Citizen Views of Peace Building and Political Transition in Angola, 1997

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*In November 1994, Angola began what became an often circular struggle to imple-
ment the Lusaka Protocol, the second of two peace agreements meant to put an end
to more than thirty years of civil strife. Four years later, the Lusaka peace process
appears to have come unraveled. Just past midway between these two points, the
National Democratic Institute carried out a series of focus groups in Angola that
sought to gauge citizens' attitudes toward and understanding of key aspects of the
war-to-peace transition and the new political system. This article discusses the
results of the survey. Initially intended to provide the basis of a program to furnish
civic education and promote improved governance in a new political context, the
focus group results now afford a glimpse into the citizens' view of the peace pro-
cess on the eve of its collapse.*

*The results of the survey suggest that in the minds of Angolan citizens, even
while the implementation of the peace process was moving forward, the war was
far from over and that the attitudes and behavior of political elites, not ordinary
citizens, would be decisive. The results indicate a surprisingly high level of gen-
eral awareness and specific knowledge about the peace process and the basic prin-
ciples of democracy and human rights, as well as a high degree of cynicism re-
garding the application of these principles in Angola. The survey also highlights
the serious limitations inherent in a strategy that would focus entirely on citizens
or "civil society" to reinforce Angola's transition to formal democracy, even when
peace prevails.*

"In politics, there is no such thing as reconciliation."
— Focus group participant in Luanda

Regrettably, since my last report, there has been no improvement in the already
deplorable situation in Angola. The country continues to drift towards full-fledged
hostilities, despite the renewed efforts of the international community to avoid a
precipitous turn of events.
— Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations
Observer Mission in Angola, August 6, 1998

Over the past four years, the Angolan government, the National Union for the Total
Independence of Angola (UNITA), the United Nations, and a number of Western
powers have been engaged in an often circular struggle to implement the Lusaka

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Angola

Protocol, the peace agreement which formally ended the fighting that followed the country's first multiparty elections in 1992. The 1991 Bicesse Accords, which put an end to more than thirty years of civil strife, provided the backdrop for those elections.

Angola's peace process has been part of a dual transition: from war to peace and from single-party to multiparty rule. The linchpin of the peace process is the construction of democratic institutions and power-sharing arrangements at national, provincial, and local levels. Nothing in Angola's history has prepared either the general public or government officials to participate in a democratically based political system. Furthermore, the transition to formal democracy has in some senses advanced ahead of the transition from war to peace. A weak, formally democratic system is struggling to survive alongside an ongoing and increasingly acute armed conflict in which the combatants are also the principal protagonists in the new political system.

In this challenging environment, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) was asked to design a program that would help to bridge the gap between the new political system as envisioned and as practiced. The program sought to improve the quality of interaction between citizens and government in the new democratic political context by working at two levels: building the capacity of ordinary citizens to understand and interact with government officials, especially at the local level, and training local government officials in methods for improving local governance through a more active engagement with local citizenry.

Toward this end, NDI, in mid-1997, conducted the first comprehensive public survey on attitudes and knowledge of basic democratic principles and processes in Angola. The focus group research began with a basic premise: that the attitudes and behavior of ordinary citizens toward the political system will ultimately affect whether the system thrives or fails. Accordingly, focus group questions were designed to gauge citizens' attitudes toward and understanding of key aspects of the transition process and the new political system. The information gathered in this survey was intended to provide the basis for a large-scale civic education effort to be conducted at the grassroots level and through radio programming.

Primary topics covered included: the Government of Unity and National Reconciliation; the broader process of national and community-level reconciliation; the functions of local government authorities; and human rights and constitutional rights.

The results of the focus groups suggest first that Angolan citizens do not necessarily share in the assumption that citizen attitudes and behavior are of primary importance, instead placing much greater emphasis on the attitudes and behavior of political elites. They lay the bulk of the responsibility both for ending the war and for establishing a functioning, inclusive political system squarely on the shoulders of government and UNITA leadership.

Returning to our premise, however, an examination of citizen attitudes toward the new political system and the transition process suggests a sense of frustration not so much with the proposed democratic political system as a system of government as with the way it is being implemented in Angola.

After setting out the context in which these focus groups were carried out and the methodology followed, I present the results of the research, preserving as much as possible the voices of the participants themselves, ending with a brief discussion of the policy implications of the focus group results.

Historical Context

The roots of Angola's civil war reach to the period of its struggle for independence from Portugal in the 1960s. The 1960s and early 1970s were marked by tensions between three independence movements: the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), the Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), and UNITA. While these engaged in shifting alliances with one another while fighting the Portuguese, all were vying for the right to take the reigns of government at independence. By 1975, the three movements had agreed to share power in an uneasy transitional government that never came off. By the date established for independence, November 11, 1975, the three movements had divided Angola in three, with the MPLA in control of Luanda, the capital. While the MPLA declared victory in Luanda, UNITA and the FNLA proclaimed the popular republic of Angola in the central province of Huambo. Essentially, the war between these movements that had begun before independence picked up after a momentary lull during which power was transferred from the Portuguese to the MPLA.

