

JOINT PRESS STATEMENT BY

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We have just returned from visiting the Congo and rebel-held territory of northern Angola. Our reasons for undertaking this trip were:

1. To gather facts about the problem of the more than 150,000 Angolan refugees in the Congo who have fled from the war in Angola, and also the plight of the refugees within Angola itself;
2. To assess the critical medical situation confronting the Angolan people and to deliver some medicines for distribution;
3. To gather facts on the educational problems confronting the Angolan people with whom we came in contact and to see if we could devise ideas for educational training that would be practical;
4. To find out what the facts were about the war itself and whether Portuguese claims that the rebellion was under control are correct.

We should like to make two things clear at the outset. One is that we do not claim to speak with authority on the entire revolt by the Angolan people. Although, from what we saw, we can make inferences about what is occurring in larger sections of Angola, we can report factually only on what we saw in the area we covered. Second, we took the initiative in planning this journey. We were not first invited by the principal organization

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conducting the revolt in the area we covered (the Union of the Populations of Angola) and then taken on a carefully planned or restricted trip to see only what the rebels wished to show us. The only restrictions upon us were those of our time and ability to cover distances by hiking through the paths in the high grass and the forests.

We left New York on December 28th and spent until January 5th studying the problems of Angolans in the Congo before entering Angola itself. We returned to Leopoldville on January 17 and again spent five days there to conclude our study. Thus, we walked the paths of a section of northern Angola for eleven days, covering about two hundred miles. Our journey took us only as far south as a location approximately parallel with San Salvador. We stopped in or visited about twelve villages during this period, met hundreds of people, slept in village huts, and ate the food that the people themselves were living on.

Medicine project

Neither of us is a student of medicine. However, we knew from reports we had received before we went to Angola that a critical/^{health}problem confronted the people in the revolt area we were to visit. The people are cut off from medical supplies and from hospital care. Missionaries who formerly worked in northern Angola are no longer there. The people living in the forests do not journey to the areas where the Portuguese still are in control for fear of being captured. Thus they are dependent on help they can receive from outside for their medical assistance. Through the aid of some agencies here, we took in about 250 pounds of medicines. With the assistance of doctors in Leopoldville, these medicines were divided into forty-three packets and distributed to

approximately this many villages in Angola. In each of these villages there was a small dispensary under the supervision of an Angolan with either nurse's training or experience in hospital work. We saw the distribution of most of these supplies to representatives of the villages who had gathered to receive the material at a central place. We personally delivered seven of the packets to villages we visited. The medical supplies consisted of antibiotics, anti-malarials, aspirin, and anti-diarrheals.

In spite of the fact that we were not doctors, in every village we visited, people lined up for whatever treatment we could offer. Mostly this consisted of our dressing open sores, and giving what pills we had on hand. We saw only a few wounds from the war because the Angolans have learned to protect themselves from bombing attacks in recent months.

The medicines we took in were for the use of all the people, whether civilian or military, without distinction.

Because of living conditions in the forests, particularly during the rainy season, new ailments are occurring, such as rheumatism, and bronchitis. We hope to expand this medical project by receiving assistance from all Americans concerned with the problem from a humanitarian point of view.

Military

The nationalist forces are organized into small, mobile forces suited to guerilla warfare. Operating out of forest villages linked by an intricate system of paths, these forces have recently received new supplies of arms. We witnessed the distribution of a sizeable quantity of arms including rifles, light and heavy machine guns, grenades, plastic bombs and land mines. to groups representing over forty military sectors. We were told that it would take two to three weeks for the material to reach some of the interior posts

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extending southward toward Luanda. The nationalist forces employ hit and run tactics designed to harass and demoralize the Portuguese military, destroy the crops, mining operations and transportation systems underpinning the profitable colonial economy and ultimately to induce the Portuguese to withdraw from a costly, interminable war. The strategy is similar to that successfully employed by the FLN in Algeria.

Apparently unable to move off the main roads and out of the major towns, both of which are subject to nationalist raids, Portuguese forces have resorted to indiscriminate bombing. We visited one village destroyed by fire-bombs on Christmas day and on another occasion witnessed Portuguese planes bombing a village we had visited the day before.

Living conditions

Withdrawn from the roads where they had been located by the colonial administration, nationalist villages have been relocated in forest centers, often near the sites of ancestral villages that are unknown and not easily accessible to the Portuguese. Living conditions are those imposed by war. The day's routine begins with a flag-raising ceremony, frequently a lecture on civic duties or national goals by the village president or military chief, and a presentation of arms by the local constabulary. Older people tend the fields, soldiers mount guard, plan and execute military missions, and the large numbers of teen-agers spend their time drilling, learning patriotic songs and, in the larger centers, studying from a tattered school syllabus or Bible. Interestingly, we were often honored by the villagers with hymns and prayers, witness to the lasting impact of Christian missionary work in Angola.

Because of the peril of air raids, women and children in some villages spend the day under protective boulders secluded in the forest. Elsewhere,

when planes are heard approaching, warning whistles sound, people disperse with food, medicine and other supplies, while military personnel run to look-out posts prepared to fire at approaching aircraft.

Nationalist-held territory is in a very real, if rudimentary, sense, already self-governing. UPA authorities issue "passports," which are checked at guard posts along the paths and at village entrances. We found in operation customs posts, a communications and information system, village councils, party, trade union and youth organizations -- in sum, the beginnings of a political state.

Racial attitudes

From our discussions with the people, we know that there is a great bitterness toward the Portuguese growing out of the repression of many years. But we also know that this attitude does not extend to all white people. If this were not the case, we could hardly have emerged unharmed from our few days in Angola. We were in the company of Africans all the time. We never saw another white person. Far from there being any hostile response, we were greeted as friends everywhere we went. In every village we visited, we must have shaken hands with all the people, not necessarily at our initiative, but theirs. When we met people on the paths, almost without exception we were greeted openly and enthusiastically. In spite of the fact that some American bombs have been dropped by the Portuguese, we felt nothing but a genuine friendliness toward us as Americans.

How can the conflict end?

On the basis of our experience we believe that the tragic conflict in Angola can end when the Portuguese recognize two things: (1) that the Angolan

people are not defeated and seem to have the will to resist indefinitely, and (2) that the Angolan people have the right to self-determination.

We found no evidence whatsoever of Communist or other outside influence in the inspiration or conduct of the revolt.

One thing plainly clear to us was that resistance to Portuguese rule is just beginning and that morale is high among the rebels. Not only are arms coming into Angola, but the supply is by no means exhausted, according to information we received. Angolan military leaders are being trained in Tunisia and Algeria now, and more will be sent soon. The war can drag on endlessly with no side clearly winning. Yet this suffering can be avoided if only the Portuguese indicate a willingness to negotiate. The Angolans appear prepared at any time to enter such discussions on the basis of a promise of self-determination, according to oft-repeated statements.

Because an early peace in Angola is essential, we hope the Portuguese will open the way for discussions and will permit the United Nations to play a role in preparing the way for Angolan independence.

Recommendations for action in the United States

1. Expansion of the medical relief program through the Africa Defense and Aid Fund of the American Committee on Africa and other agencies.
2. Sending clothing into northern Angola. The people are in many cases wearing rags and in other cases have only a single dress or pair of trousers.
3. Exploration of practical means for setting up primary and secondary schools among the Angolan refugees in the Congo.
4. A vigorous U.S. policy urging Portugal to end the conflict through negotiations leading to independence with the United Nations offering its services, and insisting the Portugal use no NATO material in Angola.