

Angola peace fails; pull out, UN troops advised by Annan

Secretary-General cites downing of two aircraft, lack of co-operation by both sides

Associated Press, United Nations

Secretary-General Kofi Annan has recommended that UN military observers leave Angola, saying the resumption of civil war and apparent targeting of UN personnel makes their presence useless.

In a report to the Security Council issued late Sunday, Mr. Annan suggests a gradual reduction in the 1,000-person UN force, which had been overseeing the 1994 UN-mediated peace accord, until the force is totally removed by about March 20.

His recommendations had been expected after the resumption of all-out fighting between government and rebel UNITA troops and the recent downing of two UN-chartered planes with 23 people on board.

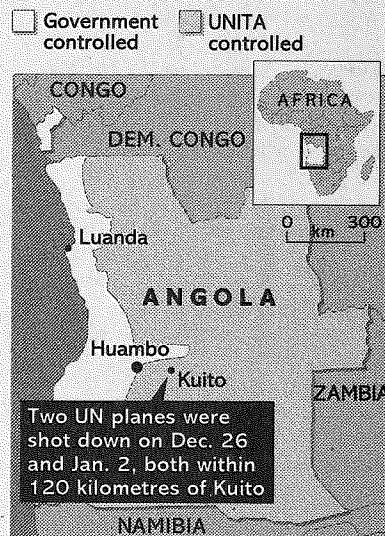
But the report's tone is nevertheless unusually critical of the warring parties over the collapse of the truce, and an acknowledgment that the United Nations has no further peacekeeping role to play in Angola is a rare admission of failure.

"The finish line was there," Issa Diallo, the UN special representative to Angola, said in the capital, Luanda. "We wanted to cross it, but we didn't cross it."

The United Nations has spent 10 years and millions of dollars trying to bring peace to Angola, where civil war broke out soon after its 1975 independence from Portugal. The 1994 peace accord, known as the Lusaka Protocol, has been held up as a model of UN mediation.

"History will, of course, pass judgment on the reasons for which this unique opportunity was missed," Mr. Annan writes. "In the meantime, however, the parties and their leaders must assume full and direct responsibility for the suffering of their people."

The Angolan government has made clear that the UN force was not welcome beyond the Feb. 26 expiration of its current mandate. The United Nations can rarely sustain a peacekeeping force in a



REUTERS / The Globe and Mail

country where it is not wanted, because the governments themselves are responsible for the safety of UN personnel.

Fighting resumed in Angola when government troops stormed two rebel strongholds that UNITA had refused to give up as required under peace deals. Rebels repulsed the attacks and fighting erupted throughout the country's central highlands.

Mr. Annan said the presumed shooting down of the two UN-chartered planes, which crashed Dec. 26 and Jan. 4, respectively, over the highlands, was an indication that the warring sides were trying to intimidate the United Nations into leaving. He also cited harassment of UN personnel and a media campaign by both sides blaming the United Nations for the resumption of the fighting.

Mr. Annan rejected those claims, putting the brunt of the blame on UNITA for failing to demilitarize and turn over its strongholds, but also holding the government responsible for severing contact with UNITA, ending any hope for a joint government.

Commentary re: The UN, Canada and the search for peace in Angola

The bloody routine of violence and suffering, endured by millions of Angolans for 30 years has yet again flared up with the resumption of all-out fighting last month. The UN itself has 23 casualties from the recent downing of 2 of its planes.

Angola's descent into yet another round of blood letting is a salutary lesson for the international community, particularly for the UN Security Council's five permanent members and for Canada which was significantly involved in the 1992 peacekeeping effort. For Canada-now a member of the Security Council - it offers an opportunity to further peace, justice and stability in Angola.

We, a group of Canadian non-governmental organizations working in Angola, have seen the deterioration of conditions last year ending in the breakdown of the UN-brokered 1994 Lusaka peace accords. We are disturbed by the declining interest of Western Governments and donors in the struggles of ordinary Angolans for survival and peace. Like most Angolans, we do not accept the inevitability of war.

Seven years ago there was a real opportunity to help Angolans build a secure peace. Margaret Anstee, then the UN representative to Angola lamented that, "peace on the cheap was like flying a 747 with only the fuel for a DC3." Investment in the peace process has increased since 1994, but still only a relatively small contingent of military and police observers was funded; severe limits were accepted on their mandate to act. Too many atrocities were overlooked 'by mutual consent.'

Now in an admission of failure, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his January 15 report to the Security Council recommends that the UN Observer Mission in Angola withdraw upon expiration of its mandate on February 26. "History will, of course, pass judgement on the reasons for which this unique opportunity was missed," Mr. Annan writes.

Indeed this is not the UN's war. The two warring parties-- the Government led by the Movement for the Popular Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the National Union for Total Independence (UNITA) rebels-- must accept responsibility, be urged to make peace, respect civilians' right to protection, and allow humanitarian access.

We support the Canadian Government's position that the UN should maintain a significant presence for the purposes of monitoring human rights, negotiating humanitarian access, and facilitating possibilities of dialogue.

The Secretary-General intends to designate a senior official who would be based in New York as his Special Envoy for Angola. New York is too far away; the Special Envoy must remain in Luanda closer to both parties and to a humanitarian situation at risk of becoming a full-scale catastrophe.

The UN has been unable to disarm combatants effectively and has largely been impotent in preventing fresh arms from flowing into the country despite Security Council sanctions against UNITA over the last 18 months. UNITA's recent intense well-armed assaults on towns crammed with refugees have surprised most observers. For the people of Angola, the arms embargo is a mockery. Canada now chairs the Sanctions Committee, it must ensure that sanctions are backed up by effective action on countries and corporations that break the embargoes.

As a first step on arms control the UN should agree to a binding code on arms transfers so as to limit the flow of arms into Angola. Canada's reputation from the land-mines campaign and her interest in the international control of small arms should help a campaign which we strongly support.

Effective humanitarian response in Angola depends on gaining access to vulnerable people. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UCAH) reporting to the Special Envoy has been instrumental in negotiating access to war affected areas in the past. For humanitarian assistance to be possible, this infrastructure needs to be maintained. We urge the Canadian Government, historically a major supporter of UCAH, to use its position in the UN to ensure this.

The crisis in Angola demands an international response to reduce the suffering of the Angolan people. Given our long-standing commitment to peace, we expect the Canadian Government to provide the leadership in the UN and the international community to ensure that Angola is not a forgotten war. We look to an early end of war and resumption of negotiations; the UN must be there.

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