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Igreja da Sagrada Família, Luanda
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Angola: Religion and repression

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The history of religious repression in Angola stands in sharp contrast to the official representations of religious tolerance. The regime keeps religion under government control, through formal and informal methods, and it suppresses the spread of churches beyond those which are mainstream and controllable. The 7th Day Adventist sect *A Luz do Mundo* (Light of the World) experienced the worst in terms of religious suppression in 2015, when it was officially singled out for 'complete destruction' and hundreds of sect members were killed in the so-called 'Mount Sumi' massacre. Despite this, religion and churches are spreading rapidly, some are rather outspoken government critics, and Angolan Catholic bishops recently warned that the upcoming elections could be manipulated to keep the ruling party in power.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Religion in Angola	3
Repression and Control	3
Islam in Angola	4
Kimbanguism	5
Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus	5
A Luz do Mundo	6
The Events	7
The Aftermath	10
Concluding Remarks	11
References	13

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RELIGION IN ANGOLA

While reliable statistics are non-existent, estimates have it that more than 40% of the population of Angola are Catholics, while almost 40% are Protestants (US Department of State 2021: 1). Officially, according to the Constitution of Angola, the state is secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of religion.

“The constitution defines the state as secular, prohibits religious discrimination, and provides for freedom of conscience, religion, and worship. The law requires religious groups to seek government recognition by meeting legally established criteria and allows the government to shutter the premises of unregistered groups. There are 81 recognized religious groups and more than 1,100 unrecognized religious groups. The government has not recognized any new religious groups since 2004.” (US Department of State 2021: 1).

The history of religious repression in Angola stands in sharp contrast to the official representations of religious tolerance. As a one-party socialist regime allied with the Soviet Union, until around 1990 the regime issued atheist propaganda, silenced church radios, meddled in religious affairs, and used public media to attack bishops and to accuse them of “questioning the integrity of the Angolan revolutionary process” (Collelo 1991).

Today, Angola’s government still suppresses the spread of churches beyond those which are mainstream and controllable. It recognises 84 churches/sects, while another 1,200 are believed to exist illicitly (US Department of State 2021: 1; The Economist 2015).

Repression and Control

The Angolan government is repressing all forms of opposition and tries to subjugate the whole of society to its political direction and control. In addition to organised religion, it has for instance prevented civil society organisations from growing outside of its control. Civil society and NGOs that are critical of the government have faced state interference and been threatened with closure. In March 2015, the President issued a decree that requires NGOs to register with the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to operate, and NGOs must obtain further authorisations to receive donations. Once registered, NGOs are required to submit to government supervision and audits. There is also a pervasive control of culture, sports or merely communitarian or charitable activity.

Likewise, in order to have a new religious organisation licenced, it must show it has at least 100,000 membership signatures from adult Angolan citizens residing in at least 12 of the 18 provinces. In addition, a religious group must submit a minimum of 60,000 signatures to the government to have its congregation legalized. No new group has been registered since 2004 (US Department of State 2018: 1), and many hundreds of religious sects and denominations, including Islam, are carrying out their activities in semi-legality, at the same time as the constitution purportedly guarantees religious freedom.

In the words of Blanes and Zawiejska (2019: 39),

“Angola is today a country ruled by an authoritarian, self-perpetuated regime enacted by a de facto single ruling party (the MPLA, despite the multipartisan framework), in which the public space occupied by the main churches is a result not only of a process of co-optation [...] but also [...] of depoliticization. It is a political process by which hegemonic churches become agents working for the status quo promoted by the regime, providing moral and social legitimation to the government policies under the post-war rhetoric of peace, reconciliation, and reconstruction”.

In some instances, the government has also disbanded religious organisations and organisations operating without government recognition, and some religious leaders have stated they have been the

victims of politically motivated prosecution for various criminal charges both tied to, and sometimes unrelated to, the practice of their religion (US Department of State 2018).

According to the Angolan journalist and analyst Ilídio Manuel, the “Operação Resgate”, a police campaign against illicit traders and non-recognised churches in 2019 “calls into question religious freedom in Angola”. He refers to news reports about the closure of hundreds of illegal churches in Angola. In the province of Lunda Norte, “mosques were closed, and worshippers were detained in full prayer”.¹

Religious organisations are still probably the single greatest organisers of Angolans – and new ones keep popping up – with some of them challenging the authoritarian control of the government, its policies, human rights abuses, and lack of democracy. Since the end of the civil war in 2002 the religious landscape of Angola has changed significantly, with a rapid growth of charismatic, evangelical, and Pentecostal churches under the impulse of Brazilian, Nigerian, and Congolese missionaries (Zawiejska and van de Kamp 2018: 17, Blanes 2015: 211). The government’s answer has been administrative control, co-optation, and instrumentalising when possible, and restrictions and repression when not.