Angola's war became one of the prime Cold War proxy battlefields in Africa. Cuban troops were sent to reinforce the MPLA in its struggles against South Africa–backed and U.S.-backed UNITA. Finally, in 1991, the MPLA government and UNITA signed the Bicesse Accords, which led to the country's first multiparty elections in September 1992. Civil war began anew in the wake of those elections, however, as UNITA refused to accept the results. The most recent peace accord, the Lusaka Protocol, was signed in November 1994. Its future remains in question, as four years and three United Nations peacekeeping missions later, major provisions of the Lusaka Protocol remain to be implemented.

Mid-1997, when NDI's focus groups were carried out, was an especially challenging time in Angola. The peace process was making only halting progress, having been relaunched with the Lusaka Protocol two years after renewed civil war broke out following the country's first multiparty elections in 1992. Throughout 1996, key aspects of the protocol, including the creation of a Government of National Unity and Reconciliation (GURN), which would incorporate UNITA in the cabinet and at provincial and local government levels, the reseating of UNITA members of Parliament elected in 1992, and the unification of territorial administration, had been repeatedly put off. In April 1997, the GURN was established at cabinet level, although installation of government and local officials proceeded much more slowly and in some cases not at all. Seventy UNITA deputies took their seats in Parliament, and although UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi, declined to come to Luanda for the swearing-in of the new government, it was possible to sense renewed optimism regarding the outcome of Angola's troubled peace process.

Optimism proved unjustified. Just one month after the formation of the unity government, Angolan government forces and UNITA soldiers found themselves on opposite sides of the war in neighboring Zaire, where UNITA's longtime ally Mobutu Sese Seko was soon to be deposed by the rebel troops of Laurent Kabila. The scenario would be repeated within a matter of months in Congo-Brazzaville, where another of UNITA's allies was routed with the help of Angolan government troops. Fighting between government and UNITA troops resumed in the diamond-rich provinces of Lunda Norte and Lunda Sul, and security in other areas around the central highlands was constantly in jeopardy.

These events of course foretold trouble for the peace process in Angola. More than a

year later, the military situation is even more unstable. Fighting in the Lundas has spread to the neighboring provinces of Malanje and Uige, and some sources report that more than a million people are internally displaced. The peace process, no longer merely stalled as it was for much of 1997, now appears to be in full retreat. On September 1, 1998, the government suspended UNITA members of GURN as well as UNITA's seventy-member parliamentary delegation. All but two of the GURN members and most members of Parliament were reinstated after the formation of UNITA-Renovada (UNITA revised/renewed), a UNITA faction that has severed links to Jonas Savimbi and is therefore "acceptable" to the Angolan government. This split appears to have occasioned serious tension among UNITA members in Luanda and served as a license for local government forces to step up persecution of UNITA officials throughout the country who have not sworn allegiance to UNITA-Renovada. Needless to say, other principal elements of the Lusaka process, including the extension of state administration to key areas of the country and the demilitarization of UNITA and its transformation into a legal political party, still face formidable obstacles. Official meetings between the government and UNITA to discuss the peace process are increasingly rare. The peace process has been severely complicated by the fact that there are now effectively two UNITAs, each claiming exclusive legitimacy.

In his October 1998 report to the UN Security Council, Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced plans to reduce significantly the number of UN peacekeeping personnel in the country unless real progress is made toward restarting the peace process.

Focus Group Methodology

Thirty focus groups were conducted, in both government and UNITA-controlled areas, in the provinces of Huambo, Bie, and Uige, and in Luanda. Focus group participants included male and female students fourteen to nineteen years of age; members of associations, churches, and other community organizations twenty to twenty-four years of age; urban and rural teachers; demobilized soldiers; women and young men marketplace vendors; urban and rural heads of family; urban and rural adult men of various professions; married women, farmers, internally displaced people; and the elderly.

The project began with broad consultations with Angolan sociologists and survey researchers on sample design and on the development of the discussion guide. NDI's partners in this phase were drawn from the Angolan Association for Rural and Environmental Development (ADRA-Angolana), the National Institute of Statistics, and Agostinho Neto University. From July 2 to 4, the first focus group moderator training workshop was held in Luanda. Eighteen moderator candidates from Luanda and Huambo underwent two days of training and practical exercises, followed by a day at an internally displaced persons camp in which each moderator had the opportunity to moderate a focus group. Twelve moderators, of whom ten spoke one of the national languages of Huambo or Uige, were selected from this group to participate in the focus group research project.

Two weeks later, the twelve moderators experienced an additional day of training and orientation to the research project. In Uige, a two-day training workshop was held to train additional moderators to work in that province. This was partly in response to the refusal of UNITA officials to permit "Angolans from Luanda" or any other part of the country to conduct this sort of activity in their areas. (This did not prove to be a

problem in Huambo or Bie, primarily because the traditionally UNITA areas in which all the focus groups being conducted there had come under government control in the weeks before the groups were organized.) In Uige, the workshop was conducted in collaboration with the bipartisan Provincial Human Rights Commission, an organization that brings together teachers, lawyers, and other interested individuals from the city of Uige (government-controlled) and nearby Negage (UNITA's northern regional capital) to discuss human rights issues. The group has received substantial support from the United Nations Verification Mission Human Rights Unit in Uíge. The focus groups were conducted from July 7 to August 30, 1997.

