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Newsletter
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Chinese Prime Minister visits Angola

The Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China, Wen Jiabao, started a two-day visit to Angola on 20 June, the first by such a high-ranking Chinese official since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1983.

Speaking at the start of talks between ministerial delegations from the two countries, President José Eduardo dos Santos hailed the 'pragmatic stance and all-round cooperation the People's Republic of China maintains with Angola, making it possible to hasten the reconstruction of our country ravaged by four decades of war'.

Prime Minister Wen Jiabao thanked the Angolan government for its support for the single China policy. The Prime Minister spoke highly of Angola's policy of peace and development, within the framework of reconciliation, consolidating national unity and promoting social equality. He hailed the economic successes achieved by Angola in recent years and the country's contribution to stability in Southern Africa and peace in the Great Lakes region.

Referring to economic cooperation between Angola and China, the Prime Minister said there had been a significant increase in bilateral trade and Angola was now China's second commercial partner in Africa.

During a visit to the Luanda General Hospital, Wen Jiabao announced that Chinese medical specialists would be coming to Angola very soon to train Angolan doctors.

Yang Zilin, president of China's Exim Bank, announced after a meeting with Prime Minister Fernando da Piedade Dias dos Santos that China had granted Angola an additional US\$2 billion loan.

He said they had discussed China's participation in the reconstruction of Angola. This has been essentially in the building, repair and rehabilitation of bridges, roads and railways, hospitals and schools, as well as power and water supply systems.

José Pedro de Morais, Minister of Finance, said at the end of the Chinese Prime Minister's visit that seven financing agreements on telecommunications and fisheries had been signed within the framework of a memorandum of understanding on the granting of the loan. These were new areas for cooperation with China.

'The government's strategic idea,' the Minister said, 'is to re-equip the country and restore all

services and infrastructure, so as to enable our economy to function with a minimum of constraints.'

Agreement on ending hostilities in Cabinda

The first official meeting between delegations from the government and the Cabindan Forum for Dialogue was held in Chicamba, municipality of Massabi, Cabinda Province, from 17 to 24 June. A press release issued after the meeting said the situation was under control, with a sharp decrease in military activity, and that the parties had expressed their willingness to reach an unequivocal agreement to achieve peace and national reconciliation in the province.

The delegations reaffirmed their respect for the constitution and other legislation and reaffirmed their unequivocal acceptance that Angola was a unitary and indivisible state, while recognising that, within the national context, the specific characteristics of Cabinda Province made a special status necessary for the province, in terms of provincial government and local administration.

They reaffirmed their commitment to the state of law and Angola's democratic institutions, as well as to peace and national reconciliation in Cabinda Province, rejecting any attempt to violate public order and the law and unreservedly condemning as criminal, unjustifiable and unacceptable any act of political subversion or terrorism by anyone whatsoever.

At a further meeting on 30 June, the two parties agreed to end all offensive military movements by the Angolan Armed Forces and Flec's military forces and to station Flec's military forces, under the authority of the Cabindan Forum for Dialogue, in established zones and areas, where their security will be guaranteed by the Angolan Armed Forces.

General Geraldo Sachipengo Nunda, deputy chief of general staff of the Angolan Armed Forces, who led the government delegation, described the cessation of hostilities as 'a very important step'.

António Bento Bembe, president of the Cabindan Forum for Dialogue, said he was 'willing and ready' to contribute to the restoration of peace in Cabinda. Flanked by members of his delegation, who included Maurício Amado Zita, the Flec chief of general staff and other high-ranking Flec officers, he said 'we are banking on being able to establish peace in Cabinda this time, so that we can all work for the development of our country'.

He said that war had never led to development and hence the need for an agreement with the government. Dialogue, he said, had always been the major victor in every war.

Voter registration to start between August and October

The National Electoral Commission, CNE, submitted its proposal on the start of voter registration to the government at a meeting in Luanda on 14 June.

Adão de Almeida, the CNE spokesman, said the CNE had decided not to make the proposal public yet, but it was not far from the date suggested by the political parties at a meeting the previous day.

'The forecasts of the parties indicated the start of registration between August and October and, we, bearing this in mind, as well as other objective factors presented to us by the Inter-ministerial Commission for the Electoral Process, believe that would be ideal,' he said.

At the meeting with political parties on 13 June, Caetano de Sousa, president of the CNE, reaffirmed that voter registration would take place over a six-month period, in accordance with the programme put forward by the government.

He said that as soon as the problem of premises was resolved, probably within three months, the members of opposition parties would attend regular meetings of the CNE, so as to be able to follow the carrying out of all the required tasks closely.

