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Transcript

Angola's 2012 Elections: The View from the Opposition

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Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to thank Chatham House, especially Alex Vines and his Africa staff, for providing this opportunity, once again, to review the situation in Angola as we see it, and benefit from the contributions that will certainly be made in the course of this session.

It is always a pleasure and a great honour for me to be here, even greater this time when your country is hosting the Olympic Games. I would be remiss if I did not say that the opening ceremony was quite a show, one to take your breath away.

We are here to assess the Angolan electoral process; I will start with a short background; then address our concerns and finally look beyond August 31.

Background

Angola held two elections before, in 1992 and in 2008. In both cases there were substantial irregularities – some intentional such as manipulation, fraud and intimidation and others resulting from inexperience.

In 2008, for instance, the European Union's election observer delegation found a number of serious violations and irregularities that prevented it from fully endorsing the elections. It is our suspicion that the decision taken by that body, against sending another delegation this year was partly based on the realization that the recommendations made in the 2008's EU report were not implemented.

In 2008 the MPLA was able to literally take over the electoral process, through operatives from the Presidential Guard, and allocate results to contenders at will. UNITA was given 10%, way below its true share of the electorate. UNITA accepted the results in order to avoid further social tension. It was a sacrifice made in the name of peace.

However, the resulting lopsided victory, allowed Mr Jose Eduardo dos Santos, who is both president of the MPLA and the Republic, to change the constitution to suit his political interests.

So in 2010, a new constitution was rammed through the Parliament, over the protest of the opposition. This new dispensation, which the president himself calls 'an atypical constitution', abolished direct presidential elections and concentrated even more power in the presidency. Overall, our democratic process suffered a serious blow with the 'atypical constitution'.

Among the many negative consequences, let me point out a few:

- Citizens were robbed of their right to elect the president, the most powerful politician in the country;
- The legitimacy of the presidency was reduced;
- This resulted in an increased confusion between the legislative and executive powers, undermining further the principle of separation of powers.

Against this background, UNITA sought to improve the legal environment by proposing and fully participating in the enactment of a new organic law on general elections ensuring in particular the creation of an independent electoral administration body, as required by the constitution, and improvements in the overall organization of the elections, based on experiences of the 1992 and 2008 elections. The ruling party, to its credit, went along and contributed positively to the changes sought.

However when the time to appoint the President of the National Electoral Commission (CNE) came, they forgot the law and violated every step required for the selection and appointment of such officials. UNITA had to draw a line in the sand and fight the appointment in order to force the ruling party to follow the law, approved by its own parliament.

In short, the ruling party reversed itself following UNITA's announcement of massive demonstrations in almost all provincial capitals, including Luanda. A new President, Andre da Silva Neto, was sworn in early June 2012, after a relatively fair process. We had all wasted valuable time that could have been used to address the many pressing tasks facing the CNE.

Where are we now?

On the bright side, we have had peace now for more than a decade and we are having our third election within the constitutionally mandated period. Having regular elections is itself a positive thing because it reinforces the practice. We believe that every time you hold an election something changes; if it is not the government, it is the people.

It is worth noting here, that the Angolan people have changed indeed:

- The majority of the electorate is fairly young and not imprisoned by the past;

- People are more aware of their political rights and are increasing their use of social media;
- They are more aware of the ruling party electoral tactics;
- They know that they live in a country blessed with resources;
- They have higher expectations for their future and the future of their children;

The economy has generally improved, but our much coveted economic growth has not converted into social wellbeing for the majority. It seems the more we are told of the country's economic growth the greater is the percentage of those living under the poverty line. All you need to do to see this is to leave downtown Luanda and wander in its outskirts.

These are positive developments that have an impact on politics.

On the dark side

Angola continues to be a state where there is no clear separation of the legislative, executive and judicial powers. We do not have strong institutions; we have a strong man in power for 32 years.

We do not have a free press. The ruling party controls the public media and determines the quantity and quality of news citizens can hear, see or read. The few independent outlets left in the market are confined by law to broadcast only in Luanda.