Results

The findings of the focus group research are in two sections, the specifics of the political transition process questions about permanent features of the political system, including the meaning of democracy and the peculiarities of its practice in Angola, the role of local government authorities, and the meaning and significance of human and constitutional rights.

The Transition Process

The End of the Year

"*A radio diz que a guerra acabou mas nós não concordamos.*" (The radio says the war is over but we don't agree.)[1]

"*A radio agita a guerra mas quando a radio e os jornais disserem que a guerra acabou, entao vamos acreditar.*" (The radio agitates for war — when the radio and the newspapers say that the war is over, then we will believe it.)[2]

The war is by no means over according to the majority of people who participated in this research. The overwhelming majority said that, for them, the war would be truly over when there was freedom of movement and commerce. This is one of the key provisions of the Lusaka Protocol, and those who cited it usually adopted the "official" wording from the protocol — "free circulation of people and goods." Other protocol provisions mentioned were demobilization and reintegration of UNITA soldiers and unification of the army.

In the Lusaka Protocol, that phrase refers to unimpaired movement between government and UNITA zones. However, this does not necessarily mean that people are preoccupied with the implementation of one specific piece of the protocol. In fact, the focus group results caution against a strictly political interpretation of the phrase. For focus group participants, free circulation has two important nonpolitical implications: goods continue to be artificially expensive, whether they are imported or produced within the country, as long as free circulation is impaired; and free circulation also requires that people not be hassled by the police as they go about their daily lives.

For example, free circulation was cited more frequently in Luanda focus groups than those in the provinces. This is surprising, since people in Luanda do not undergo the daily experience of having to cross between government and UNITA zones to see relatives or to buy goods not available in their area. The following comment, for one, is from a focus group with internally displaced people in Luanda. "People are not living freely; there is not free circulation from one place to another . . . I myself was

intercepted by the police and had to give them two million kwanzas, and I began to think that democracy is false in our country."[3]

The second most frequently cited indication that the war had really ended would be the arrival of Savimbi in Luanda. This answer came up most often in Huambo and Bie.

Finally, there was a good deal of emphasis in Luanda on the behavior of the police. One student said that the end of the war would mean "that the police stop mistreating the people."[4] The police are discussed in more detail below.

Reconciliation

For most individuals, the greatest obstacle to reconciliation is division caused by the war, principally the fact that people tended to be aligned or were perceived to be aligned with either one side or the other.

Reconciliation was understood as "forgetting about war," "the end of mistrust," "learning how to live together," "forgetting the past and pardoning our neighbors," "joining hands and singing with one voice," "recognizing that no one has been 'defeated' at the level of the family or the community." Others emphasized the importance of communication, of opening a dialogue in order for reconciliation to occur.

The overwhelming majority of focus group participants felt that reconciliation was the responsibility of the government or of the two warring parties, the MPLA government and UNITA. Most people distinguished between *national* reconciliation and reconciliation at the community level. At the national level, responsibility for reconciliation was most often attributed to the government. At the community level, it was *sobas* (traditional community leaders), church leaders, and "the people in general" or "all of us." The UN was also cited as one of the principal entities responsible for reconciliation in Angola. Only one person argued that the people themselves had to provide the momentum and the example for their leaders. "The people should send to their leaders the message of peace and national reconciliation."[5]

Those who had concrete suggestions for how to promote national reconciliation tended to favor one of two remedies: government intervention at the community level in the form of meetings and speeches about reconciliation and improved communication about the peace process.

Many identified the need to change mentalities in order for reconciliation to be successful. "There must be a revolution in the mind of each person. I cannot stop talking to someone just because his father is from UNITA."[6] Others emphasized the importance of communication, of opening a dialogue in order for reconciliation to occur. As one participant put it, "Communication is necessary in order for people to unite."[7] More concretely, the media should play a role in promoting reconciliation. "On both sides there are people who want war, and the media should broadcast messages against war."[8]

There was a strong perception that reconciliation would be easier at the grassroots level than at the political level. "In politics there is no such thing as reconciliation."[9] On a social level, however, people were able to cite numerous examples of informal reconciliation. One participant cited the following example of reconciliation in practice at the community level: "Here there is a neighborhood for UNITA members of Parliament where a party was organized two weeks after they arrived, a so-called National Reconciliation Celebration. And no one asked if your father was from the MPLA or from UNITA. At these small parties people start to become friends and the separation ends."[10]

In addition to political differences, people underscored ethnicity and differences in living standards as factors causing separation or division in their communities.

GURN and the Extension of State Administration

"On April 11 when the GURN was inaugurated I was very happy, I thought that it would mean big changes. But until now nothing has changed because we see that those in government only want to fill their pockets and those of their families, to make up for lost time."[11]

The vast majority of focus group participants had heard of the Government of National Unity and Reconciliation and knew what it was. Those who had never heard of the GURN or who had heard of it but didn't know what it was were distributed fairly evenly between Luanda and the provinces. Typical descriptions of the GURN follow.

