Angola marks 45 years of National Independence

Luanda – Right on the night of 11 November 1975, the year that marked the end of the War in Vietnam and the US army’s heaviest defeat ever, the World witnessed, in expectation, the proclamation of the then People’s Republic of Angola.

By Elias Tumba, ANGOP editor

On that day, amid a tense military environment hovering over several regions of the country, a new sovereign nation, in the Portuguese-speaking space, emerged, which, by its own merit, got rid of the Portuguese colonial yoke, after many attempts to secure the much wanted self-determination.

The proclamation of independence was the culmination of a hard process of general armed uprising by Angolans against the Portuguese regime, which started on 4 February 1961, in what came to be officially known as the National Armed Struggle Liberation Day.

The process of total self-affirmation of the country, today with 30 million inhabitants, involved thousands of fellow-countrymen, including politicians, church people and anonymous citizens, who shed their blood and gave their own lives over to see the dream of freedom, inspired by their ancestors, come true.

The proclamation of the national Independence represents the turning point in the centuries long struggle for self-determination, waged by brave worriers (kings and queens), who fell to the hardship of the oppressing regime, but left alive the hope to see a sovereign nation to emerge.

Among these heroes, highlight goes to Mandume Ya Ndemufayo, Ngola Kiluanji, Ngola Kanini,
Nzinga Mbande, Mutu Ya Kevela, Bula Matadi and many other freedom precursors, who saw the dream made come true, by three liberation movements, only in the 20th century.

These are the Angola People’s Liberation Movement (MPLA), the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), led, at the time, by Agostinho Neto, Jonas Savimbi and Holden Roberto, respectively.

It was under the leadership of these nationalists and historical leaders, allied to the spiritual struggle of various church people, that Angola set this important twist and proclaimed its independence, under an environment of internal conflict among the above mentioned three liberation movements.

On the basis of the tension, which led to a violent war, were supposed breaches of the premises of the Alvor Agreement, which arose after the “Revolução dos Cravos”, on April 25, 1974, in Portugal, and the decision of the new Portuguese authorities to grant independence to the colonies.

In the case of Angola, this step was "sealed" with the Alvor Agreement, in January 1975, between the colonial power and the three nationalist movements, which provided, among other elements, for the formation of a Transitional Government, with the participation of the Portuguese themselves and representatives of the liberation movements.

With 70 articles and 11 chapters, the text, signed in Algarve, Portugal, outlined the main guidelines for the proclamation of national independence, on 11 November 1975, in a peaceful manner.

It was, in particular, a kind of general ceasefire pact between representatives of the Portuguese State and the three liberation movements, which had already been observed, in fact, by the respective armed wings throughout Angola.

In terms of the Alvor Agreement text, one of the most relevant aspects put on the table was the fact that any act of resort to force, which was not determined by the competent authorities to preventing internal violence or external aggression, was considered illegal.

To this end, it envisaged the creation of a transitional government, chaired and led by a Presidential Council, consisting of three members (one from each liberation movement), including ministers appointed in equal proportion by the MPLA, UNITA and FNLA.
Some of that government’s duties included securing a cooperation for a proper running of the decolonisation process until total independence, thus ensuring its functioning and promotion of the access of Angolans to authority positions.

Other duties included running the internal policy, preparing and securing the holding of general elections for an Angola’s Constituent Assembly, exercising the legislative function through a Decree-Law, preparing the decree, regulating and instructing for the proper enforcement and guarantee of laws, in cooperation with the High Commissioner.

The Transitional Government was also tasked with granting the safety of people and goods, reorganising the Angola’s judiciary, defining the economic, financial and monetary policy, as well as granting and securing individual and collective rights and freedoms.

That, in fact, was a juridical instrument that contained everything needed to lead a process of peaceful transition among the children of the same motherland, eager to reach the same dream: freedom.

However, what seemed to be the most viable solution for Angolans, a few months later revealed such a frustration, even putting the proclamation of independence at risk.

Despite the Alvor Agreement, the three liberation movements entered a collision course, exchanging mutual accusations, which led to an armed conflict of sad memory, considered one of the bloodiest in the world, during the very Cold War period.

**Quifangondo - The decisive battle**

Given the lack of understanding among the parties, the national independence was proclaimed in an environment of "crossfire" and violent attacks, opposing FNLA and UNITA, with their respective foreign allies, to the MPLA and its partners, with serious repercussions for the country.

Story goes that the 11 November 1975 was preceded by military clashes for the control of the country, particularly the capital, Luanda, which became the scene of violent fighting.
Controlled by the MPLA and its military wing (FAPLA), Luanda became a strategic political and military objective for the proclamation of national independence, having, for this reason, recorded attacks by the FNLA army, supported by former troops from neighbouring Zaire, today Democratic Republic of the Congo.

According to versions on history books, on 10 November 1975, an FNLA convoy, moving from North, reached the Cacuaco region (which separates Luanda and Bengo), "trying to evict the FAPLA and the Cuban army", in what became known as the Quifangondo Battle.

Unable to break the barriers of the MPLA, and just a few hours after the proclamation of independence, through this movement, these writings underline, the FNLA and its allies "intensified the shelling of Luanda", but retreated a few hours later, back to the northern region of the country.

Alike the FNLA, UNITA, supported by South African military forces, had also tried unsuccessfully to capture Luanda, leading the MPLA to unilaterally proclaim the independence of the People’s Republic of Angola, in the voice of its historical leader, António Agostinho Neto.