Islam in Angola

The spread of Islam began in Angola the 1990s with immigration from West African countries and Somalia, joining a few established families of Lebanese descent. Some Muslims obtained licenses to build commercial warehouses and then used the sites to build mosques, without obtaining legal permission or building licenses specifically for such places of religious worship. There are around 69 unregistered Mosques in the country (US Department of State 2021: 4; d’Orsi 2017).

The government, however, has not recognised any Muslim groups or issued any licenses to Muslim groups to practice their religion legally or to build Mosques. Requests for official recognition submitted in 2019 by two Muslim organizations, the *Comunidade Muçulmana de Angola*, (Muslim Community of Angola, CISA) and the *Comunidade Islâmica de Angola*, Islamic Community of Angola, COIA), remains pending (US State Department 2021, Tadesse 2019).

Government officials have also stated that some practices allowed by Islam, such as polygamy, contradicted the constitution. And when the government in 2020, as a measure to prevent the spread of Covid-19, allowed only religious services on Saturdays and Sundays, this was felt as discriminatory to the Muslim community and their Friday services. The director of the *Instituto Nacional para os Assuntos Religiosos* (National Institute for Religious Affairs, INAR, the regulating body of ‘religious affairs’), called this a “a false problem” because the authorisation only affected “legally recognized religions”.² In other words, a banned religion had no rights anyway.

However, allegations circulating in social media, posted by international and local Muslim groups, that Angola is the world’s first country to “ban Islam” and pictures of “bulldozing down Mosques”, have been found to be exaggerated and fakes.³

1 Source: DW (Deutsche Welle), 14 February 2019: Angola: “Operação Resgate põe em causa a liberdade religiosa”, diz analista. By Manuel Luamba (www.dw.com/pt-002/angola-opera%C3%A7%C3%A3o-resgate-p%C3%B5e-em-causa-a-liberdade-religiosa-diz-analista/a-47517678).

2 Source: DW, 28 September 2020: Angola: Governo diz que exclusão de cultos dos muçulmanos é “um falso problema” (www.dw.com/pt-002/angola-governo-diz-que-exclus%C3%A3o-de-cultos-dos-mu%C3%A7ulmanos-%C3%A9-um-falso-problema/a-55084487).

3 See for instance: The Observers, 7 November 2019: *Is Angola banning Islam and destroying mosques?* (<https://observers.france24.com/en/20191107-angola-islam-ban-destroying-mosques-old-rumors-resurface>) and AFP Fact Check, 15 May 2019: *No, these pictures are not evidence of Angola banning Islam*. By Mary Kulundu (<https://factcheck.afp.com/no-these-pictures-are-not-evidence-angola-banning-islam>). See also Al Arabia News, 26 November 2013 (updated: 20 May 2020): *Angola denies banning Islam after outcry* (<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/africa/2013/11/26/Angola-denies-banning-Islam-after-outcry>).

Kimbanguism

The charismatic Baptist church *Église de Jésus Christ sur la Terre par son envoyé spécial Simon Kimbangu* (Church of Jesus Christ on Earth, also called *Kimbanguism*), with its headquarters in Nkamba in DR Congo, has a strong following in northern Angola and in particular among the Bakongo. The Bakongo are traditionally Baptist (Brinkman 2003: 197). Kimbanguism has in fact become an important 'glue' for the Bakongo people and an important ethnic denominator, and therefore Bakongo *Kimbanguists* have also experienced stigma, pressure, and discrimination in Angola (Sarró 2018).

Although this church is officially recognised in Angola (de Morais 2014), and a long history of co-optation by the MPLA, its transnational scope and the prominence of its Bakongo membership adds to the widespread Angolan perceptions of Bakongo 'foreignness'. The Bakongo have been discriminated against and sometimes persecuted in Angola for being 'non-Angolans' and for not being 'true' Angolans. The Bakongo are sometimes referred to as "full of French" and "barely Angolans", and the derogatory term '*langa*' (and '*langa-langa*') is used for the Bakongo (Martins 2015: 155, 106). Some Bakongo complain about official discrimination in the form of *berufsverbot* (that it is impossible to get public employment above a certain level), reflecting that they have difficulties in accessing housing, health care, etc.