"The GURN is the union of people from many parties."[12]

"The GURN is a government constituted by members of various parties."[13]

"The GURN is a group formed by people from all parties to be able to lead the country."[14]

"It is to see whether in fact Angolans can achieve reconciliation."[15]

Most people had heard about GURN through radio, television, or friends and neighbors. Other important sources of information were newspapers and local religious leaders and government officials. In general, the less people knew about GURN, the more they were inclined to be optimistic about it. As one participant put it, "I don't know anything about the GURN, but it seems that it will resolve the problems of the people."[16] Among those who said they knew what GURN was all about, feelings about what GURN could do were mixed, although the great majority was cynical about the likelihood of any positive impact. Those who did believe that GURN would be able to deliver thought it would bring an end to the war and promote reconciliation, but that this would take time.

"I think that we cannot construct a life from one day to the next. When you get a job, on the first day you commit many errors. Those who are in the government now don't have experience. We have to give them time to improve their work."[17]

GURN "was a positive stop, a sign of hope for a better Angola."[18]

GURN —"that's where we can end all the talk that we have heard, about war."[19]

The majority of focus group participants, however, saw in GURN business as usual. Their responses reflect not so much an opinion of the performance of GURN itself, which had been functioning for only a few months at the time of the research, but a profound skepticism about the abilities and intentions of government in general.

GURN "is lard, and only those who are there are going to get fat and not us."[20]

GURN "is not going to resolve the problems of the population, and it is going to create an economic crisis because of the purchase of luxury cars [by government officials] and because [those in government] only think about themselves."[21]

"The GURN will resolve the problems of the government and not the people."[22]

"The GURN is not resolving anything; it puts nothing in practice; there are even new threats of war."[23]

"It came to make our problems worse, since now there is enmity and distrust [within the government]."[24]

"From the information that I have, the GURN met and then did nothing."[25]

"I don't see reconciliation — they just point fingers; that's what I know about the GURN."[26]

"The GURN will only have value when it is understood that governance means providing services to the people."[27]

"The simple fact that we have ministers from four parties in government doesn't mean reconciliation. Are they the only Angolans? If so, then we will also make our war."[28]

Others would be more positive about the potential positive effects of GURN, if only it functioned the way it was envisioned, if only it was for real.

GURN "might bring us good intentions, but we want them to be put into practice."[29]

"We don't see evidence of their work. Lots of promises, little practice."[30]

And finally, "There is hope, but only Dr. Savimbi knows for sure."[31]

Extension of State Administration

"In Quibala, the GURN was beat up"[32] (The first exercise in extending state administration ended in failure at Quibala after reaching only a few municipalities. Members of GURN were severely beaten when they arrived in Quibala to swear in new municipal officials.)

Focus group participants were surprisingly well informed about the process of extending state administration. Most knew not only what it was but some detail about it, either where administration had already been extended and why or when it was stopped. Many gave reasons for the failure of the process.

"It is difficult now for someone who fought for twenty years against a regime to accept a new flag."[33]

"If [the leaders] were thinking about the people, state administration would already be extended all over the country."[34]

"UNITA doesn't want extension of state administration, because UNITA wants to stay at war."[35]

Several people emphasized the importance not only of extending the state physically but of changing people's attitudes toward the process and educating them about it. "We have to create the right mentality for a real reestablishment of the state."[36] As another participant put it, "We don't believe in extension of state administration because all of the forces of society are not in agreement that this process should be carried out, so we simply have vandalism by one side against another."[37]

Democracy, the Role of Local Authorities, Human and Constitutional Rights

The Meaning of Democracy

"*Estamos a pagar pla democracia muito mal dada.*" (We are paying for democracy poorly done.)

A strikingly high proportion of focus group participants demonstrated at least a basic understanding of the term "democracy." In only one group did members say they had no

idea what democracy was or fail to provide examples of basic democratic principles.

For the majority of focus group participants, democracy was most closely associated with freedom of expression. Freedom of movement, tolerance, and mutual respect were also cited as key aspects of democracy. Freedom of expression, however, was far ahead of the others in terms of the number of times it was cited. Linked to the issue of freedom of expression was the idea that in democracy, citizens' voices should have an impact on governance.

In neither respect, however, did democratic theory and practice coincide in Angola, in the minds of focus group participants. For example, most participants believed that in a democracy, people are free to speak their minds without fear of reprisal. They then went on to explain that this was not the case in Angola. Those who cited freedom of expression as a fundamental part of democracy usually ended the phrase with the words "without fear of reprisals" or simply "without fear." One group pointed out that "people call in to radio shows to express their opinions and ideas, but they have to request anonymity to protect themselves."[38]

Similarly, in terms of accountability of government to the people, Angola does not qualify as a democracy in the minds of most focus group participants. "In a democracy, the government should listen to the ideas of the people who elected them, but in this democracy [in Angola], this provision does not exist in practice."[39] Another participant reinforced this view, saying there is no democracy now because "the population does not have a voice."[40]

A surprisingly high level of understanding of the basic values of democracy is matched by high levels of frustration and cynicism regarding the wide gap between the theory and practice of democracy in Angola. "Our leaders want to show the people that democracy means to rob, kill, and do whatever you want without being punished."[41]

There is also a strong link in people's minds between democracy and the functioning of specific government institutions — people understand that in a democracy there are certain government institutions which ought to work in a certain way. The behavior of the police, for example, is for many people contrary to basic notions of democracy. "When I hear the word *democracy* I get irritated because it is a word that is used very often but does not exist in practice. . . . Someone comes and steals my wallet, my watch, and the police do nothing."[42] Government institutions do not function the way they should and are not accountable to citizens.