He expressed concern about the lack of premises for provincial, municipal and communal electoral offices, saying that in some places existing buildings were being used while in others new ones were being built.

The government had indicated two weeks earlier the start of recruitment of the first 3,528 people to make up the voter registration brigades, giving until 22 June for applications to be submitted.

The government plans to recruit about 14,000 people to form approximately 2,000 brigades to register the estimated seven million Angolan voters.

Angola elected to chair new UN Peace-building Commission

Angola's Ambassador to the United Nations, Ismael Gaspar Martins, was elected by acclamation on 23 June to chair the organisational committee of the Peace-building Commission, a new body to support countries in post-conflict situations.

'As a representative of a country which is in the process of overcoming the negative consequences of many years of conflict and from a continent with the largest number of countries in post-conflict situations, this choice is to me a symbolic recognition of the purposes for which our leaders decided to establish the Peace-building Commission,' the Ambassador said in his address.

He described the establishment of the commission as 'a turning point in the manner in which each of us and our organisation deals with post-conflict situations', and said 'we have been afforded a unique opportunity to meet the expectations of millions of people who have been affected by cycles of conflict'.

Fisheries programme to cost US\$27.6 billion

The Ministry of Fisheries' programme, which will cost more than US\$27.6 billion, provides for 30 projects, including building various kinds of vessels, terminals, fishing ports and cold storage facilities and buying trucks.

Maria Antónia Nelumba, national director of market research, said 23 of these projects would be financed by the Chinese government's credit line. Another three projects would be funded by the United Nations Development Programme, the Agricultural Development Fund and the African Development Bank, while the remainder awaited funds from other sources.

Priority was now being given to boat building, she continued, and some boats from South Africa and Portugal were already in the country, while others were expected shortly from Portugal. It was also planned to rehabilitate and build cold storage depots, fish shops and markets in every province.

Maria Antónia Nelumba went on to say that funds had already been made available for building fishing ports in Cabinda, Kicombo (Kwanza Sul) and Cacuaco (Luanda), and fish meal and fish oil plants would be built in the provinces of Luanda, Benguela and Namibe.

Government aims to create jobs for demobilised soldiers

The government's solution to finding more and better jobs for citizens, especially demobilised soldiers, is to ensure the vigorous relaunching of the economy, according to Carlos Lopes, Deputy Minister of Planning.

He was speaking on 23 June at a meeting in Luanda between the institute for the social and vocational reintegration of ex-servicemen, Irsem, and members of the multi-country demobilisation and reintegration programme involving states in the Great Lakes region.

He acknowledged that most former soldiers, like most of Angola's population, still had relatively low incomes because they were unemployed or had only temporary jobs, but economic development would change this.

The Deputy Minister went on to say that the social reintegration of ex-servicemen had been a success. Most of them had been duly integrated in the communities of their choice with their families.

Under an official communication signed by President José Eduardo dos Santos on 6 June, a commission for the establishment of projects for the full rehabilitation of the war-disabled and technical and vocational training for former soldiers is to be set up. One of its tasks will be to create the material conditions for creating rehabilitation centres for those disabled during military service, to ensure full clinical treatment, social reintegration and training for the return to active life of at least 1,500 men at each centre.

The commission will be entrusted with creating conditions to enable war-disabled men to engage in national reconstruction, restoring their full potential as rapidly as possible.

Coordinated by the Ministry of Assistance and Social Reintegration, the commission will include representatives of the ministries of Health, Public Administration, Employment and Social Security, Education and Defence. It is to present a feasibility study and proposed budget within 30 days and supervise work in progress with a view to its completion within 180 days.

The commission must give a monthly report to the President. If need be, it may recruit technicians and set up working groups.

SADC asked to support mine clearance

A delegation from the national inter-ministerial commission for demining and humanitarian assistance, CNIDAH, attended a meeting of the SADC mine action committee in Windhoek on 12 June. The meeting examined reports on the mine situation in member countries and drew up proposals to be presented to the SADC defence and security policy organ.

General Santana André Pitra 'Petroff', president of the CNIDAH, said the main concern in Angola was that the country was preparing to hold elections and there were still places that were mined. He said the government had therefore asked the SADC secretariat to make more efforts to support Angola in respect of this challenge, while the CNIDAH was doing its utmost to create conditions for successful elections.

The meeting also discussed the recommendation of African Union heads of state on 'the possibility of joint participation by countries that were directly or indirectly involved in mine laying in the continent', like the case of South Africa, a country that could help to lessen the hardships of victims in the region.