While this type of discrimination appears to be entrenched, there is no recent record of state-sanctioned physical violence carried out by authorities purely on the basis of Bakongo ethnicity, without other contributing factors. The Kimbanguist church, however, stands out as an autochthon movement, with the risk this entails.

Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus

Another example of why the control of churches is important to the Angolan government, and how this control is exercised, is the example of the evangelical and charismatic *Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus* (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, IURD or UCKG). The IURD was established in Brazil in 1977 and expanded to Portugal in 1989 and spread to several African countries in the early 1990s. It is today one of the largest religious congregations in Angola. According to Blanes & Zawiejska (2019: 41-42),

"This church arrived in Angola in the early 1990s, and soon established a strong, visible presence through what has been described as their 'cathedral politics' [...]: their flamboyant *Catedrais da Fé* (Cathedrals of Faith) in focal points around the city such as the Alvalade neighbourhood made a strong impact, and their public image, [...] was soon established as a positive one, determined by a collaborative relationship with the Ministry of Internal Affairs [...]. For instance, the local UCKG leadership took an active role in the government-promoted electoral census campaign of 2006, using their churches as registration centres".

The problem, from the point of view of the government, was not that the church expanded rapidly throughout Luanda and the rest of the country, with some 230 church buildings (called temples) in Angola in 2020. The IURD church never took part in the political debate and never criticised the regime. It supported the political status quo by their public silence (Blanes & Zawiejska 2019: 42). The problem was rather one of control. First, some local pastors accused the Brazilian church hierarchy of mistreatment, abuse of authority, and unfair treatment in promoting 'ministers'. Then other voices joined the critics, noting the lack of sustainability of the church's social campaigns and targeting the church doctrine, the church's luxurious style, and the promise of immediate fulfilment (ibid.: 42).

"Along with these controversies, an older issue was brought into the discussion regarding the church's 'foreign' condition, frequently played by the government authorities in relation to various religious groups" (ibid.: 57).

The strong transnational circulation of pastors, media, and ideologies between Brazil, Africa, and Europe became a problem. “In the case of IURD, the perceptible foreignness is reported at all levels of church life, observable in ritual style, the pastors’ accent, and the hierarchy in management” (ibid.: 58).

The government clamp-down on the church in 2021 included the enforced dissolution of its board of directors, court cases against the Brazilian bishop who led the IURD in Angola, the spread of slander and defaming allegations on social media and ‘fake news’, the instalment of a ‘reformist’ leadership, and a temporary closure of several IURD temples around the country. This regaining of control by the government by an outright ‘nationalisation’ was carried through even though it led to a heated political debate, several skirmishes and court cases between the ‘Brazilians’ and the ‘reformists’ over the control of the church, allegations of crimes of both sides, and an exchange of sharp notes and diplomatic tension between the Angolan and Brazilian governments.⁴

A LUZ DO MUNDO

The 7th Day Adventist splinter sect *A Luz do Mundo* (Light of the World) experienced the worst in terms of religious suppression in 2015, when it was officially singled out for ‘complete destruction’ (Orre 2015) and hundreds of sect members were killed in the so-called ‘Mount Sumi’ massacre.

The background for the killings was a gathering of an estimated 3,000 – 4,000 members of the sect for a religious meeting. They were followers of Kalupeteka’s *Light of the World* congregation at Mount Sumi, 40 km from Huambo city in Angola’s central highlands. The sect or cult is a millenarian breakaway from the *Seventh-day Adventist Church*. Kalupeteka was an active member of the church before he was removed for alleged indisciplinary behaviour, and formed his own sect in 2001, a sect that was never officially registered or recognised. Kalupeteka was preaching personal sacrifice and seclusion, and forfeiting material possessions, and some say he also encouraged his followers not to vote or register for the national census (OFPPRA 2016, The Economist 2015).

Angola’s government tried to prevent knowledge of the massacre. Press freedom is restricted in Angola, and the regime was at the time actively preventing journalists from reporting on the case, denying them access to official information and preventing them from broadcasting, threatening them with detention and prosecution. In the Mount Sumi case, police refused observers access to the site (HRW 2016). According to *The Guardian* (2015),

“The government is imposing its own version of the story – the only version with nationwide outreach – while demanding that everyone else provide evidence to the contrary, even though it is not allowing independent journalists and civil society members near the site. The authorities have been adamant in claiming that the police killed only 13 “snipers” who shot at them. Articulated through the state media, the official version of events has insinuated that UNITA and unspecified foreign forces are behind the sect”.