This was particularly true in the case of the police and not simply because they are unresponsive to citizens' needs. If there was one theme that ran across region, gender, age, occupation, and educational level, it was a preoccupation with police abuse. Although the discussion guide did not contain a separate section on the police, the discussions elicited so much comment on them, almost all of it negative, that I think it is important to highlight these expressions here.

According to one young community activist, "it is much better these days to come across a petty criminal than to come across the police."[43] Others agreed: "Our security is always at risk; the police who should protect us turn out to be more dangerous than the criminals."[44] "The police very often contribute to disorder."[45]

Interestingly, despite the fact that most people said they believed the police were responsible for causing at least as many problems as they resolved, nearly everyone named the police as the entity that guarantees their personal safety.

Another intriguing twist is that most people, when asked what they would do if they suffered police abuse, said they would complain to an officer's superiors. This would

seem to indicate a certain amount of faith in the institution of the police, if not the individual members with whom people come in contact.

A minority of participants voiced despair with the system as well. We have no recourse; there are no courts; if the authorities abuse us, to whom can we complain?[46] Or "We are always suffering abuse and there is nothing we can do. The system allows these abuses to multiply."[47]

Most, however, had concrete solutions for police abuse. Asked what they would do, most answered along the following lines:

> "Try to find [the police officer's] unit and inform them."[48]

> "We should go to the appropriate authorities of his squadron and if that doesn't work, go directly to the tribunal."[49]

> "If going to his squadron didn't resolve the case, one would go immediately to the Provincial Command of the Angolan National Police to see if they can resolve it or not. If not, one would go to the institutions of military justice, since he is part of the military."[50]

There is a widespread perception among the groups surveyed that a double standard is in effect in Angola's political system. Cynicism was expressed in general terms as well as through specific examples. For example, two common responses were, "In other countries it means freedom, but in Angola democracy is only for 'the haves.'"[51] "The word *democracy* is only for those who eat well."[52]

A group of teachers in Luanda gave a more specific example, which highlights the responsibilities rather than the rights associated with democracy. "Democracy extends only to the masses, it doesn't reach elites. For example, if a high-level person kills someone, nothing happens. Justice doesn't reach this person; he takes the law into his own hands. For democracy, everyone must be equal under the law."[53]

Two other issues were closely associated with democracy in participants' minds. These were peace and an improvement in living standards. Democracy is not possible without peace, and peace and democracy will bring about improvement in people's well-being.

Local Government: Who Is in Charge?
This question was first posed as "Who are the local authorities here?" or Who is in charge here?" Moderators then presented a series of hypothetical problems and asked how the group members would go about trying to resolve them. The resulting answers were put into the form of a diagram of the local hierarchy of authority. In some cases, each focus group participant made his or her own diagram. In others, the moderator drew the diagram on the basis of what the group said.

Virtually all focus group participants in Uige, including demobilized soldiers and male and female students, described the hierarchy as follows: provincial government, Angolan Armed Forces (FAA), Police, the people.

In some cases, FAA and the police were at the same level of authority. This perception of the police and military and paramilitary units as intermediaries between the government and the people was also present in Luanda but less prevalent. In Luanda, the police figured most prominently for younger participants aged fifteen to twenty-five. Since Uige focus group participants were disproportionately young compared with Luanda, Huambo, and Bie, age may play a part. Also important may be the fact that the

city of Uige is seen by the government as an island in a sea of UNITA, which very likely translates into tighter security and a larger role for the police and defense forces.

In Luanda, the police figured less prominently in people's diagrams but were still present. Two of the nine groups that said they had a clear idea of who the local authorities were named the police in second place, right after the local administrator. The diagrams drawn in Luanda were less uniform than those in Uige. As a rule, the Luandans gave more detail about formal structures at the local level. For example, most people named not only the local administrator but also the neighborhood administrators and heads of residents committees.

In Huambo and Bie, there was more emphasis on the governor, the four vice-governors, and traditional authorities. There was also a very clear separation between urban areas and rural areas. Two kinds of organizational diagrams were typical: (1) urban areas, governor, vice-governors, government officials, traditional authorities. (2) rural areas, *soba,* coordinator, *seculos* — assistant *sobas.*

Traditional authorities were hardly mentioned in Uige and in Luanda, no doubt because focus groups took place primarily in urban or periurban areas there.

In addition to seeking to understand people's notions of the hierarchy of local government authority, the focus groups raised specific examples of various kinds of problems to get a general idea of how people viewed the role of various government and nongovernment actors in resolving the challenges they face daily.

For the most part, people appeared to have low material expectations of the government, but they retained faith in government institutions. When a community required social services, for example, in very few cases was the solution simply to go to the government and seek support. Usually, as in the instance of rehabilitating a school or a clinic, people said that they would try to organize members of the community to do the required work, that they would get together and buy medicines to supply a clinic, or that they would turn to nongovernment organizations (NGOs) for help.

