

**Statement by His Excellency Mr. Ismael Gaspar Martins
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of the Republic of Angola
in the Third Committee at the 61st Session of
the General Assembly on agenda item 41: Report of the United Nations High
Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and
displaced persons and humanitarian questions**

New York, November 08th, 2006

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation wishes to thank Mr. Antonio Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for his reports and the very useful introductory statement he made on Agenda item 41: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions.

My delegation fully associates itself to the statement made earlier by His Excellency Mr. Ileka Atoki, the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of Congo, on behalf of the Member Countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Mr. Chairman,

The Angolan Government recognizes that it primary responsibility the assistance and protection of refugees and internally displaced persons, and for this reason the government have been allocating financial and material resources to that effect. Very recently, my Government made available resources to support the final phase of the repatriation process, which we hope to conclude by the end of this year, in accordance with our commitments arrived at the meeting of the Tripartite Commission (Zambia, Angola, and UNHCR).

The international community has been witnessing the historically high economic growth of Angola, which is characteristic of countries that are reborn of ashes. However, we must underline that as a result of the process of reconciliation and national reconstruction, such growth has an impact that is in great measure absorbed by the improvement of the well being of the populations and of the more than 370 thousand refugees that are already in Angola as a result of repatriation operations, as well as the more than 4 million internal displaced persons (IDPs) that have been resettled during these 4 years.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to stress that at such a singular time in our history, Angola prioritizes the following areas with regards to the repatriation process and the socioeconomic reintegration of refugees and IDPs: mine action, food safety and professional training.

Mine action represents the main obstacle to national recovery and reconstruction in general, and to the rehabilitation and reintegration of refugees. In this context, the Government established in 2005 the Executive Demining Commission, which comprises a governmental task force including the civil society, International organizations and companies, which in only 7 months, were responsible for countless sensitization initiatives and for the removal of more than 15,000 explosive devices (including anti-personal and anti-tank mines) near roads, bridges, sources of water supply, airports, refugee's resettling camps, etc. To these numbers we added the more than 1,400,000 removed explosive devices (including anti-personal and anti-tank mines) particularly those in the proximity of destroyed during the last 10 years, the equivalent to an area of more than 200 soccer fields.

Unfortunately, we still experience obstacles created by landmines, with a larger incidence in the access to farm lands, pasture areas for cattle, circulation in principal and secondary roads, access to infrastructures, while hindering access to sources of water.

Mr. Chairman,

We are aware that many Angolans still face precarious conditions in their areas of origin in spite of the government's efforts to minimize this situation. Moreover, Angola has been observing with growing concern the occurrence of natural calamities, which have affected more than half a million people last year alone, including farmers and cattle breeders, affecting above all their means of subsistence.

Notwithstanding the existing difficulties, we are experiencing across positive results with the return and resettling of Angolans in the country, especially with regards to the increase of cultivation areas and the production and commercialization of agricultural products.

In order to guarantee food safety, as well as to reduce food shortage, and to re-launch agricultural production, my Government is implementing sustainable rehabilitation programs of the means of production with a view to assuring food self-sufficiency, the preparation of farm lands for the next agricultural campaigns, food assistance to the most vulnerable populations, and stimulation of the production of basic foods, among other measures.

Mr. Chairman,

Only the countries that have suffered total destruction of their economic fabric can truly appreciate the significance of reintegrating more than a third of their population in the productive activity of the Country. We are aware that even though Angola's economy relies above all on two mineral products that require qualified labor, we will continue to provide training to returnees and internally displaced persons and we will continue to distribute agricultural kits to the population. To this end, we also hope that the General Program for Demobilized Soldiers and Repatriation establishes safer conditions in rural areas, and consequently, that it encourages IDPs to retake their productive life in the rural economy, freeing additional national resources to invest in the economic and social sectors, as well as to invest in the human capital of ex-soldiers, and to reinforce the capacity of community-based development organizations to implement programs.

In this regard, my delegation wishes to appeal to the donor community to assist in the conclusion of the repatriation process and subsequent socioeconomic reintegration of refugees, IDPs and demobilized soldiers. I further wish to express my Government's appreciation to the UNHCR and the various Non Governmental Organizations, working in cooperation with the UNIC's assistance program for the commendable work they are developing among refugees and hosting communities under very difficult conditions. My Government will continue to fulfill its role of coordinating all matters relating to refugee protection and assistance.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, I would also like to thank the support of friends and countries that have been financially assisting Angola in this rehabilitation and national reconstruction phase. We particularly thank the neighboring countries of SADC for the welcoming and

dignified manner in which they treated refugees during the most difficult period of their lives; this has been a very profound gesture of solidarity.

Thank you.