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Ana GOMES

Brussels, September 23rd 2013

Dear President Durao Barroso,
Dear High Rep / Vice-President Ashton, dear Cathy

Subject: Crackdown on political dissent and media in Angola

On September 19, 2013, police arrested 22 protesters who sought to demonstrate near Independence Square in Luanda and hand out leaflets calling for social justice. Two released that day were quoted in local media alleging that they were beaten and otherwise mistreated in custody.

On September 20, three journalists - Rafael Marques, a journalist and prominent human rights defender; Alexandre Neto, president of the Southern Africa Media Institute in Angola; and Coque Mukuta, a correspondent for Voice of America - were themselves arrested, threatened, and beaten by the police after attempting to interview some newly freed protesters. According to Human Rights Watch, the journalists were conducting the interviews on the street about three hundred meters away from the court when approximately forty heavily armed rapid intervention police officers arrived in five cars with sirens, including two armoured vehicles. They arrested the three journalists, seven of the just-released protesters and a businessman who had been filming the incident from a nearby office building. All were taken to a rapid intervention police command centre.

The journalists and the businessman told Human Rights Watch that the physical abuse began once they arrived at the command centre. They were ordered to lie down in a police van with their faces on the floor. "Then a high-ranking official and others came in, walked over us with their boots, vests, and heavy equipment, jumped over us and kicked us", Neto told Human Rights Watch. The journalists said that the police officers threatened to kill them, shouting "You give us a lot of work. You deserve to be shot. You will die today." Marques complained that he was beaten in his neck with an unknown object and still feels pain.

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More than four hours later, the three journalists and the businessman were transferred to the criminal investigation police and released without charge. Their camera equipment was returned with the lenses destroyed. The seven protesters remain in custody, despite the earlier court order for their release, and still face trial, though they have not been charged.

This behaviour on the part of the Angolan authorities is completely unacceptable and clearly violates Angola's obligations and commitments under the Cotonou Agreement with the EU, and, also, the "EU-Angola Joint Way Forward" partnership agreement.

I urge you thus to demand the Angolan authorities to immediately end arbitrary arrests and assaults against peaceful protesters and journalists; and request, furthermore, that an independent investigation be carried out on these regrettable events, so as to hold the responsible police officers accountable for these abuses.

I note that, in previous exchanges, the European Parliament has been told that the EU was investing its cooperation with the Angolan authorities in improving the rule of law. I would appreciate your assessment on what this cooperation is achieving in view of the violations of human rights, abuse of authority and impunity entailed in pervasive corruption and violent repressive incidents, such as those recently occurred.

Best regards,

Ana Gomes

Member of the European Parliament

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