At the same time, however, people across the board had very clear ideas about which authorities were supposed to deal with which kinds of problems. If people almost never invoked the government in general as provider of their needs, they almost always named a specific government department responsible for resolving a range of problems from conflicts over housing and land to teacher corruption. For example, almost everyone responded that if a problem arose over conflicting claims to a house, they would demand documentation from the other claimant and direct the problem to the Department of Housing. In the case of teachers demanding bribes from parents to allow their children to study, the most common answer was that one would speak to the director of the school, and if that didn't work they would speak to the local or provincial delegate for education. Similarly, in the situation of a maternity hospital that was surrounded by mines, most people had concrete suggestions as to whom to ask for help: usually the police or the local army unit, and in one case INAROI, the Angolan national agency responsible for land mine removal, was identified.

No one, however, said that the government was satisfying their needs, and when the question "Does the government succeed in satisfying your needs?" was posed directly, most of the answers were extremely cynical. The following are some typical replies.

"There is not support from the government, and they satisfy our needs when it suits them."[54]

"The government might do some things, but it is not enough. NGOs help us more."[55]

"Years ago, the government had the capacity to satisfy our needs, but today it doesn't and is considered incapable. Now we get some help from NGOs, who help us in the construction of schools, clinics, etc. That's how the people survive."[56]

"Local government doesn't meet the needs of our families. We only survive with the help of NGOs and the church."[57]

"The local authorities don't succeed in meeting anyone's needs because they are only interested in the well-being of themselves and their families."[58]

"The government hasn't helped the people in a long time. On the contrary, it is the people who help the government."[59]

Traditional authorities play an important role in meeting community needs and resolving conflicts at the local level. For most people contacted in Huambo and Bie, *sobas* are the first and most important line of authority at the community level. In general, *sobas* appear to be most influential in solving problems within the family and in disputes over land. People tended to distinguish between *sobas* and local administrators in terms of the origins of their authority: "Government authorities receive orders from the government and resolve issues on the basis of government law. Traditional leaders work on the basis of traditional law; their orders come from tradition."[60]

Human Rights

A surprisingly high number of focus group participants, across age groups, region, and occupational and educational status, are familiar with the concept of "rights" and have a basic notion of the meaning of human rights.

"They are the rights of citizens."[61]

"Human rights means to treat others as human beings."[62]

"Respect for life, the rights of others."[63]

"To have the right to live, to do what you know how to do without the interference of anyone."[64]

"Human rights means that every Angolan citizen should feel free, should not be oppressed."[65]

"It is to feel at peace, and to have everything that you work for."[66]

"It is to walk freely without fear of stepping on land mines."[67]

Equally striking is the sense of the participants that human rights, as they define them, are not systematically respected in Angola.

"Human rights is freedom of movement, personal liberty, in sum everything that no one has been able to achieve up until now."[68]

"Many die and are killed because these [human] rights have been taken away."[69]

[Citing the fact that crimes are provoked by police and their commanders, and nothing is done about them, that there are no jobs for returning students from abroad, and so forth,] "There are no human rights in Golfe."[70]

In addition to the conventionally defined concept of human rights, for the focus group participants those rights also included socioeconomic claims to housing, employ-

ment, decent salaries, and education.

> "Human rights are all of those rights that a person should have for their social, economic, and cultural well-being."[71]
>
> "There are no human rights because we have trouble just getting enough to eat; we are very limited in financial terms."[72]
>
> "It is to enjoy a little bit of all the riches of the country. Right now we are stagnating and no one enjoys the riches of the country and this is not human rights. Human rights is to have everything you need to live."[73]

One group pointed out that it is incorrect to think that human rights violations are committed only by the police. All forms of deprivation — for example, absence of electricity, water, salary — are violations of human rights. Asked what were the most important individual rights, participants again highlighted freedom of expression and freedom of movement. The following were most frequently cited: freedom of movement, including free circulation between government and UNITA zones and freedom to move about town and between their homes and fields without being harassed; socioeconomic rights — work, decent salary, education, home, health care; freedom of expression. One participant summed up freedom thus: "To be able to leave here and go anywhere at all without fear and talk about the problems that afflict us without suffering reprisals."[74]

One of NDI's goals in this section was to ascertain whether people had a notion of rights being accompanied by duties and whether "freedom" also implied responsibilities. The answer was a resounding yes. Virtually everyone was careful to make the distinction between *liberdade* (liberty) and *libertinagem* (libertinism). For the focus group participants, laws, and the duty to uphold them, made the difference between liberty and anarchy. "*Sem leis, todos andam na libertinagem.*" (Without laws, we are all just libertines.)[75] Most noted that liberty must also imply respect for others.