4 Sources: DW, 31 January 2021: *Fiéis da IURD Angola pedem abertura das igrejas e contestam reforma*. By LUSA (<https://www.dw.com/pt-002/fi%C3%A9is-da-iurd-angola-pedem-abertura-das-igrejas-e-contestam-reforma/a-56396182>); DW, 27 October 2021: *Publicação em Diário da República reacende polémica na IURD Angola*. By Borralho Ndomba (www.dw.com/pt-002/publica%C3%A7%C3%A3o-em-di%C3%A1rio-da-rep%C3%BAblica-reacende-pol%C3%A9mica-na-iurd-angola/a-59645076); DW, 19 November 2021: *Julgamento do caso IURD começa com orações e tumulto em Luanda*. By Nelson Francisco Sul (<https://www.dw.com/pt-002/julgamento-do-caso-iurd-come%C3%A7a-com-ora%C3%A7%C3%B5es-e-tumulto-em-luanda/a-59869818>); Angola24Horas, 22 March 2022: *IURD Angola desmente ter apelado ao voto a favor da UNITA e da FPU* (www.angola24horas.com/sociedade/item/23705-iurd-angola-desmente-ter-apelado-ao-voto-a-favor-da-unita-e-da-fpu); RD1 (Brazilian TV station), 20 February 2022: *MP de Angola pede a condenação de bispos da igreja de Edir Macedo* (<https://rd1.com.br/mp-de-angola-pede-condenacao-de-bispos-da-igreja-de-edir-macedo/>).

The evidence of a massacre is convincing, however. There was indeed a raid and killings of an unknown number of sect members on Mount Sumi (also called Sume and Sumí Hills), the *A Luz do Mundo* sect's semi-permanent camp in the municipality of Caála in Huambo province, on 16 April 2015 and the following days. According to the government, nine unarmed policemen were killed, who had come to arrest the sect leader, José Julino Kalupeteka, and thirteen armed members of the sect died in response. According to Angola's main opposition party, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), 1,080 members of the sect were massacred, with helicopter gunships mowing them down. *Human Rights Watch* and other human rights organisations have called it a massacre.

These facts stem from the rather extensive international press coverage of the events in the following months. Some of this reporting include:

- BBC News, 22 April 2015: Angola police raid Kalupeteka sect in Huambo (www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32412212).
- Reuters, 6 May 2015: Christian sect killings in Angola shrouded in fear and mystery. By Herculano Coroado (<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-angola-violence/christian-sect-killings-in-angola-shrouded-in-fear-and-mystery-idUSKBN0NR17X20150506>).
- The Economist, 11 May 2015: A massacre mystery. The government plays it down, the opposition stokes it up (www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21650934-government-plays-it-down-opposition-stokes-it-up-massacre-mystery).
- African Arguments, 28 May 2015: Angola: The Mount Sumi massacre – an atrocity that will come to define the new country. By Simon Allison (<http://africanarguments.org/2015/05/28/angola-the-mount-sumi-massacre-an-atrocity-that-will-come-to-define-the-new-country-by-simon-allison/>).
- France 24, 5 June 2015: Angolan sect deaths: “It was a real massacre by the police”. By Gaëlle Faure (observers.france24.com/en/20150506-angola-sect-deaths-massacre-police).
- DW (Deutsche Welle), 13 July 2015: Filho de Kalupeteka afirma: Houve mais de 700 mortos no Monte Sumi [Son of Kalupeteka confirms: More than 700 died on Mount Sumi]. By António Cascais (www.dw.com/pt-002/filho-de-kalupeteka-afirma-houve-mais-de-700-mortos-no-monte-sumi/a-18581699).
- Human Rights Watch, 19 January 2016: Was There a Massacre in Huambo, Angola? (www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/19/dispatches-was-there-massacre-huambo-angola).
- MakaAngola, 22 April 2016: Witness to Slaughter: The Mount Sumi Massacre. By Rafael Marques de Morais (www.makaangola.org/2016/04/witness-to-slaughter-the-mount-sumi-massacre/).

