



Celebrating Angola Day

Jendayi E. Frazer, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs

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Thank you, Ambassador Wolpe, for that warm introduction. I am pleased to join all of you to celebrate the occasion of Angola Day, as well as celebrating the friendship that our two nations share.

Our relationship has spanned several centuries. As we are within the same week that Queen Elizabeth II visited Jamestown, Virginia, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the first American settlement, it is worth noting that the first African bondsmen to reach the colonies were, in fact, Angolans. So, the sons and daughters of Angola have been part of American history from its start, and we are grateful for their contributions to our country.

On behalf of President Bush and Secretary Rice, I would like to welcome to Washington our delegation of special Angolan guests, led by Minister of Industry Joaquim David. I would also like to thank the Angola Day organizers: the Angolan Embassy, the U.S.-Angola Chamber of Commerce, USAID, and the Woodrow Wilson Center. Most importantly I would like to acknowledge the leadership of Ambassador Diakite, who we fondly call Ambassador Josephina. Finally, I would like to thank Chevron for its efforts to implement socially responsible practices, as well as its engagement in public-private partnership projects in Angola, in conjunction with the United States government.

I was asked to look to the future and say how the administration will develop and strengthen the relationships between the United States and Angola. Bottom-line, I believe Angola can become a model of post-conflict democratic transition, and has the resources - human capital and natural endowments - to be a regional and global leader in world affairs.

ANGOLA'S PROGRESS

Today we celebrate real progress in Angola. After a 27-year long civil war that claimed more than half a million lives and internally displaced 4 million people, Angola has experienced five consecutive years of peace. This milestone has made real, positive changes in the lives of individual Angolans possible. The country is rebuilding itself at a rapid pace, and today's event serves as a reminder to would-be investors, policy-makers, and the international community that today's Angola offers many opportunities for even greater achievements and the prospect of a bright future for all Angolans.

Angola is off to a good start. The Government of National Reunification has maintained peace and stability, while disarming and reintegrating former soldiers into Angolan society. Many now serve in high-level civilian and military positions. Angola is extending this reintegration process by engaging with civil society to consolidate peace in Cabinda.

Working with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Angolan Government successfully undertook a voluntary repatriation program that returned 400,000 Angolan refugees to their homes. This makes Angola's action one of the most successful post-conflict repatriation programs ever conducted in Africa. I am proud to say the U.S. supported this Angolan achievement, contributing over \$32 million to the effort.

In concert with its international partners, including the United States, Angola has removed thousands of land mines, reclaiming transportation routes and rich agricultural land for Angolan farmers. These farmers, many returned refugees, are key to returning Angola to its former status as a breadbasket of sub-Saharan Africa. The U.S., through a public-private partnership with Chevron, is working to accelerate Angolan agricultural development.

These changes are taking place within the context of Angola's booming economy. The growth notably extends beyond the oil and diamond industries; the non-oil economy has grown at an estimated 14% in recent years. The government has done an admirable job of cutting inflation from triple digits heights near the end of the civil war to just over 10% last year. The government has also built foreign exchange reserves and transformed years of fiscal deficit into a budget surplus.

Angola is currently preparing to hold parliamentary elections in 2008 and a presidential election in 2009. As of April 12, Angola had already registered over 4 million voters on its way to a final goal of 7.5 million. Civil society groups and opposition parties have noted some glitches in preparations, but most have hailed the process as a success. One particularly positive development is Angola's strong voter awareness campaign, which includes billboards and newspaper inserts exhorting citizens to register; this campaign also places special emphasis on registering young people and women.

ANGOLA AS REGIONAL AND GLOBAL LEADER

Angola is also quickly becoming a regional leader within Africa, capable not only of bringing peace and stability to its own people, but also having the potential to export these benefits beyond its borders. The Angolan military - one of Africa's best - is already providing stability in neighboring Democratic Republic of Congo. It has the capacity to bring the same peace and stability to other African neighbors.

Through our newly announced African Command and our ACOTA training program, we look to joining with the Angolan Government in its commitment to peace on the continent. We see Angola as a potential continental, not just regional, leader. We hope that Angola will formalize its leadership in this area by joining peacekeeping support operations abroad.

Angola has demonstrated leadership in the regional Gulf of Guinea Commission, volunteering to host the Commission's headquarters in Luanda and funding the first year's expenses. Angola has also taken a leadership role in a U.S.-sponsored initiative on Gulf of Guinea security issues, by volunteering to host the next ministerial level meeting in Luanda. Angola has vital interests in the region, as well as the capability to help ensure these initiatives succeed.

Finally, as Angola prepares to lead the South African Development Community's Committee on Peace, Security, and Defense, the United States encourages Angola to continue the good work started by Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete in promoting dialogue on economic and political reform in Zimbabwe.