More than 4,890 explosive devices laid in different parts of the central highland province of Huambo were deactivated by the British NGO the Halo Trust between 2002 and 2005, clearing an area of about 99,000 hectares. A Halo Trust report said the removal of mines and unexploded ordnance was imperative in Angola, especially in Huambo Province, since they prevented the implementation of government programmes.

Agostinho Ndjaka, provincial director of the National Demining Institute, praised the Halo Trust for its work and spoke of the need for everyone to work together not only to clear mines, but to educate people and prevent mine accidents and to provide assistance to victims.

He said the clearing of agricultural land and access routes to previously military areas was a priority of the provincial demining commission and that the Angolan Armed Forces were fully involved in identifying mined areas.

The aim, he continued, was to clear the major routes between different municipalities, villages and settlements. Increasing the awareness of people in the most remote areas would be essential to reducing the number of accidents, because 'this will enable people to know where they can go safely and to recognise the signs that indicate minefields', he said.

Repatriation of Angolans from DR Congo

The voluntary repatriation of 50,000 Angolan refugees in DR Congo started on 20 June, World Refugee Day. Kofi Dwomo, a representative of the UN refugee agency, the UNHCR, said that 13,000 considered 'vulnerable' were being repatriated immediately and the operation was expected to be completed by the end of the year.

He said the UNHCR was supporting the local government's efforts to ensure the reintegration of the returnees into society by building medical posts, schools and wells.

According to a UNHCR report, 85,000 Angolan refugees returned to the country in 2000, about 133,000 returned in 2003, and 90,233 in 2004. There were about 500,000 Angolan refugees in neighbouring countries like Zambia, Namibia, Congo, DR Congo, Botswana and South Africa until 2004.

Red Cross to reduce aid in Bié Province

Ângelo Sassongo, the Angolan Red Cross representative in Bié Province, said that they were reducing food aid because of the government's food self-sufficiency programme in the province. He said the Angolan Red Cross was currently assisting about 32,000 people, but this number would now be reduced to 21,000.

'We have concluded from the survey we made that 11,000 of the people we have been supporting can now live off the crops they have been growing,' he said. He said he hoped that other physically fit people would engage in agriculture or other money making activities to end dependence.

The Red Cross, he said, had been assisting vulnerable communities, especially returnees from Zambia, providing them with maize, maize meal, beans, cooking oil, salt and soya provided by the World Food Programme.

New graduates from vocational training centre

One thousand and forty-four people who attended courses in diesel mechanics, metalworking, refrigeration, tailoring and dressmaking, plumbing, English, electricity, building, electronics, carpentry, handicrafts and IT at the Cazenga vocational training centre were given certificates on 16 June. Organised by the Ministry of Public Administration, Employment and Social Security, the five-month courses were attended by 1,119 people, 50 of whom dropped out, while 25 failed.

António Saturnino, director of the centre, said the courses were being given to help to reduce unemployment rates in Angola and to enable young people to enter the labour market. The centre started to give courses in November 1999.

Countrywide child vaccination

The '*Viva a vida com saúde*' (enjoy a healthy life) campaign, organised by the Ministry of Health and its partners in July, is to be carried out by 18,371 people. It is aimed at reducing infant mortality by 50 percent by 2008. The first phase, from 5 to 9 July, will cover urban areas and the second, from 12 to 26 July, rural ones, with a view to immunising 3.635 million children aged up to five.

During the campaign, polio and measles vaccines, vitamin A and anti-parasite treatment will be given, and mosquito nets treated with insecticide will be distributed to immunised children in provinces with high malaria rates.

Filomena Wilson, director of the public health promotion office, said the government, the World Health Organisation and Unicef were providing US\$15.853 million for the campaign. The money, she said, would be spent on buying vaccines, transport, logistics and all other aspects of the campaign.

Angola has an infant mortality rate of 240 in every 1,000 births. It is hoped to reduce this rate and achieve the millennium development targets of eradicating poverty and providing better health services.

A WHO report said that, after three consecutive years in which there had been no new cases, in 2004 Angola had ceased to be considered a country in which polio was endemic. However, there was a new outbreak between April and November 2005, probably as a result of a virus from Uttar Pradesh, in India. It said that a low rate of routine vaccination and intensive population movements throughout the country had facilitated the spread of the virus, resulting in ten confirmed cases in the provinces of Benguela, Luanda, Lunda Sul and Moxico.

In response, the report continued, Angola had stepped up vaccination. After the last case in Cubal, Benguela Province, in November 2005, there had been no further cases in the next seven months, suggesting that the outbreak had ended.

Cholera continues decline

The government has been stepping up preventive measures to stem the cholera epidemic in the country. This was announced by José Van-Dúnem, Deputy Minister of health, at the end of a meeting in Luanda on 8 June with the governors of Angola's eighteen provinces. The measures, he told the press, included improving sanitation and the quality of water supplied to the population, and collecting and treating solid waste and refuse.

