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American Committee on Africa

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March 15, 1961 George M. Houser
Executive Director

STATEMENT OF MR. HOLDEN ROBERTO, PRESIDENT OF THE UNION OF THE

POPULATIONS OF ANGOLA

Gentlemen of the Press:
Ladies and Gentlemen:

I thank you in the name of the Union of the Populations of Angola and of its Executive Committee for having responded to my invitation in such numbers. You are all aware that momentous events have taken place in Africa during these recent months. These events flow from the successive liberation of African territories and stem, notably, from the basic realization of a historic fact which, in a nutshell, is this: Africans will no longer accept the domination of foreigners. This is the will of African men and women who are resolutely prepared to fight under this slogan, cost what it may. At the same time it must be recognized that there is no possibility, psychological or moral, for colonial powers to continue their domination of Africans, confronted as they are with the unanimous will of the democratically-minded people who are becoming the majority in this world of ours.

Very recently the Portuguese conducted a massacre of horrendous proportion in Angola. The Union of the Populations of Angola, which for years has been struggling against the iniquities practiced by the Portuguese, is carrying an appeal to international opinion in order to place before the world some knowledge of its responsibility to the Angolans.

The Union of the Populations of Angola, of which I have the honor to be the spokesman, counts 40,000 registered members and more than a half million sympathizers. It is the most popular and best organized party in Angola. Its newspaper, the Voice of the Angolan Nation, appears every two weeks; it is published in four languages: the two most widely spoken African languages of Angola, French and Portuguese. In the Party Credo, which was published in June 1960 under the title of "The Fight for the Independence of Angola," the Party denounces the oppression and racial discrimination which characterizes the Portuguese regime in Angola, a regime of economic slavery and cultural obscurantism. At the same time the Party declared that it was not an enemy of the Portuguese people but that it was against a system which has deprived Angola of its entire existence as a nation.

The Union of the Populations of Angola was founded in 1954 on the initiative of peasants who grouped themselves together on their own initiative, clandestinely, to combat Portuguese colonial

colonial policy of systematic expropriation and forced labor. In connection with these remarks, you should be aware that in Angola the African -- or so-called native -- cannot be a proprietor. Although the land may nominally belong to him, it is only his to plough and to sow. At the moment of the harvest, he is too often expelled from his property by instruction of the colonial regime known as a "confidential circular;" his property is then handed to a Portuguese immigrant. Thus today some 85 percent of the good land is in the hands of the Portuguese colonials. The Africans are pushed back towards the arid and unproductive areas.

Forced labor, the blood relation of slavery, is a normal institution in twentieth century Angola. The system has been institutionalized by the colonial administration as part of a plan for the extermination of Africans. I do not use the word "extermination" lightly: history teaches us that forced labor as practiced by the Portuguese and Spanish colonizers of Central and South America contributed to the extermination of the indigenous populations there, a depletion of human resources which had to be replaced by slave labor from Africa which depopulated a major part of the continent.

Today these same Portuguese are carrying on in the footsteps of their ancestors. While they are attempting to bamboozle the world with legalistic nonsense, they are exterminating the African population of Angola by forced labor to which may be added deportations, assassinations and terror. At the same time they are replacing the victims with Portuguese immigrants. For many years more than 700,000 Angolans, including women and children, have been requisitioned yearly and carted off under armed guards to the plantations of the Portuguese colonizers.

The Portuguese have been quite sensitive to the charge of destruction and rape of their colony. They are apt to protest very loudly when it is pointed out that forced labor is an institution of the Portuguese colonial system. Their howls of denial, however, are the best evidence of the existence of the system they have been trying to keep hidden and the whole world recognizes their angry protest as an open confession of their guilt.

Parenthetically, it is important to note that the decree on the abolition of forced labor was published in Angola only as late as July 13, 1959, and only then because of the first African Conference of the International Labor Organization was being held in Luanda, the capital of Angola. The delay in the application of the decree is typical of the Portuguese disinclination to carry out in fact what Portugal feigns to be its policy. It is equally appropriate to point out that although Portugal has ratified the convention on Forced Labor, the labor system in Angola has not been modified accordingly; in fact forced labor is on the increase. It is not necessary to point out that forced labor is nothing else but slavery in modern dress.

In amplification, you must know that the African worker is obliged to abandon everything -- his home, his family, his land, for the compulsory accomplishment of work for a Portuguese master. For twelve months this unhappy deportee is some sort of beast of the field who may be turned out at any time of day to work. He is a deportee in the sense that the Portuguese authorities make sure each person selected for forced labor is sent to an outlying part of his region, far from home. Upon his return, moneyless and feeble, he all too often finds his home and family in pitiable state and his lands confiscated on the pretext that they had been abandoned.

The recruitment of forced labor is nothing more or less than a business affair for the benefit of a number of individuals who, of course, are members of

of the administration: District Commissioners, Secretaries, Administrators and Governors. These latter are hand in hand with the big companies and the colonials who offer small, and sometimes large sums for their cooperation.

To crown it all, the African who is subjected to this sacrifice is not even paid a decent wage. After twelve months of dogged labor he earns between one and two thousand escudos (One escudo = US \$0.035), a pitiable \$35-70.00. As if this were not shameful enough, one half of his earnings is retained by his "employer" by requirement of the law for the payment of taxes which all workers must pay. The tax amounts to 245 escudos or \$8.57, some 32 percent of his annual salary. The remainder is not the worker's to keep; deductions for purchases from the company store see to that. The worker is lucky to return to his home and family with the shirt on his back.