Law

For most people, laws exist to preserve order and to organize the life of the community. "Without laws, the people do not advance . . . without laws no one has respect for anyone else."[76] Once again, however, the participants expressed the sentiment that while this was true in the ideal, it was not true for them. "The law exists, but it is not enforced."[77] "The law is just, but it is not followed."[78]

Another recurring theme reemerged in this section, the notion of a double standard in terms of the way elites and ordinary people are treated. Earlier, someone noted that democracy was for the poor, meaning only ordinary people were subject to the limitations of the law and other democratic institutions. Here the same idea resurfaces. "Law is for the poor."[79]

This group went on to give an example of a general, now an ambassador, who killed someone and never went to prison for it. Another group cited a similar example involving a local military commander and an ordinary citizen.

Most people know that the law comes from "the government." A slightly smaller number of people were able to identify the Parliament as the country's chief legislative organ, although given that most bills originate in the executive and must pass through the Council of Ministers before going to Parliament, perhaps the government, in the

sense of the executive, is the most accurate answer. The minority responses were the most interesting in this section. The third most frequent answer to the question Who makes the laws? was the police. Other answers included local administrators, *sobas,* and the courts. One person answered that the people make the laws.

The Constitution

As for the constitutional law, the numbers of people who had and had not heard of it were about evenly divided. Those who ventured an answer to its definition were for the most part correct in their perceptions. The following are sample answers. "The constitutional law is the guidelines drawn up by government which the people should follow; it is a statute or regulation that we can all follow."[80] "It's an order that establishes what must be done in a country."[81]

Others had heard of it but were disinterested or disgusted. "We have heard of the constitutional law but we don't pay any attention, we are not interested in it."[82] "It has no practical utility — they are always changing it."[83] "We have never heard or seen a copy of the constitutional law; I think it must not be widely distributed."[84]

<p align="center">*   *   *</p>

Looking back, the 1997 focus groups provide a rough portrait of a country caught in limbo between a partial and increasingly fragile peace and a return to all-out war. They capture the prevailing sense of instability and record the widespread conviction that the war was not yet over. For most participants, the removal of barriers to movement and commerce throughout the country, which had consistently been erected by both sides, would be the most important sign that peace had truly arrived. The second most frequently cited indicator of war's end would be Jonas Savimbi's installation in the capital. Clearly, in the minds of most participants, the remaining barriers to peace were coming from the top, not from ordinary citizens.

Focus group participants demonstrated a high level of both general awareness and specific knowledge about key aspects of the peace process. They also understood some of the basic principles of both democracy and human rights. At the same time, they were keenly aware that these principles were systematically violated in Angola. Two fundamental liberties were identified over and over again as being both the most important democratic freedoms and the most difficult to exercise under current conditions: freedom of expression and free circulation of people and goods. It is important to note that while participants evinced strongly negative and cynical feelings toward government in general, these same negative feelings were not applied to democracy as such. Frustration was with the fact that "real" democracy was not practiced in Angola rather than with democracy as a system of government.

People were fairly well versed in how local authorities are supposed to help them resolve the problems they confront in their daily lives. Most, for example, were able to cite specific government departments designed to resolve particular problems. However, people also felt very sharply the government's inability or unwillingness to address their most pressing problems.

While participants had an intuitive notion of what government should and should not be doing, there was a much lower level of understanding about the law, particularly the constitutional law that sets out the basic rights and responsibilities of citizens as well as

the formal limits on the state. In some areas, notably Uige and to a lesser extent Luanda, there is also a general perception that the police, the Angolan Armed Forces, and civil defense forces are the principal intermediaries between the people and the government. This perception is probably firmly rooted in local reality. Many people believe that the police themselves make the laws. Again, for all intents and purposes this may be true in some locations.

While the focus groups suggest that there was and is important work to be done to empower individual citizens and advocacy groups to make Angola's exemplary democratic constitution effective in practice, they also point up sharply drawn limits to what can be achieved from below, from outside the state and the formal political system. First, the matters of most concern to citizens are those over which they have the least control. Achieving a measure of political stability, freedom of movement, freedom of expression and association, all depend to a great extent on the ability of the government and UNITA to put a decisive end to their conflict. Ongoing low-intensity controversy, such as that which has marked the Angolan peace process from the outset, offers almost limitless opportunities for human rights violations and myriad extra-judicial activity under cover of "legitimate" defensive action. The most well-informed activist and courageous citizens are obviously no match for the combined repressive powers of a government and armed rebel movement at war with each other.

Second, the focus group results suggest that even after an effective political settlement is achieved between the warring parties, civic education efforts should focus not on ordinary citizens alone, but on civic education and training to improve the capacity of those parts of the Angolan government that come in direct contact with Angolan citizens, particularly on issues related to human and constitutional rights. These include the police, the armed forces, and local judicial and administrative officials. For many focus group participants, government is not a bewildering maze but a place with known departments that are meant to resolve specific problems. The difficulty is that when people go to these departments, when they interact with the individuals who represent government in their daily lives, their needs are not met and their faith in the system is continually eroded. This is demonstrated in the striking contrast between what people say about how they would resolve concrete problems and their attitude toward the government as a whole. They say they would go to a specific department, yet their expectations that their needs would be met there are close to zero.