The Events

In mid-April 2015, news emerged about the killing of nine policemen in Angola's Huambo province, in an incident involved the police and members of José Julino Kalupeteka's sect *A Luz do Mundo*. On April 20, President José Eduardo dos Santos said in a televised speech that Kalupeteka's sect “was a threat against national security and peace”, led by dangerous individuals.⁵

President Eduardo dos Santos, then stated (“without any further detail and without mentioning any killings” and “in his characteristic factual and unemotional style”, according to Orre 2015) that the forces from “defence, security and internal order” would continue its work to “completely dismantle the sect”.⁶

5 ANGOP (Agência Angola Press, official Angolan news agency), 20 April 2015: *President considers sect “Light of the World” a threat to peace*, (<https://allafrica.com/stories/201504210192.html>) and RTP Notícias (Portuguese news agency), 20 April 2015: *Presidente de Angola acusa seita “Kalupeteka” de ser ameaça à Paz nacional* (www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/presidente-de-angola-acusa-seita-kalupeteka-de-ser-ameaca-a-paz-nacional_n821917).

6 ANGOP, 20 April 2015; RTP Notícias, 20 April 2015.

In the words of Aslak Orre (2015),

“Apparently, the police tried to arrest the sect leader, and it all probably started as a search-and-arrest mission against the sect leader Kalupeteka. Something went wrong, however, and the killing started. The government claims that nine police officers were killed and in addition 13 civilians who, according to the local police commander, were “snipers”. In and of itself, such a casualty figure should call for a serious investigation”.

“Other sources give a different account of the events and an entirely different magnitude of death and destruction, and the intervention of anti-riot forces and armed forces of the Angolan Army (FAA). UNITA, the MPLA government’s former enemy during the civil war and now Angola’s largest opposition party, reacted to initial accounts of systematic atrocities. It sent its parliamentarians to Huambo to look into the matter but was unable to access the site as the army and police had it cordoned off. Nevertheless, the UNITA spokesperson claimed a death toll of more than 1, 000 people, in a killing spree said to have lasted for days. He also said that the victims had been hurled into mass graves”.⁷

Another opposition party leader, Abel Chivukuvuku of the CASA-CE, also came to the site a few days after, and gave his accounts. According to him,

“It is my belief, with as much honesty as possible in these things of politics, that the sect of the Light of the World posed no danger to the stability of the country. At no time did it pose a threat [...]. Everything was silent. Some of the troops shot people who were sitting in the cult and others destroyed the camp. Some were burned, others shot. [...] Children and women sat in front, behind sat the men. [...] When the shooting began, the believers began to sing religious chants. [...] At one point the singing stopped. After a while, the shots also stopped. That’s about how the operation went. There was death and destruction”.⁸

There were also reports that the “witch-hunt” was broadened over the next few days and to several areas beyond the mount, “where the sect seems to have a strong following” (The Guardian 2015). To date, two thousand followers are listed as missing from the massacre (Blanes and Zawiejska 2019: 41).

Another trustworthy source is the journalist Luisa Rogério, who got there quickly and clandestinely and reported in her report “Sumo: The Silence of Death” that “mass killings” and “extremely grave things” had taken place (Rodrigo 2015). In the words of Orre (2015),

“Rogério’s gripping report brings a wealth of photos from the camp. She described ‘an eerie putrid smell in the afternoon air’”.

According to Herculano Coroado, reporter for Reuters,

“The only traces of thousands of Angolan Christian sect members who were camped in these hills are burnt-out vehicles, shacks pocked with bullet holes and bloodstains in the soil. [...] The raid involved hundreds of police and soldiers armed with machine guns, mortars, and rocket-propelled grenades,

7 See also: BBC News, 22 April 2015: *Angola police raid Kalupeteka sect in Huambo* (www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32412212); Reuters, 6 May 2015: *Christian sect killings in Angola shrouded in fear and mystery*. By Herculano Coroado (www.reuters.com/article/us-angola-violence/christian-sect-killings-in-angola-shrouded-in-fear-and-mystery-idUSKBN0NR17X20150506); Reuters, 27 April 2015: *Opposition says 1,000 killed in Angola clash with religious sect*. By Herculano Coroado (www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN0NI1GW20150427); and SIC Notícias (Portuguese TV station), 3 June 2015: *A oposição angolana divulgou imagens do genocídio do Monte Sumi* (www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIHOEv5KOdM).

