

Dos Santos Seeks to Pass the Buck On Lack of Donor Support (Angola - EU)

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The European Union has denied that it has called off the proposed donors' conference for Angola, saying it was up to the Angolan government to request it.

President Jose Eduardo dos Santos said earlier this month that the European Union had scrapped the idea of a donors' conference. "Representatives of the executive commission of the European Union have told us that it is no longer necessary to hold an international conference for the reconstruction of Angola because Angola has mineral resources," Dos Santos said.

"We must step up our efforts. That is why we have sought bilateral cooperation and private investment to rehabilitate our infrastructure," Dos Santos told the opening session of the central committee of his ruling MPLA party, the Movement for the Liberation of Angola.

But a European Commission spokesman told SouthScan, "Our line has always been that we are ready to support such a conference, but require an official request from the Angolan government". He denied Dos Santos' claim and said "We have no idea who in Commission is supposed to have said otherwise".

Analysts believe Dos Santos has to provide an explanation to his party heading for its first post-war elections next year for the failure to mobilize foreign donors. They believe he does not want to call for it now because he would first have come to an agreement with the International Monetary Fund on transparent accounting for oil revenues which appear to have gone in the past to his own accounts and those of his elite.

But he also feels the pressure is off because of a large Chinese loan made earlier this year. The IMF and World Bank appear well aware that their capacity to put pressure on Dos Santos may be diminishing because of this maverick player. An official from the Banks' International Finance Corporation said at the Petroleum Congress in SA earlier this month that "Chinese oil companies are marketing themselves to West African governments in that they don't care about governance. It's a mistake."

Angola asked the European Union in April 2002, after the end of the war, to help organise the international donors' conference to rebuild the country.

But hostility to providing outside aid has grown in the face of the state's massive oil revenues and the refusal by the government to deliver clear accounting for them. Angola may be pumping two million barrels of crude per day by 2008 and will also benefit from the sharp rise in oil prices this year. Much of this revenue is already mortgaged, but much also goes to a small number of ultra-wealthy Angolans, say analysts.

Dos Santos told the MPLA meeting his government would set out priorities for reconstruction, starting with roads, then restoring the electricity network and finally providing clean water.

"All of this must be done in tandem with mine clearance," said Dos Santos.

The government estimates that at least five million mines remain in Angola.

Displaced people

The government has been successful in winning support from China for the reconstruction of roads and rail networks while Israel has also stepped in to help restore the health and agriculture sectors.

But there is no doubt that finance has to be found from somewhere to aid the almost 100,000 displaced people still unable to return to their homes, according to a recent study.

Findings from a joint assessment carried out earlier this year by the UN and the government revealed that although some four million internally displaced persons (IDPs) have made their way home since April 2002, more than 91,000 remained in limbo, mainly in Cabinda, Huila, Kuando Kubango, Luanda and Moxico provinces.

The major impediments were bad roads, lack of transport and landmines. In the areas worst affected by the war there was "limited administrative capacity and infrastructure, and basic services are virtually non-existent".

In Cabinda province, however, the "massive presence" of Angolan armed forces was seen as the chief deterrent to those wanting to go home, the report said.

The level of political intolerance and violence between non-displaced communities and formerly displaced persons in some provinces is also rising.

In March this year, the south-eastern province of Kuando Kubango saw heavy clashes between supporters of the ruling MPLA party and the main opposition party, Unita, which left 29 people injured.

The humanitarian situation facing IDPs living in camps remains bleak, the report said. This was in part blamed on the government's refusal to recognize IDP populations and camps as part of the surrounding communities.

The plight of Angola's IDP population has worsened as donor support for humanitarian assistance progressively reduced, the report said. In Cabinda most of the displaced were receiving no assistance. The World Food Programme was compelled to reduce the cereal rations it provided to vulnerable groups in Angola, mainly refugees and those internally displaced.

Improved funding was urgently needed in areas of return, which were often worst affected by the war, where there was a high proportion of poor, food-insecure families; limited local administrative capacity; and infrastructure and basic services were largely non-existent.

Even the process of demobilising former Unita and MPLA fighters into a single army has run into the sands in some places. In Bié province it is former Unita combatants who remain in the military camps while former MPLA soldiers have returned to their homes, observers recently in the area told SouthScan.

Private oil companies

Angola's goal of churning out two million barrels per day by 2008 may get a boost from private local companies to be created to take part in exploration under a new law adopted last year, said Syanga Abilio, vice president of Sonangol, Angola's national oil company at the World Petroleum Congress held in South Africa earlier this month. He called for foreign investment and "national partners even from South Africa".

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But Western companies and countries do not believe major investment will come unless the Angolan authorities are more transparent on their oil revenues. Many called for the adoption of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (Eiti), whose principles were agreed to in June 2003, and which seeks the publication and verification of company payments and government revenues from oil, gas and mining.

About 20 countries - including Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, Azerbaijan and Nigeria - have endorsed or were actively implementing the Eiti. Angola has not.

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