Public resources continue to be abusively used for private ends.

The political process continues to be manipulated to serve the interests of a few at the detriment of the majority.

Opposition, political officials and civil activists continue to be intimidated, arrested and, in some cases killed, by the security forces.

In this context, our concerns regarding the electoral process can be summarized as follows:

The selection of the election date

Traditionally elections were held at the end of September. This time, Mr Dos Santos insisted that they be held at the end of August. Let it be said that his birthday is on August 28 and such occasions are marked by a public holiday

filled with free for all parties. Be ready for a week-long feast leading up to election day. This is certainly a violation of the electoral law.

Voter registration rolls

Voting without proper electoral rolls has become an endemic problem in Angola, witnessed both in 1992 and 2008 elections. However, more serious than that is the fact that the lists of people and places where they will be voting at have not been published and/or posted for the purposes of complaint and redress. If the problem of the integrity of the electoral rolls is not resolved in time the confusion at the polling stations will be worse than the one experienced in 2008.

Election workers at the polls and polling stations

In 2008, almost all polling station directors were voters that were cardholders of a single party; the majority of these were civil servants from government ministries.

UNITA emphasized with the CNE that this situation should not be allowed to repeat itself. This year, the CNE needs approximately 170,000 people to man the polling stations, of which about 16,000 will be presiding officers and 12,000 will be 'logistical supervisors.' Until now all those selected are members of a single party: the ruling party.

In addition, there are rumours indicating that, as in 2008, the President's military advisor is training members of his services to be introduced in the polling stations under the pretext of being 'logistical supervisors' and 'polling agents'. Precisely, they will be working in transportation, distribution and handling of ballots, ballot boxes, and minutes for the election results. If confirmed, UNITA will not accept this.

List of party delegates

In 2008, the process of accreditation of party delegates was marred by law violations misdeeds, poor organization and deliberate delays. The law that was approved on 12/21/2011, however, establishes more efficient and faster procedures for the registration and accreditation of the delegates presented by the candidates and political parties. UNITA expects the CNE to act in good faith.

Election logistics

UNITA had recommended to CNE to pay particular attention to the type of companies to be hired and the role that Angolan dignitaries eventually come to play in such companies. It was further recommended that the control of ballot papers, ballot boxes, the electoral minutes and also the electoral counting centres should not be handled by third parties. It should be done entirely by the CNE.

It appears that the CNE is either very careless or compromised in this matter. It simulated a public tender, to be realized in two non-working days – Saturday and Sunday – to select the company that will be responsible for the electoral logistical services exceeding \$250,000.00. The following Monday there was a winner. And the winner was INDRA - the Spanish company – that did the same work in 2008. CNE claims that only INDRA presented all the qualifying documents that had been requested. It came to our attention that the relevant documents presented by INDRA have, for the most part, the date of April 2012. This means that INDRA had been previously notified.

In 2008 INDRA produced 26 million paper ballots for Angola, this according to its own Internet website [<http://www.indracompany.com>], when the CNE had, at least publically, only ordered about 10 million paper ballots. We are asking where did the additional 16 million ballots go?

Use of the spectre of war as an intimidation tool

There is what seems like a concerted effort by certain security forces to tell people in rural areas that if they do not vote for the ruling party the country will be back to war. It is a tactic also used in 2008.

Deliberate delays regarding the invitation of foreign observers

In denouncing these irregularities and flaws in the electoral process at home and abroad UNITA seeks to stimulate and empower citizens to assume responsibility and compel the competent organs of the State, in particular the CNE, to act within strict limits defined by the Law. No citizen expects the CNE to be unruly, and as such to be an instability factor.

UNITA also seeks to raise awareness and call on the international community to encourage the Angolan government and the ruling party to conduct an electoral process that is as free and transparent as possible to ensure that the result will be accepted by all involved.

Recent demonstrations by the youth, the ex-combatants and those called for UNITA, have left no doubt that Angolans have matured and are willing to fight for their rights through constitutionally sanctioned methods. There will be little tolerance for fraudulent elections as electors seek to express their will through the polls.