8 RA Rede Angola, 5 May 2015: *A nossa conclusão é que houve matança grave*. By Luísa Rogério (www.redeangola.info/especiais/chivuku/).

according to a military source [...]. Some members of the sect were singing songs and shouted, “our weapon is the Bible” and “Jesus is our protector” during the siege [...]. Houses were burned down with people inside and sect members were mown down indiscriminately, many of them praying to the end”.⁹

The Adventist Church website (in Portugal/Portuguese) published some disturbing pictures, and a video was posted on YouTube that was presumably filmed by a police officer.¹⁰ In the words of Orre,

“The first couple of minutes of the video shows clips from happier days during a baptism of Kalupeteka’s followers, then the video shows a dozen dead bodies, a man in a police uniform clubbing away at a defenceless victim who is still alive, a number of burning huts, and men in the uniform of the Rapid Intervention Police (PIR) rummaging through personal paraphernalia left at the campsite, apparently looking for things of value”.

There have also been some eyewitness accounts of the massacre. One witness was Raul Xavier, 25, who was shot by police through his right ankle. He claims to have seen the Rapid Intervention Police force surrounding the camp with large vans with machineguns mounted on the back, then shooting and killing people in prayer and sect members defending themselves with stones and sticks.¹¹

In addition, there is the story of a woman asylum seeker in the UK, who told about rape and abuse of women sect members by police officers, indiscriminate killing, unwarranted imprisonment, and torture and abuse in prison, in meticulous detail and in accordance with all other evidence and soon after the events took place. Her story was deemed a trustworthy first-hand knowledge report by a UK court.¹²

In the words of Orre,

“A fanatic perhaps, but Kalupeteka does not stand out as particularly original among Africa’s many charismatic leaders of Christian sects. Indeed, he seems to have built much of his charisma around a special gift for music and song. Otherwise, he was not in any way running a clandestine organisation, despite the mountain retreat. Rumours have it that even MPLA politicians tried to buy into his coveted popularity by courting him with gifts – which he appears to have refused.”

The sect is not comparable to armed religious movements such as Boko Haram in Nigeria or the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda, but still the Angolan president dos Santos called it a “threat against national peace”.¹³

Old ethnic and political rivalries may have played a role in the repression of the Light of the World. The highlands of Huambo are historically the heartland of the Ovimbundu ethnic group, from which MPLA’s historical foes, UNITA, drew its leadership and mass support. The highlands were UNITA’s stronghold during the civil war. The growing following of the sect, what the government perceived as links between the *Light of the World* and main opposition party UNITA, and the regime’s inability to co-opt him and keep him under control can explain the disproportionate, lethal suppression of that religious sect in mid-April 2015.

9 Reuters, 6 May 2015: *Christian sect killings in Angola shrouded in fear and mystery*. By Herculano Coroado (www.reuters.com/article/us-angola-violence/christian-sect-killings-in-angola-shrouded-in-fear-and-mystery-idUSKBN0NR17X20150506).

10 See: Adventistas 2015 (pictures) and YouTube, 16 June 2015: *Genocídio no Monte Sumi* (www.youtube.com/watch?t=17&v=5ZaP1Q4FWg), (video) (or alternatively, for an edited version: www.youtube.com/watch?v=PRMYoVKJX4).

11 See: MakaAngola, 22 April 2016: *Diário de um Sobrevivente do Massacre do Monte Sumi*. By Rafael Marques de Morais (www.makaangola.org/2016/04/diario-de-um-sobrevivente-do-massacre-do-monte-sumi/).

12 I have seen her witness account, but I do not have her permission to reveal any details.

13 ANGOP, 20 April 2015; RTP Notícias, 20 April 2015.

The Aftermath

Back in 2015, the United Nations (UN) called for the establishment of an independent commission of inquiry, but the government has refused.¹⁴ Instead, in April 2015, the Light of the World was banned by Angolan authorities, and on the 5th of April 2016, the Huambo provincial court convicted José Kalupeteka, the leader of the sect, and nine of his followers, allegedly for the killing of nine police officers. Kalupeteka was sentenced to 28 years in prison.¹⁵ The sentence has been appealed, but as of March 2022, the Supreme Court has not answered the call for appeal (but instead it reduced the sentence to 23 years in prison).¹⁶

On the 9th of August 2016, new clashes between police and *Light of the World* followers in Kwanza Sul province reportedly resulted in the deaths of five sect members and three police officers. There are also reports of some 30 people ‘missing’ from these clashes.¹⁷ The media and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) reported that security forces confronted followers in the same area also on the 13th of August 2016, resulting in an unknown number of casualties (IRBC 2019).¹⁸

According to the French organisation *Action des chrétiens pour l’abolition de la torture* (Christian action for the abolition of torture) in April 2017,

It seems that the ‘Light of the World’ Church and its followers continue to be repressed. [...] To this day, the survivors [of the massacre] are in hiding for fear of retaliation. Several of them has managed to flee to other countries and seek asylum, particularly in France [...]. There is no doubt that more than two years after the massacre in Mount Sumi, the international community’s impunity and silence encourage repeated violence against members of the ‘Light of the World’ Church (cited in IRBC 2019).