He said the epidemic was 'clearly declining', owing especially to the start of the dry season, increased supplies of clean water and greater public awareness of preventive measures.

The Deputy Minister went on to say that the meeting had not been just to review the current situation, but to create conditions to ensure that there would not be another cholera outbreak in coming years and that, if there were, it would not assume the proportions of the current one.

The Chinese Embassy donated US\$200,000 for the fight against cholera and the Egyptian Embassy presented the Ministry of Health with 160 kilos of anti-cholera vaccine at a ceremony in Luanda on 14 June. Minister of Health Sebastião Veloso expressed his thanks to the two countries. Deputy Minister of Health José Van-Dúnem again spoke of the significant decline in the number of cases. In Luanda, for example, there were now 50 cases, compared with the 500 cases a day there used to be, and the same was happening in the provinces of Huambo, Bié and Malanje.

The Ministry, he said, was concerned about the situation in Lunda Norte, in the Cuango diamond area, and in Chamuteba, Uíje Province, where the number of cases continued to increase. There were still a large number of infected people in Namibe Province. José Van-Dúnem stressed the importance of awareness work and the cooperation of the public, which had resulted in behaviour changes and a fall in the number of fatalities.

Deputy Minister José Van-Dúnem went to Uíje Province on 16 June to assess the situation. He advised on measures to stop the spread of cholera during a meeting with the administrators of the province's sixteen municipalities.

He went to Lunda Norte Province on 20 June for the same purpose with a delegation that included officials from the ministries of Territorial Administration, Energy and Water and Public Works.

The figures given by the WHO and the Ministry of Health on 27 June were a total of 47,912 cases and 1,980 deaths in fourteen of the country's eighteen provinces.

Deputy Minister calls for redoubled efforts to fight Aids

José Van-Dúnem, Deputy Minister of Health, has described the Aids pandemic as a worldwide problem that requires redoubled efforts on the part of the international community. He was speaking in New York on 2 June at a special UN session on HIV/Aids.

He praised the commitment of UNAIDS and the African Union in respect of technical cooperation and coordinating the efforts of member states, and stressed the importance of the establishment of the global fund to fight Aids, tuberculosis and malaria as a significant step towards reducing mortality rates and promoting global access to treatment, overcoming some of the barriers imposed by poverty and social inequality.

In Angola, the Deputy Minister said, a study on the number of HIV positive pregnant women attending pre-natal clinics carried out by the Ministry of Health, in partnership with the Centre for Disease Control and the World Health Organisation, had shown a rate of 2.7 to 2.8 percent. The rate, he said, ranged from 10.7 percent in Cunene Province to 0.80 percent in Bié, with the most affected age group from 15 to 29 years old. These figures, he continued, showed the urgent need for a multi-sector response to fight the disease rapidly and effectively.

'To this end, a 2003-2008 national strategic plan started to be implemented. A programme to enable HIV positive women to give birth to healthy children was started in 2003, opening the way for treatment with anti-retrovirals,' he said.

José Van-Dúnem said the Esperança Hospital, a national treatment centre, had been established in 2005, as had the National Institute for Fighting Aids. This had given enormous

momentum to the fight in Angola, resulting in the extension of anti-retrovirals to eleven of the country's eighteen provinces.

He appealed to the pharmaceutical industry to reduce the prices of anti-retrovirals, including new products being researched, so as to ensure that universal access was attained by 2010.

New social projects

Henda Ducados, assistant executive director of the Social Support Fund, Fas, said the Fas will be spending about US\$120 million in some of the country's provinces over the next four years. She announced this on 18 June in Menongue, capital of Kuando Kubango Province, in southeast Angola, while introducing her delegation to the provincial council. She said that she had come to Kuando Kubango with António Malguco, the Fas director in the neighbouring province of Cunene, to discuss the establishment of a Fas office in the region.

The Fas is intended to build, improve and expand basic social and economic facilities, using a community-directed approach.

Henda Ducados said that 710 projects would be carried out in the area of education, 130 in health, 1,250 in water and sanitation, 200 in economic facilities and 50 more in other areas.

Two phases of the Fas, a financially autonomous institution, have already been carried out. During the first phase, from 1994 to 2000, about US\$30.7 million was disbursed by the World Bank, the Angolan government and donors like Italy, Sweden and Japan, to fund 687 projects that benefited 924,700 people. The second phase, from 2000 to 2003, involved the spending of US\$40.65 million on 979 projects, benefiting more than 924,000 people, and providing training for 1,443 people.