Too often I am asked what would UNITA do differently should it become the government. Let me offer a few of our ideas.

We believe that Angola cannot realize its full potential without a decentralized, functioning and inclusive government. It is imperative to embark on the devolution of power to provincial and local governments that can bring services closer to citizens. That means:

- Adhering seriously to the rule of law; committing without reservation to direct democratic elections for the president, the parliament and local governments;
- Governing with all citizens who are qualified and competent regardless of their political affiliation;
- Reversing the unemployment trend, addressing the pressing housing needs, healthcare, education and social security;
- Fighting hunger and poverty;
- Using current oil revenues to seriously diversify the economy while honouring those commitments made with foreign partners; and
- Guaranteeing equal opportunities for all.

These policy ideas represent the essence of what makes us politically different from the ruling party the MPLA and their implementation can and will change Angola for the better.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With all that was said above it is easy to conclude that although we are about to hold our third elections, as a country we have a long way to go in the process of building a strong democracy. Ours is still a country of extremes. Too much wealth and too much poverty; high growth rates and low social indicators; the latest car models riding on dusty roads; million dollar homes built next to shanty towns; we want to be the regional power yet, we can neither feed and house our population nor secure a steady flow of electricity;

we talk of development and competing in the global market, yet we invest 4% of our budget in education; the government tells citizens to feel free in choosing a political party, and when citizens do choose, they lose their jobs, if not their lives; and finally, the government offers bicycles and tractors to traditional chiefs, just in case they forget which party they should vote for.

In such a country building a strong democracy is not a luxury. It is a social and historic imperative. We see people all around us yearning for change. These elections will be a turning point because, as we said before, the people's tolerance for fraud and manipulation has shrunk substantially.

Given its economic, political and military potential, Angola has, and will continue to have, tremendous influence over the Central and Southern Africa regions. However, our contribution to regional stability cannot be limited to exporting the instruments of violence, as were the cases, in the DRC, Congo B., Ivory Coast and Guinea Bissau. We must transform ourselves into a true democracy and a vibrant inclusive economy to ensure that our contribution includes successful models of reconciliation, democratic transition and economic reform. Only then can we ensure lasting regional stability and emerge as responsible regional power.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is my brief contribution to this topic, despite all the negatives, we can see the light at the end of the tunnel and we hope it is not an oncoming train.

Thank you for your attention.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Note: The spoken word prevails.

Question 1:

You mentioned that UNITA received 10% of votes in the last elections, which is lower than the reality. How many votes do you think you would have won in case of fairer elections?

Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

We would have won the elections. We will never know what the exact percentage would have been, it would be speculation. What is essential this time is that the process is transparent and fair to make sure that the results are as close as possible to the people's expression. At the last elections, it was certain that the 10% was a given percentage and not the earned result.

Question 2:

Is there any official funding for the political parties?

Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

There is official funding of about \$700,000 for each party. This is the last amount I heard, but this might change. I do not know what the exact figure will be. In Angola, this money is not sufficient to run a good political campaign. Every party will have that money, but the president has a few other sources of funding which results in an unfair process. Other parties will struggle to find the resources.

Question 3:

When talking about devolution, what is the existing power of the provinces?

Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

If UNITA becomes the government, devolution will be a priority. Now, the power depends on the provincial governor's relationship with the President, this creates differences between provinces. In 2008, people visiting Angola could see that some provinces were ahead in terms of development – roads and infrastructure. Development is a good thing, but it needs to be done the right way. Right now, the power of the provincial government is very limited.

Question 4:

What is the media access for the different political parties?

Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

In previous campaigns it was very poor. Now, by law, each party has an allocation of 10 minutes of radio and 5 minutes of TV broadcast, for party political campaigns starting on 1 August. The law also determined the order of the parties. The rest of the time is being used by the current ruling party.

During the protests on 19 May, thousands of people rallied in Luanda without any TV coverage of the protests. There are also two independent radio stations in the country, but their broadcasting signals are geographically limited by law so that it cannot reach the majority of the people.