In April 2018, the sect vice-leader, Justino Tchipango was sentenced to 18 years in prison for his involvement in the deaths of the nine police officers in April 2015.¹⁹ According to some sources, the Light of the World “no longer exists” (IRBC 2019).

José Julino Kalupeteka and the *Light of the World* are not completely forgotten, however. In September 2018, *Friends of Angola* (FOA)²⁰ petitioned the Supreme Court to review the case of the Kalupeteka because “there is evidence that fundamental principles of the criminal procedural code were not scrupulously observed”.²¹ The petition has not been answered. Then, in October 2020 the self-styled *Revolutionary Youth Movement*, commonly known as Revús, announced that they would

14 DW, 12 September 2018: *Caso Kalupeteka: Investigação independente com novo Governo?* (www.dw.com/pt-002/caso-kalupeteka-investiga%C3%A7%C3%A3o-independente-com-novo-governo/a-45454281).

15 DW, 26 July 2019: *José Julino Kalupeteka* (www.dw.com/pt-002/jos%C3%A9-julino-kalupeteka/t-19476761).

16 VoA (Voice of America), 27 August 2020: *Angola: Tribunal Supremo está há quatro anos para decidir sobre recurso de Julino Kalupeteka* (www.voaportugues.com/a/angola-tribunal-supremo-est%C3%A1-h%C3%A1-quatro-anos-para-decidir-sobre-recurso-de-julino-kalupeteka/5560555.html) and DW, 25 May 2021: *Angola: Tribunal Supremo reduz pena de Kalupeteka* (<https://www.dw.com/pt-002/angola-tribunal-supremo-reduz-pena-de-kalupeteka/a-57660653>).

17 See for instance RA (Rede Angola), 15 August 2016: *Confrontos entre elementos de seita e polícia provocam cinco mortos* (www.redeangola.info/confrontos-entre-elementos-de-seita-e-policia-provocam-cinco-mortos/) and RA, 2 September 2016: *ONG denuncia mortes de seguidores de Kalupeteka* (www.redeangola.info/ong-denuncia-mortes-de-seguidores-de-kalupeteka/).

18 Source: DW: 5 September 2016: *New massacre of cult members in Angola*. By Cristiane Vieira (www.dw.com/en/new-massacre-of-cult-members-in-angola/a-19527398).

19 Source: VoA, 24 July 2018: *Vice-líder da seita A Luz do Mundo condenado a 18 anos de prisão* (www.voaportugues.com/a/vice-l%C3%ADder-da-seita-a-luz-do-mundo-condenado-a-18-anos-de-pris%C3%A3o/4498023.html).

20 Friends of Angola (FOA) is a US based human rights advocacy organization established in 2014 in Washington, DC, “to raise the consciousness of the global community to the challenges facing Angola and to support Angolan civil society”. The well-known activist and investigative journalist Rafael Morais is the FOA director in Angola (see www.friendsofngola.org/ and www.makaangola.org/).

21 FOA, 5 September 2018: *Friends of Angola Request to Review Pastor José Julino Kalupeteka case in Angolan’s Supreme Court* (www.friendsofngola.org/archives/10919).

hold demonstrations in Angola during October to demand the unconditional release of Kalupeteka,²² and in January 2021 the organisation *Friends of Angola* issued an open letter to the Angolan president requesting a fair and transparent trial for Kalupeteka.²³

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Since the end of the one-party communist era, the Angolan government is not officially representing atheism and no longer ideologically inclined to suppress religion as such, but as an authoritarian, self-perpetuated regime it strives to maintain control over civil society, including religious organisations. As with civil society more broadly, religious organisations are subject to a host of legal restrictions and government regulations, of which the requirement of a formal registration with the all-powerful regulating authority, the *Instituto Nacional para os Assuntos Religiosos* (INAR), is the most important. To be registered and licenced, a new church or religious organisation must submit a minimum of 60,000 signatures and must have at least 100,000 members and presence in at least 12 of Angola's 18 provinces.

Religious groups and churches that delivers government services (like providing social services and taking part in voter registration) are treated favourably, and churches that never criticise the regime but support the status quo by their silence on political issues are tolerated.