In reaction, the leader of the FNLA, Holden Roberto, proclaimed the Independence of the People’s Democratic Republic of Angola, at midnight of 11 November, in Ambriz (Bengo), while UNITA leader, Jonas Savimbi, proclaimed, on the same day, independence in Nova Lisboa (now Huambo).

It was, in fact, a troubled period that almost threw the Angolans’ dream down the drains. In practice, national independence hanged by a thread, with an exchange of accusations among the three leaders of the liberation movements about alleged violations of the clauses of the Alvor Agreement.

In his speech at the proclamation of the national independence, in Luanda, the MPLA’s historic leader, Agostinho Neto, conveyed to Angolans a message of hope and enthusiasm, aware that the challenge of the new state would be complex, given the threats of invasion by external military forces.

According to the nationalist, who then became the first President of the People’s Republic of Angola (present-day Republic of Angola), “the fundamental concern of the new state” was "to totally free the country and all people from foreign oppression".
Without explorers and exploited

Neto undertook to "fulfil the aspirations of the large popular masses", having pledged that, under the command of the MPLA, "the country would progressively move towards a State of Popular Democracy".

To this end, he announced, "it would have in its centre the alliance of workers and peasants". "All the patriotic strata will be united against imperialism and its agents, in the struggle for the construction of a society without exploiters, nor exploited".

According to the MPLA historical leader, "attaining independence was the expression of popular will and the result of the great sacrifice made by the national liberation fighters."

“In this regard, I would vividly underline that the objective was to fight for the construction of a just society”, he said.

Looking at the external component, Agostinho Neto said, in his speech of more than 25 minutes, that the "struggle of the MPLA had never been against the Portuguese people."

"On contrary, from now on we will be able to cement fraternal links between the two peoples, who share historical, linguistic ties and the same objective: freedom", expressed the President.

With this speech, the bases were laid for the birth of the new Republic, which would, however, face 27 years of war until eventually reaching a lasing peace, on 4 April 2022.

Until independence was achieved, Angola trod a long journey, with the determination and bravery of its people, who fought for the right to be free and sovereign.

However, fate so wanted that the dream of freedom should not come true without pain, which led, from 11 November 1975, to a tough war that devastated the country, killed thousands of Angolans and held back development.

According to existing data, the war may have killed at least 500,000 people and made more than two million refugees, thousands of orphans, widows, disabled and displaced persons.
It was a conflict that put at stake Angola's affirmation in the concert of the Nations, leading to the destruction of relevant infrastructures, which the authorities are seeking to restore over the 18 years of lasting peace.

Angola for all

It is a fact that the armed conflict has been left behind and the country is now experiencing military stability. However, it is also unquestionable that much remains to be done for a true social peace, leaving the Government with the mission of mounting efforts for Angolans actually benefit from the vast national wealth, and be in the centre of governance policies.

There is no point in celebrating independence and peace if you there is no looking back and reflecting on the great plans that motivated the struggle for the liberation from the colonial yoke.

It is necessary to honour the blood of those who fought for the freedom of Angola, through prayers or with weapons in their hands, taken to the battlefields, underground or into jails, where they contributed to this great deed.

In order to dignify this effort, an intense and assertive work is required, as well as governance policies that have, in fact, the well-being of the people as a central point.

Thus, the Government needs to continue its task of combating the evils that have delayed the country’s progress for more than 30 years, such as corruption, nepotism, money laundering and embezzlement, without looking at party faces or affiliations.

The struggle for the country’s development is still huge, the reason why the authorities must work to get the gains of national independence replicated, in an unequivocal way, in remote areas, by investing more and more in poverty fight programmes.

It is also a must to continue investing to improve the quality of public health, education, electricity network and distribution of drinking water, as well as in the provision of housing, especially for young people.

At a time the country makes a reflection on the gains of independence, Angola needs to work to have an increasingly inclusive country, without resentment, where no one will be harmed by its political, cultural or ideological options.
Another aspect that should get the Government’s highest focus is the creation of more efficient policies to increase the supply of jobs and diversify the national economy, making agriculture the basis and industry the development factors.

It is true that all this is not achievable through magic, especially at this time when the country and world are suffering from the impact of Covid-19. But it is important to realise that Angola has no other way, but to invest in its development.

This necessarily involves the adoption of several measures, including the long-awaited implementation of the local power. However, in order for everything to be successful, there is need for a renewed spirit of patriotism and nationalism.

Only with true nationalists, who look and think of Angola in all its multiple dimensions, while respecting its vast cultural diversity, will it be possible to build a harmonious country, combat social inequalities and reduce poverty.

It was with this feeling that the great thinkers and promoters of the Pan-African ideology, such as Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Patrice Lumumba (Congo Kinshasa), Amilcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau/Cabo Verde), Thomas Sankara (Burkina Faso), Samora Machel (Mozambique) and Nelson Mandela (South Africa), envisaged Africa.

Likewise, it was with this deep look and this political and governmental vision focusing on the people, that Agostinho Neto projected a prosperous Angola, which values its human resources and makes an equitable distribution of its vast wealth.

After all, just look at the famous phrase "The most important is to solve the people's problems", to realise that Angola can still prosper, despite the economic, financial and social adversities of the moment. Where there is a will there is a way.