Last year, Angola assumed the Chairmanship of the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission. This new body was established to prevent countries emerging from civil war and other conflicts from slipping back into turmoil. For example, the Commission's first international field visit was to Sierra Leone. Angola will conclude its term as the first chair of this body in June, leaving behind an initial framework for better rebuilding post-conflict nations.

Last November, Angola garnered international attention when it became the first new member of OPEC in over 30 years. By the end of this year, many analysts expect Angolan oil production to reach 2 million barrels per day, and accordingly, analysts expect that U.S. consumption of Angolan oil will increase over time. Angola can use its strategic oil reserves to elevate its geo-strategic influence in world affairs.

Angola's increasing global leadership is also reflected in maturing partnerships with other nations, including members of the European Union, strong South-South partnerships with nations such as Brazil and China. These partnerships are both necessary and beneficial. For instance, the Angolan-Chinese partnership will create infrastructure and transportation links that will benefit all investors, whether American, African, European, and Asian.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF LEADERSHIP

Angola's growing regional leadership and presence on the international stage will call increasingly for it to confront certain challenges of leadership directly. For example, Angolans will need to think about the big picture, as well as the immediate future. Angolan leaders must work to build strong, transparent institutions accountable to the people of Angola. I firmly believe that strength abroad is based on strength at home.

First, I urge Angolan leaders to build on the success of the current voter registration period to complete the project well ahead of the 2008 legislative elections. If necessary, add additional brigades to ensure that all eligible Angolans are registered to vote in a timely fashion. Second, publish an election timetable to allow Government, impartial observers, political parties, and civil society the opportunity to plan and organize based on uniform standards.

Civil society groups are growing in Angola. I encourage Angolan leaders to strengthen these groups by empowering them to be effective watchdogs and advocates, and by ensuring their freedom of movement and association. A vibrant civil society is an essential element of democracy.

Transparency is another cornerstone of good governance. The United States was disappointed to learn about Angola's decision to decline structured macroeconomic monitoring plans from the IMF, but we recognize that this reflects Angola's growing capability to manage its own economic affairs.

We are heartened that the government plans to continue technical discussions with the IMF, and we urge the Government of Angola to maintain an open dialogue. I am also pleased to share that the U.S. is engaged in significant partnerships with the Angolan Government to build capacity within the Ministry of Finance and the Angolan Central Bank.

Finally, I want to recognize the strong leadership Angola has demonstrated in tackling public health challenges. Malaria has been the number one killer in Angola. Angola's Ministry of Health is now leading the fight to cut Malaria deaths by over half before 2010. Through the President's Malaria Initiative, the United States is actively supporting Angola in this fight.

We must make similar efforts to eradicate Polio, Cholera, and Tuberculosis. Angola has had a low incidence rate of HIV/AIDS, but this rate has already begun to rise in border areas. The United States recognizes this public health issue, and we stand ready to work with Angolan leadership in response, paving the way for additional successes in the realms of economic and political development.

PARTNERS IN INVESTMENT

The United States has excellent experience partnering with Angola. Since 2002, the U.S. government has contributed nearly \$500 million toward Angola's renaissance.

The American private sector has poured additional billions of dollars into developing Angola's petroleum industry, as well as: soft drink bottling, fruit juice processing, construction, and diamond exploration. These investments provide jobs, training, and the opportunity to rebuild Angola's economy.

The U.S. has supported this flow of trade and investment under the provisions of the African Growth and Opportunity Act, or AGOA, which provides duty-free entry into the U.S. market for nearly all goods exported from Angola. Last summer, the U.S. and Angola discussed the possibility of signing a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, which provides a forum for regular bilateral consultations designed to address trade and investment issues of mutual interest.

For 50 years, the government has honored its petroleum industry contracts --even in the midst of civil war. Angolans could emphasize their commitment to good governance by participating actively in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, or EITI, which requires public disclosure of extractive industry companies' payments to host governments in addition to the host government's revenues from extractive industries companies.

Angola has already met many of the conditions for EITI. Voluntary participation in this initiative would enable Angolan civil society to continually monitor government finances, and Angolan leaders could build on this success, by ensuring that rules and procedures are in place to protect investments in non-extractive sectors.

I would like to conclude by congratulating the people and Government of Angola. After 27 years of civil strife, you have made a firm commitment to peace. You have dedicated yourselves to rebuilding your nation politically, economically, and otherwise.

Angola has made great progress over the last five years. Already, your nation has demonstrated its ability to be a leader among nations. From my point of view, it is only a matter of time and focused effort for Angola to become known universally as an international leader in economic growth, conflict resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction, among other valuable skills.

As we mark the occasion of Angola Day, we celebrate five years of peace and hope for at least 50 more! May the years ahead be filled with endless promise and persistence, and may many more great things be in store for all of Angola.

Thank you and happy Angola Day!

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