Religious groups and churches that stand up to government abuse and human rights violations are criticised and harassed by representatives of the regime. When the *Conferência Eclesial de Angola e São Tomé* (CEAST), a group of Catholic bishops, criticised the government for not declaring an emergency in the drought-ridden southern part of the country, this provoked some government officials to say that “the Church should not intrude into politics”.²⁴

The Catholic Church and the leading group of bishops of the CEAST has nevertheless ‘intruded’ into politics on many occasions, with their statements and pastoral letters. They called for peace during the civil war, for democracy in the early 1990s, and they have consistently call for dialogue and social justice (Jensen and Pestana 2010: 20). Despite the fact that several Catholic Church priests have openly supported the MPLA, and that some restrictions have been effective also on the Catholic Church, its link to Rome has granted it some autonomy and a few bishops have become more and more outspoken about the poor living conditions in Angola (and about MPLA's responsibility for them) over the past few years and particularly since October 2021, when a new board was elected to direct the bishops' conference. In a statement in February 2022, the bishops' said that Angola is being impacted by “fearful poverty, loss of purchasing power, galloping unemployment, degradation of habits, empty dialogue between the parties and society, and high levels of intolerance”.²⁵

Religious groups and churches that defies government control and restrictions are facing more severe government repression. The non-registration of Islam seems to be quite effective. The rumours circulating on social media (unconfirmed reports) that government has been bulldozing down ‘illegal’ Mosques seems to be successful in its chilling effect. The massive and lethal repression of the *Luz*

22 VoA, 23 September 2019: “Revús” anunciam manifestações para pedir libertação de José Julino Kalupeteka (www.voaportugues.com/a/rev%C3%BAs-anunciam-manifesta%C3%A7%C3%B5es-para-pedir-liberta%C3%A7%C3%A3o-de-jos%C3%A9-julino-kalupeteka/5095235.html).

23 FOA, 25 January 2021: *Open letter to Angolan President to Request a Fair and Transparent Trial for Pastor José Julino Kalupeteka* (www.friendsofanguola.org/archives/11841).

24 Ver Angola, 12 October 2021: *Catholic Bishops defend a state of emergency in the south of the country due to draught* (www.verangola.net/pt/en/102021/Society/27642/Catholic-bishops-defend-a-state-of-emergency-in-the-south-of-the-country-due-to-drought.htm) and VoA, 27 February 2022: *Igrejas devem ser intervenientes na situação política e social, defendem analistas angolanos*. By Agostinho Gayeta (www.voaportugues.com/a/igrejas-devem-ser-interveniente-na-situa%C3%A7%C3%A3o-pol%C3%ADtica-e-social-defendem-analistas-angolanos/6461728.html).

25 National Catholic Reporter, 21 February 2022: *Catholic bishops in Angola emerge as fearless critics of country's ruling party*. By Eduardo Campos Lima (www.ncronline.org/news/politics/catholic-bishops-angola-emerge-fearless-critics-countrys-ruling-party).

do Mundo sect and the heavy sentencing of its leader produced at least a temporary restricting effect on other congregations.

In early 2022, however, the Catholic bishops spoke out again, and warned that the elections scheduled for August 2022 could be manipulated to keep the MPLA in power. They also warned that the ruling party would not allow the elections to be properly monitored.²⁶

26 National Catholic Reporter, 21 February 2022. See also VoA, 7 February 2022: *Angola: Bispos voltam a pedir transparência nas eleições e destacam importância de observadores*. By João Marcos and Coque Mukuta (www.voaportugues.com/a/bispos-cat%C3%B3licos-voltam-a-pedir-transpar%C3%A2ncia-nas-eleic%C3%B5es-e-destacam-import%C3%A2ncia-de-observadores/6430871.html).

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The history of religious repression in Angola stands in sharp contrast to the official representations of religious tolerance. The regime keeps religion under government control, through formal and informal methods, and it suppresses the spread of churches beyond those which are mainstream and controllable. The 7th Day Adventist sect *A Luz do Mundo* (Light of the World) experienced the worst in terms of religious suppression in 2015, when it was officially singled out for 'complete destruction' and hundreds of sect members were killed in the so-called 'Mount Sumi' massacre. Despite this, religion and churches are spreading rapidly, some are rather outspoken government critics, and Angolan Catholic bishops recently warned that the upcoming elections could be manipulated to keep the ruling party in power.

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