Question 5:

Should the MPLA win another election, what can UNITA do given the lack of judicial balance?

Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

UNITA is insisting that before elections happen rules be clear and that everyone knows what the expected process is. The law needs to be followed clearly by the CNE, and the government needs to act as it is supposed to act. If we look at democracy as a market, there is the supply side and the demand side and there is a need for change on the supply side as people cannot only keep demanding. UNITA wants to make sure that all these elements are in place before the elections. If Angola is going through the same flawed election process again, this time the only solution that remains is the constitutionally sanctioned method: people on the streets - the demand side. UNITA insists on the law because it is the only tool available: the right to hold free and fair elections and the right to demonstrate.

Question 6:

Is there a role for SADC? What is the role of international observers and what are you expecting from outside?

Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

Yes there will be a role for SADC. They had a role in 1992 and in 2008 elections and I am sure there will be one this time too. The only problem with

SADC is that we can expect in advance what will be the report. They will probably say that it was the most spectacular elections they have ever seen. The law requires and allows the participation of international observers which according to UNITA are a key part in the election process. But Angola needs a credible third party beyond SADC to support the results. We continue to insist that the government issues invitations for election observation missions. The EU has decided not to send an observation team. The reasons stated are the lack of funds as it is expensive to hold an election mission in Angola, but my experience tells me that this is a political decision. When Mr Barroso went to Luanda to meet with President dos Santos, he announced after the meeting that the EU will not send a team. The EU should be able to find about \$3 million to spend on Angola, so the reason must be a different one. We want the government to issue invitations to those institutions – individuals, European and US institutions that have shown an interest in sending an observation team. Last time, they could not come on time because they received the invitations only a few days before the elections, so it is important that the invitations are issued soon. If the government expects to win, why are they concerned about an observation mission? They will gain credibility and it would legitimise their victory. Why are they resisting so much to open-up the process if they are so sure that they will win?

Question 7:

As there are so many issues being discussed, do you see them being addressed in time for the elections? Is there a dialogue happening to address these issues?

Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

Yes, there is a dialogue at the CNE level and much is also happening between the parties. Not all of the issues will be addressed, but we are trying to reach a point where we can all be satisfied with the results. It is a worthwhile exercise. We have been played for fools for a long time and if we are not prepared going to the elections there is no point in participating. We need to be serious as a country and as citizens. Ten years since the end of the war is enough time to grow up.

Question 8:

It is commonly perceived that the MPLA will win the next elections. If they do win the elections again, they will have a chance to consolidate their power. What does it mean for the country?

Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

I do not necessarily agree with this. If the elections are free and fair, the MPLA will not win the majority. If they elections are free, UNITA would win, or at least would be close to winning and the opposition will be able to form a majority. Should the MPLA win again, it will only be accepted if the process is fair and transparent. We want a better process to the one we have witnessed in the past. If the process is flawed it does not matter who wins. If the MPLA wins through a flawed process again, they will be under so much pressure that the situation cannot remain the same. Every time you have an election something changes and if it is not the government it is the people. One of the biggest difficulties facing dos Santos now is not the opposition, but his own political party. This time it took him almost three months to announce the parliamentary list because he wanted Mr Manuel Vicente to be number two on the party list and a lot of MPLA people were not happy with it. I am sure that he had to twist arms and sign a few cheques to reach a consensus. There are two problems for President dos Santos: The first one is that people from the MPLA itself are no longer lambs simply following blindly. Second, there is a segment of the youth, those who are now 18 to 35 year old, who happen to be an important part of the electorate and do not have the

experience of war. Those factors, together with access to social media and technology change the dynamics. So if the MPLA wins, they will feel a lot of pressure from the demand side to change what is happening.

Question 9:

Is there a possibility for a coalition of the opposition parties? Is that a realistic scenario? Is the emergence of the Convergence for Angola's Salvation party (CASA-CE) a threat for UNITA or is it something that the party can deal with?

Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

The emergence of CASA-CE shows that in a democracy anything can happen. Abel Chivukuvuku left to form a new party, but at the same time, other parties have decided that they will join and support UNITA. Losing a UNITA member of the stature of Abel is a shame, but now that he left, there is a need to look at the positive aspects: First, indirectly, the creation of CASA-CE created a new dynamic, both in the national set up and within UNITA itself. UNITA knows that it must work hard not to lose more members to CASA-CE. It had the positive impact of re-energizing UNITA. Second, only a few persons from UNITA joined Abel and those that did were not key members of the party. Finally, the supporters of CASA-CE do not only come from UNITA. They also include former MPLA members. This means that the opposition's outreach is growing. Taking all of this into consideration, UNITA did not suffer much. CASA-CE will draw some members from UNITA, but most will come from civil society and the MPLA. That is positive for the country. Overall this means that there will be fewer people voting for the MPLA.

In the case of a coalition, CASA-CE will probably not refuse to join a coalition because of their UNITA background.

Question 10:

There seems to be an astonishing amount of money being spent on CASA-CE propaganda, where is that funding coming from?

Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

Abel is a very methodical person who might have planned all this for a long time and secured enough funding. There are rumours that the money might come from the MPLA, but this is highly improbable because they would not be

able to convey the message they wish for. There are a lot of millionaires in Angola who do not all agree with dos Santos; the money could also come from them. It would not surprise me if there are some rich Angolans supporting Abel's party.

Question 11:

What would you say to investors concerned about the political situation in Angola?

Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

It is legitimate that they are concerned about the elections. However, UNITA does not want to see a tragedy but rather a positive move forward. There are a lot of common beliefs about Angola which no longer hold true and there is space for new developments in Angola. It is important that investors do not look at Angola as a country of 'absolute truths' anymore. For example, it used to be an 'absolute truth' that dos Santos was in power, but this is changing. It was an 'absolute truth' that whatever happens at elections, the people will be obedient - that is not true anymore either. It was an 'absolute truth' that UNITA could not mobilise people in the streets - this has been proven wrong. There are certain 'absolute truths' that no longer apply, so there needs to be a paradigm shift. If UNITA wins the elections there are number of important points to acknowledge.

Firstly, the party understands that the future development of Angola is interconnected with the international community. The continuation of existing agreements is an important aspect to safeguard. We have no idea how much money is being made every day, but we want to make sure that this money continues to be made because we will need it to run the country.

Secondly, we will change the economic environment to enable the population. If the economic environment is not good for Angolans, it will not be good for the foreign investment either. It needs to be more accessible for locals, improving financial access, bureaucracy and laws. If we improve the business environment for Angolan entrepreneurs, it will also be better for foreigners. We will change things related to the economic environment to make it leaner, faster and better. As far as the international companies are concerned, we have nothing against them. UNITA will also change a few things regarding Chinese contracts to concentrate on adding value to Angola and making sure that investments benefit local people instead of importing labour for jobs that Angolans can fill.

Question 12:

What is the context of the previous election manifesto from 2008? Is there a UNITA manifesto for 2012? Is the MPLA manifesto going to be different from the one in 2008?

How can we improve the fight against corruption? UNITA itself has also been accused of corruption, racism and tribalism.

What is the strategy that UNITA is pursuing to guarantee a smooth transition of power?

If Manuel Vicente takes over the leadership of the MPLA, will he rule the party differently?

What stops rich Angolans from giving money to UNITA? To what extent is the past catching up with UNITA?

This is a question for Chatham House: what does Chatham House do after such a meeting?

Domingos Jardo Muekalia:

UNITA 2012 Manifesto was published two days ago. The MPLA has been facing difficulties in explaining why the million houses that they promised did not show up. A number of houses were built together with a new high-rise apartment building to demonstrate the ability of the government. Now that the elections are close they are releasing some apartments. Their Manifesto will have to be different from the 2008 Manifesto because the MPLA needs to justify a number of failed projects and programmes. They lost credibility as they have not matched all their promises.

