they have an army that was the liberation movement major military wing, this army has never been reformed, and they have never had any benefits of independence, and therefore they have been involved with drug trafficking, but also with military coups and assassinations. In the last three years, a president [President João Bernardo Vieira] was assassinated, and two chiefs of the armed forces were also assassinated, I think three, and it became a concern both of the CPLP and the ECOWAS [the Economic Community of West African States].

When we took over from Portugal these problems were happening. I just wanted to say that Portugal was chairing the CPLP, and Angola took over from Portugal, who did a wonderful job in trying to help first by creating a contact group. There is a contact group at large, which involves the European Union, and other international partners like the United Nations, to see if we can all work together and build peace and solve the problems in there. So, we have a United Nations mission working with us there.

But, also, when we took over, already we had agreed that all CPLP countries would work together to make sure that we are committed to that. Angola sent a number of armed men, we sent a team of our Angolan national army, to work on, with the Guinean authorities, to work on the reform process, which was already addressed by our Portuguese counterparts.

What is this process of the reform of the armed forces of Guinea-Bissau? Basically, we need two things: one is to downsize this army; number two, we need to make it a republic army. And, therefore, we need to put some of the people who are in the Guinean armed forces, we need to reform them, to demobilize them, and make them go back into civilian life. For those who have followed the Angolan process, this is also one of the challenges Angola faced at the end of the war. We had two armies, well, with many figures. Some had 100,000, the other side had 200,000, I don't know, but we had to make an army of only 50,000 people, and we also worked with Portugal in that sense in Angola, to make sure the Angolan armed forces were downsized to only 50,000, and have a proper budget for the army, having some of those who come from the previous armies go into civilian life.

Today, Angola is able to use this experience and implement policy, this programme in Guinea-Bissau. So far we have committed, as Angola alone, about \$100 million to this programme, which involves our presence there, to build or re-build some of the barracks for the Guinean army. Now, we are looking at a former guerrilla army, that means we are looking at people who do not have salaries, or who receive them from time to time, the only way they can have something in their pocket is if they go down in the street with a gun and intimidate somebody. But we are also talking about people who have no shoes, who may have no clothes, and the proper way we felt of doing this is to make them understand, first of all, that they are soldiers, and that true soldiers cannot be in the street frightening people. We have managed that.

The second stage is to bring them into barracks, and we have also succeeded to do that. The other step was to count them because they did not know how they were. And, one of the things I wanted to say is that many

soldier who brings children, his cousin or his relatives into the barracks and make them soldiers as well. We have found soldiers who are as old as 85 years old; it's true, it is true. The youngest soldier we found was about 27 years old. Everybody else was about... between that age and about 85 years old.

So, the challenge in Guinea-Bissau which the CPLP is doing is to work with the international community and see if we can build a new army. We need funding for that. Angola, Brazil, Portugal have been contributing to that effort. We need about \$45 million to guarantee the pensions fund for the next six years while we demobilize those who are going into civilian life. We have also identified that the future army will only have about 3,000 men, which include... and then, on top of which we will add about 600 for the air force, and about 1,000 for the navy. But the challenge is to re-train and re-educate those we will be counting on. The army in Guinea-Bissau was ethnic based, so the new standards that we worked on will be a national army, which will have people coming from all ethnic groups, and have them in one army.

But, the major challenge also in Guinea-Bissau is impunity. There have been crimes that will need to be investigated at a later stage. We do believe that most of the political elite has been involved in some of those crimes. And indeed, unless we have an army and a police force to which both Angola, Portugal, and Brazil have been training, we need proper institutions, that means the police, but also the judiciary, and all legal institutions and police institutions that will guarantee a democratic environment. But, in this process, as we are implementing it, only in December, on the 26th, there was another military attempt, another military coup, which, fortunately, failed. Well, not because we were there, necessarily, but maybe because, well, our presence made it easier for the prime minister to run away and get into our embassy, and protected by our military. So there is an urgency for the international community to get committed to Guinea-Bissau, and see if we can implement very quickly, we can implement very quickly this process.

That was just to say that there are many, many challenges for us as Angola and as a country, but we are trying to do the best we can, committed to the principles of the African Union. And, I also just wanted to say that in that capacity in SADC, and I wanted to correct an information, which was put across. Is that in SADC, SADC is running for the chairmanship of the African Union with a lady candidate, who is Madam [Nkosazana Dlamini] Zuma. And, some people said, 'well, it was a problem only of Angola.' Angola was campaigning for – we as chair of SADC we have an obligation to do the

campaigning as SADC agreed and approved a year ago – that Miss Zuma would be the candidate for SADC for the African Union chairmanship.

What I wanted to say is that SADC has never had that position in 48 years of existence of the African Union – that is number one, that is why we feel strongly that this is our time to have that position. Number two, this is not being done against anyone. Well, Mr Jean Ping has had four years, so this was an electoral process, he was running and Miss Zuma was also running, but I think there was confusion, say, 'well, there is a division.' No, it is a problem of SADC. SADC has one candidate, we feel we have a strong and good candidate who can also deliver in that position. Well, the electoral process, since no one won that election, the electoral process should have been suspended. And the provisions of the rules are that when you don't elect someone after the fourth round then the president or the chair suspends the electoral process, and then he calls for new elections.

So, that is what the situation is. So, we do hope that eventually SADC, or Miss Zuma, will get that position, and we are strongly campaigning for that. And it will also be the first time that a lady is running for that post, or will try to be in that position.

Well, to sum up I just wanted to say that Angola's foreign policy across the world is a constructive one; we cooperate with everybody from the United Nations to individual countries. We cooperate with all major organizations – the European Union – and we intend things to be that way. We are open to foreign investment coming from anywhere, but we are particularly committed to Africa where we belong. We think that we can help build and construct peace close to our borders, but also beyond our borders, which is what we did, we are doing not only in Guinea-Bissau, but also we are working, we are a part of the international conference of the Great Lakes region because we want to improve peace globally. And we do contribute to all of these organizations with the possible resources that we can have from time to time.

But, I just wanted to say that we are a peaceful nation, we want to build this peace, we want to cooperate with everybody, and everybody is welcome to Angola and to see if each one of you can help us re-build or to re-construct our country. And, I am particularly pleased today that in all of the meetings that I have had, I saw the commitment of British companies, the British people, our good friends who are here who are still willing and committed to work with us. And if we work with you, it will be a stable country, and we will continue to contribute to peace and development in our region and beyond.