How useful are these focus groups in helping us to understand the downward spiral away from a successful political settlement to Angola's long-running conflict? Do they provide important insights into the troubles with the Lusaka Protocol then looming large on the horizon? In conveying a sense of uncertainty and instability about the peace process, in insisting that the war was not yet over, they are certainly consistent with what was to come. But they are also important on another level — they reinforce the notion that there is a disconnect between those who are responsible for bringing about peace and structuring the new political system and the majority who must live according to its rules, and they highlight the yawning chasm between the stated goals of the Lusaka process — peace, national reconciliation, effective multiparty democracy — and reality. ✄

Notes

1. Mutilados de guerra, male (hereafter M), 20–30, Kilombo, Huambo.
2. Youth, M, 17–25, Camussamba, Huambo.
3. Deslocados, M, 35–47, Luanda.
4. Students, female (hereafter F), 15–19, Cazenga.
5. Market women, 35–55, Kunge, Bie.
6. Community activists, M, 20–24, Golfe, Luanda.
7. Teachers, M/F, 26–37, Golfe, Luanda.
8. Students, M, 25–30, Kuito, Bie.
9. Men, 50–59, Operario, Luanda.
10. Community activists, M, 20–24, Golfe, Luanda.
11. Youth, F, 22–26, Golfe, Luanda.
12. Catequists, Chivela, Huambo.
13. Students, M, 25–35, Kuito, Bie.
14. Teachers, M, 25–35, Chinguar, Bie.
15. Women, 59+, Operario, Luanda.
16. War-disabled veterans, M, 30–59, Kilombo, Huambo.
17. Youth, F, 22–26, Golfe, Luanda.
18. Students, F, 16–18, Uige.
19. Deslocados, M, 45–59, Benfica, Luanda.
20. Students, F, 16–18, Cazenga, Luanda.
21. Youth, M, 19–25, Uige.
22. Students, M, 14–18, M. Uige.
23. War-disabled veterans, M, 20–30, Kilombo, Huambo.
24. Students, F, 16–18, Uige.
25. Students, F, Cazenga, Luanda.
26. Community activists, M, 20–25, Golfe, Luanda.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Women, 59+, Operario, Luanda.
30. Students, F, 16–18, Uige.
31. Demobilized soldiers, M, 19–32, Uige.
32. Employed men, 25–59, Golfe, Luanda.
33. Community activists, M, 20–24, Golfe, Luanda.
34. War-disabled soldiers/community leaders, M, 30–55, Kilombo, Huambo.
35. Deslocados, M, 45–59, Benfica, Luanda.
36. Community activists, M, 20–24, Golfe, Luanda.
37. Women, 59+, Operario, Luanda.
38. Teachers, M/F, 26–37, Golfe, Luanda.
39. Secondary school students, M, 25–35, Kuito, Bie.
40. Teachers, M/F, 26–37, Golfe, Luanda.
41. Students, F, 16–18, Cazenga, Luanda.
42. Youth, F, 22–26, Golfe, Luanda.
43. Community activists, M, 20–24, Golfe, Luanda.
44. Ibid.
45. Students, F, 16–18, Uige.
46. Youth, M, 19–24, Uige.
47. Community activists, M, 20–24, Golfe, Luanda.
48. Deslocados, M, 45–55, Benfica, Luanda.
49. Youth, F, 15–19, Cazenga, Luanda.
50. Women, 59+, Operario, Luanda.
51. Community leaders, M, 30–55, Kilombo, Huambo.
52. Deslocados, M, 25–45, Benfica, Luanda.
53. Teachers, M/F, 26–37, Golfe, Luanda.
54. Students, F, 16–18, Cazenga, Luanda.
55. Students, F, 16–18, Uige.

56. Women, 59-, Operario, Luanda.
57. Youth, M, 18–20, Operario, Luanda.
58. Students, M, 25–35, Kuito, Bie.
59. Catechists, M/F, 25–40, Chivela, Huambo.
60. Women, 59+, Operario, Luanda.
61. Youth, M, 18–20, Operario, Luanda.
62. Women, 59+, Operario, Luanda.
63. Youth, M, 19–24, Uige.
64. Students, F, 16–18, Cazenga, Luanda.
65. Demobilized soldiers, M, 19–32, Uige.
66. War-disabled veterans, M, 30–59, Kilombo, Huambo.
67. Ibid.
68. Community activists, M, 20–24, Golfe, Luanda.
69. Students, F, 16–18, Uige.
70. Teachers, M/F, 25–36, Golfe, Luanda.
71. Students, M, 25–35, Kuito, Bie.
72. Community leaders, M, 30–55, Kilombo, Huambo.
73. Demobilized soldiers, M, 20–36, Huambo.
74. Community activists, M, 20–24, Golfe, Luanda.
75. Students, F, 16–18, Uige.
76. Demobilized soldiers, M, 19–32, Uige.
77. Youth, F, 22–26, Golfe, Luanda.
78. Youth, M, 19–24, Uige.
79. Men of diverse labor status, 25–59, Golfe, Luanda.
80. Teachers, M, 25–35, Chinguar, Bie.
81. Students, F, 16–18, Cazenga, Luanda.
82. War-disabled soldiers, M, 30–54, Kilombo, Huambo.
83. Community activists, M, 20–24, Golfe, Luanda.
84. Students, M, 25–35, Kuito, Bie.