Henda Ducados said that extending the work of the Fas to the interior of the country could help the government to solve problems affecting the people.

The Luanda provincial government completed more than twenty social projects in nine of the province's municipalities between January and May this year. They included improved street lighting and clean water supplies, the building and rehabilitation of schools, hospitals and health posts and waste collection and treatment facilities. Much had also been done to restore roads and pavements, green areas, children's parks and parking lots, install traffic signals and plant trees.

This was revealed on 4 June by Gabriel Leitão, director of the provincial government studies, planning and statistics department, in an address to a meeting of residents' associations. He spoke of the need for the cooperation of municipal administrations and residents' associations in implementing other projects on which the provincial government was going to spend about US\$67.4 million this year.

The Fas spent US\$90,000 in the first five months of this year on building and furnishing four primary schools in Caála, Huambo Province. There are currently 260 schools in the municipality of Caála and 55,000 children are enrolled in primary schools this year.

Since the start of its activities in Benguela Province twelve years ago, the Fas has financed 134 community development projects at a cost of US\$3.52 million.

Carlos Alberto Guardado, the provincial Fas director, said the projects carried out were related to economic facilities, water, sanitation, education, health and the environment, the aim being to fight poverty and to involve the most vulnerable people in reconstruction and economic and social development.

Building new hospitals

Francisco Muana, director of the local government studies and projects office in Namibe Province, revealed that work had started a few days earlier on building a new mother and child care hospital, a 20-month project that would cost US\$4 million.

The 300-bed hospital will include an outpatients department, maternity and paediatric wards, two operating theatres, a mortuary and a canteen. It will provide 520 jobs - doctors, nurses and administrative staff.

Francisco Muana said the project was part of the local government public investment programme aimed at providing more social services for the population.

New 60-bed hospitals that are being built in the municipalities of Matala, Quilengues, Caconda, Jamba and Cuvango, in Huíla Province, funded by the Chinese credit line, will benefit more than a million people.

Oscar Isalino, the provincial director of health, said that health centres were being built in Gambos, Cacula, Chipindo and Quipungo, while work on rehabilitating and expanding the 200-bed mother and child care hospital and the Dr António Agostinho Neto Central Hospital in Lubango had been completed.

This programme, he added, was accompanied by the recruitment of new staff.

Steps to be taken to combat violence against children

Roberto Leal Monteiro 'Ngongo', Minister of the Interior, announced in Luanda on 17 June that the government was drawing up a policy to combat violence against children everywhere in the country.

He was addressing the opening of a round table meeting on violence against children organised by his Ministry and the National Children's Institute, Inac, to mark African Children's day.

The great challenge, he said, was to ensure the urgent intervention of the Ministries of Education, Health, the Family and the Advancement of Women and Youth and Sports, as well as the Ministry of Justice, to ensure that the rights of children were respected.

He condemned physical and psychological violence against children, corporal and moral punishment, humiliation, heavy labour and sexual and other forms of abuse.

Among the causes of such conduct, the Minister said, were poverty, alcoholism, drug addiction, psychological stress, illiteracy, a decline in moral values and ignorance of the rights of children, and he criticised people who wrongly held that violence was a legitimate way of educating children or making them behave well.

The Minister called for more rapid changes in the law, so as to make all kinds of violence against children criminal offences, while imposing heavier penalties.

The meeting was attended by Cândida Celeste, Minister of the Family and the Advancement of Women, Angela Kearney, the Unicef representative in Angola, and representatives of the Ministry of Assistance and Social Reintegration, the criminal investigation department, the juvenile court, a number of children's homes and other institutions.

Earlier in the month Manuela Coelho, director of the studies and research office of Inac, said

there had been a marked decrease in child abuse in the country over the past three years, as a result of the implementation since 2003 of a plan of action against child labour and trafficking and sexual abuse of children.

She said the highest incidence of exploitation and sexual abuse of children had been in Cunene Province, owing to extensive commercial activity across the long border with Namibia.

'Now the situation is completely different,' she said, 'because of action taken under the plan, which was started in that province. Children used to be sexually abused there and made to do heavy work like carrying goods.'

Speaking after a talk on combating child labour, she acknowledged that there had been some reports in the press, but Inac had not been officially notified about them.

Manuela Coelho stressed that the war and the vast extension and vulnerability of borders with neighbouring countries had had negative effects in this respect.

The government set up a multi-sector commission headed by Inac, which includes, among others, representatives from the Ministries of the Family and the Advancement of Women, Youth and Sports, Justice and the Interior, entrusted with putting the plan of action into effect and maintaining contacts with other countries in the region to discuss these issues.