This, in very brief, is a picture of forced labor in Angola. What other name is there for this system and how can it not be considered as genocide, this destruction of the home, this deportation from one's own soil. Is it not a systematic and deliberate policy of the destruction of African society in Angola? Is it not clear that the Portuguese are practicing this system with the objective of expropriating the entire territory of Angola?

Gentlemen: the Portuguese colonial regime, living in its own little dream world, proclaims incessantly that nothing will make it change its policy in Angola. Now, since the realization has dawned on them that the African peoples intend to cast off the yoke of colonialism, the Portuguese have been expediting their guns, their warships, their combat aircraft, their soldiery. This is the response of the Portuguese Government to the unshakable will of the Africans of Angola! The Angolan people have multiplied their appeals to the Portuguese Government for the end of the regime of slavery and for the construction of new relationships, man to man instead of master to slave, but the Salazar dictatorship responds with new methods of destruction.

We do not say to the Portuguese colonial, "You are a foreigner: go away!" We do not say to him, "We are going to take over the running of the country and make you pay for your crimes and those of your ancestors." We do not want to supplant a hatred for the black with a new hatred for the white.

We say to him: "We are Angolans; banish from our land all racism, all forms of oppression, of injustice, all attempts to keep our people in ignorance, and let us work together for the flowering of mankind and the enrichment of humanity."

The colonial replies to us that the Portuguese Government supports him, that Portugal will never relinquish Angola and will resort to force to prevent us from being free.

This inability to come to terms with reality has led to the terrifying situation in which Angola finds itself today.

Since 1959 a climate of terror, of manhunts, has prevailed in Angola. Africans have been subjected to massacres, deportations, and hideous tortures. I think of my countrymen whose lips have been pierced and padlocked together, their palms transfixed, for having been found in possession of our newspaper, the Voice of the Angolan Nation, or of Alfredo Benje, dumb and paralyzed after brutal maltreatment and torture in a Lobito jail, witness to what the Portuguese cynically describe as "the work of Christian civilization."

There have been serious disorders in Luanda, recently, for which the Portuguese are responsible. Early in January of this year rumors were circulated to the

effect that all political prisoners being held in Luanda jails were to be deported. (In the Portuguese colonies, the word "deported" has a very special meaning: it signifies complete disappearance of the individual consigned to this fate). It was for that reason that Angolan patriots felt impelled to invade the prisons in order to rescue the prisoners. It was decided to attempt their liberation on February 4th. The first attack took place at four o'clock in the morning. The Portuguese forces of so-called order opened fire on the rescuers, killing them by the hundreds. Further attempts on the part of the rescuers led to even more deaths, leading to what was nothing less than an out-and-out massacre.

"The most fantastic riot I ever saw." It is in these terms that a South African journalist of the Johannesburg newspaper "THE STAR" described the dramatic events which characterized Sunday in the capital of Angola. "A frenzied mob, armed with sticks and with stones snatched from gravestone, broke out from the suburbs of Luanda Sunday evening, beating the Africans to death and sewing panic in the cemetery where a funeral service for the African and the six Portuguese policemen killed during incidents on Saturday was taking place," declared the journalist in the course of a telephone call from Luanda. "The Portuguese pursued and fired on the Africans who were present at the service. It was a veritable massacre. While leaving the cemetery," the journalist continues, "I saw the cadavres which were strewn on the streets. The rear lights of my car were broken by the machine gun bullets of the armoured cars at the moment that I left the scene of the riot. The Portuguese are hostile to the presence of all foreigners in the city especially since the Portuguese authorities imply the attacks launched on Sunday by the Africans against the police station, the radio station, and the prison were inspired from abroad. Saturday I was arrested by the police after having seen that they were gathering up the dead bodies. I was detained for five hours simply because I had seen these bodies".

How else may one describe this action of Angolan patriots except as the last-ditch efforts of people to save themselves from the brutal death which terminates the manhunt?

The colonial regime was established in violence and endures in violence. But this is no abstract violence, or mere spiritual violence. The daily routine of the Portuguese colonizer expresses itself in forced labor, "deportations," assassinations and racist hatred. This is a very real and painful violence. It affects not only the soul, but also the muscles, the blood. It is an avalanche of violence which knows no bounds and has engendered violence on the part of the Angolans, a just anger which is aching to express itself.

It is the role of our Party to look out for our peoples' destiny, to dam their tendencies to violence and channel into a constructive political action. For a human spirit, contemplating the unfolding of history corresponding to the universal level, violence must first of all be combatted by the language of truth and reason.

But, alas, however much we may deplore it, it sometimes happens that enslavement leads to the inducement of violence in the soul of the enslaved but this is an indication of the latter's bestial existence. This is a defense mechanism, nothing more than an instinct for self-preservation.

The Union of the Populations of Angola has let the Portuguese government know in no uncertain terms of its decision to wage the combat for the end of the colonial regime. There is no compromise. We shall conduct our struggle first of all on the political level because Portugal, unlike other colonial powers, has

rejected any pacific methods which would lead to liberation as experienced in most of the rest of Africa. Other colonizers were not able to maintain their domination in the face of the will of the African peoples. Even the use of violence will not permit the Portuguese to flout the unanimous will of the people of Angola. In an Africa fighting for liberty, there is no place for those who are unable to recognize the aspirations of the masses towards justice and liberty.

The Union of the Populations of Angola addresses itself to democratically minded people of the whole world and invites them to help end the oppression of 4.5 million people. We address ourselves to international opinion and request that Portuguese colonialism be condemned without reserve, that favor be found for the triumph of liberty in this African land which has suffered for five hundred years.

LONG LIVE LIBERTY
LONG LIVE ANGOLA