With regard to corruption - some members of UNITA might well be corrupt. Corruption exists everywhere – even in Europe. People who are found to be involved in corruption need to face consequences, but in Angola there are no consequences. UNITA is committed to the rule of law and to punish those relying on corruption by promoting an anti-corruption law. If someone is found to be corrupt they have to pay the consequences. Now corruption is the norm and if you come to Angola and try to play by the rule, everybody will laugh at you. There is also a need to concentrate on the political structure because with more decentralisation, there will be different centres and resources of corruption. The way parliamentarians get elected also needs to be reformed. At the moment, dos Santos decides who gets on the party list. This inhibits parliamentarians to speak up against corruption as they rely on the President for their position. This needs to be changed so that parliamentarians will

speak on behalf of the people and hold the executive to account. Part of UNITA programme is to change the way the political structure is organised and to ensure a separation of powers between the legislative and the executive.

The accusation about tribalism can only come from the government or from people associated with the government. UNITA is present in all of the country and each province of Angola, and is working with people from all background and tribes. UNITA works hard to make sure that diversity is respected. We need to find ways to emphasize the common denominators to build national unity on diversity, but we need the tribes because elections are a matter of numbers. The MPLA has the largest share of *mestizos* and white members, mostly because they happen to be based mostly in Luanda and Benguela. It is not a policy of UNITA to discriminate. If you are an Angolan, you have competence, you want to join us, you agree with our policies - that is all we need to know.

The smooth transition to power will depend on how the election process goes. If the MPLA accepts defeat, the transition will be smooth. It is in the interest of all of us to ensure that there is a smooth transition. This is the reason why we keep insisting on the transparency of the electoral process.

If Manuel Vicente was elected as leader by the party on his own merit, he would run the party like Sonangol. But actually we are talking about a situation where President dos Santos wanted Vicente's name on the list and fought the party to make sure that he is on it on the number two spot. In this situation, Manuel Vicente is a stand-in for President dos Santos and there are no expectations that he will run the party any differently.

There is nothing stopping Angolan millionaires from funding UNITA and I would not be surprised if they did. All the parties need to find resources were they can.

In the past UNITA has been involved in a conflict with the MPLA, but time has passed. Some people tend to look at things that happened ten years ago to paint UNITA in a certain light. But people seem to see through that. The government certainly tries to remind the people that those things happened, but people are moving forward because no-one can change the past. UNITA today is not the same as then: the party has a different mentality, dynamic and different goals. UNITA today will move Angola beyond 2012. The relationship with the electorate has improved a lot since 2008 – the recent demonstration proves this.

Alex Vines:

For over 10 years now there has been an Angola Forum at the Royal Institute of International Affairs and it will continue. Chatham House is a policy institute engaged in thinking, debates and discussions. On Angola, we produce papers, we host meetings and we publish the results. This meeting will be on our website. We are planning a cluster of analyses on elections: what is happening in Angola, looking at the previous elections and the upcoming ones on 31 August. We will be producing analyses after the elections too. We have syndication on allafrica.com, so in terms of dissemination, some of that will be widely read. We also do work in Angola: for instance we recently organised a Maritime Conference on the Gulf of Guinea security with the Gulf of Guinea Commission where we engaged with the Angolan military. We are now planning a major international conference in London on 22 November. Some officials from the ministry of defence of Angola will participate. This is all part of a process. Other things that we are planning include a book launch on China-Angola relations, where we will invite experts from Angola and China to London. We also do not want to forget that next year is the 30th anniversary of US-Angola relations, so we are planning pieces of work on that relationship. We also provide media commentary; Markus Weimer is highly involved in analysing events in Angola for both Portuguese and English speaking media. That is our mandate as a policy institute. We try and ensure that Angola is not lost amongst all the interest in Africa. Angola can be marginalised, especially in the Anglophone world, with poor analysis. Angola has some risks, but there are also many opportunities. As an independent institute, we try to provide long-term analysis of Angola which is non-partisan, and not tied to any political party. All sides of Angolan politics are welcomed here.