

TRAGEDY IN ANGOLA



An address by Osagyefo the President
to the National Assembly of Ghana

FIRST STEPS IN THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

The states of Africa must work in unity to:

- *Broadcast the facts to all nations*
- *Awaken the conscience of mankind*
- *Appeal to the workers of the world*
- *Succour the wounded and refugees*

AN ADDRESS

BY OSAGYEFO DR. KWAME NKRUMAH

President of the Republic of Ghana

to the

National Assembly

May 30th, 1961

MR. SPEAKER, MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY:

I am taking the opportunity, before the National Assembly adjourns, to address you on the situation which now exists in the Portuguese colonies of Africa and, in particular, in Angola.

This situation has taken a serious turn and is threatening the peace of Africa, and because of this, what is now taking place in the Portuguese colonies is the concern of all African peoples and, indeed, the concern of all the peace-loving peoples of the world. It is essential we do our utmost to rouse world opinion. Indiscriminate slaughter of men, women and children is at this very moment taking place in Angola. Forests are being set on fire by incendiary bombs dropped from Portuguese aircraft, thus burning alive thousands upon thousands of men, women and children for no crime other than being African. Armed Portuguese settlers roam the towns and countryside killing and looting at will. Such is the dreadful picture of events in Angola painted in the world press of to-day. No newspaper has estimated the African dead at less than 20,000. Some put it as high as 100,000. In such circumstances there must be revolution and the revolt in Angola has already broken out and is making headway.

The facts told in column after column in the newspapers of the world make one thing clear. The issue of Angola is a question of African nationalism and of human liberty and decency. It is in no sense an ideological question. Here no issue of communism versus capitalism arises. The question is reduced to the most simple formula. Which countries have sufficient interest in humanity to step in and stop the slaughter in Angola?

The irony of the whole situation is that while the great powers, like Britain and France, are adjusting their thinking

and actions to the requirements of modern times and have recognised the principle of self-determination for their colonies, yet Portugal sticks stubbornly to the idea of a "Portuguese soul", "Portuguese territory" and a "civilising mission" in a mediaeval fashion and seeks to perpetuate these under a most degrading, humiliating and oppressive rule. The attempt to cover this up by talk about Euro-Africa is nonsense, geographically and geopolitically. The avalanche of nationalist fervour which is rolling over Africa and toppling imperialist and colonialist governments has touched Angola, and touched it in a substantial manner.

In Angola, in spite of the enervating force of slave labour, in spite of the absence of any form of proper education, in spite of all the grinding disabilities and misery suffered by the people there, that country has now entered the African nationalist revolution and it will never be the same again. However, if the Angolan people are left to fight their battle entirely on their own, their sufferings and casualties will be enormous.

The evils of Portuguese colonialism are realised by all African states without exception. We should therefore be able to go united to the assistance of the people of Angola and it is most important that the differences of approach which we have on other problems should not prevent our mobilising the full strength of African opinion against what is taking place to-day in those parts of Africa controlled by Portugal.

A genuine desire for unity is not enough. We must understand the forces which bring about such a tragedy as is happening in Angola to-day and which in its final solution must spur us on to African unity—the only force that can prevent the recurrence of a similar tragedy. I stated before the United Nations, and have stated many times elsewhere, that what is happening in the Congo can be repeated in other African territories under colonial rule unless the Africans themselves unite to save Africa from the misery of these tragedies.

It is impossible to examine the question of the Portuguese colonies in Africa unless they are looked at within the framework of the African situation as a whole.

Superficially, the Portuguese colonies represent the old colonialism in its most classic form. In fact, however, they are also an example of neo-colonialism in its latest and most dangerous guise.

We shall not therefore be able to deal with the problem of the Portuguese colonies—and, indeed, the colonial question itself—unless we understand and are able to detect and meet the dangers and calamities of neo-colonialism. For it is the neo-colonialism, hidden in the background, rather than the front of classic colonialism, which makes the issue in Angola or in the Congo so difficult to resolve.

First, to be frank, the colonial power, Portugal, is herself a sort of colony. Indeed Portugal is an interesting example of early neo-colonialism of the early nineteenth century.

Once the owner of a powerful empire, Portugal had by the beginning of the nineteenth century become entirely dependent upon other powers. In the economic and financial sphere Portugal had become a client state of the United Kingdom. Militarily she depended upon Spain. The dominant role of the United Kingdom can be illustrated by the numerous occasions when the United Kingdom expressed itself willing to give away the Portuguese colonies in Africa, generally to appease Germany. This colonial attitude of the United Kingdom towards Portugal leads subconsciously among certain sections in the United Kingdom to a defence of the Portuguese position under any circumstances. Thus the United Kingdom feels obliged not to support any resolution at the United Nations which criticises Portugal in any way. The British Foreign Secretary's speech in Lisbon last week, in which he said that Portuguese policy in Africa, like that of Britain, was based on respect for human personality, is another example of the same trend. Such a remark made in the face of the known facts of the Portuguese atrocities in Angola can only be attributed to a kind of congenital blindness suffered by the United Kingdom so far as Portugal is concerned.

However that may be, the Ghana Government is bound to have the impression that the statements made in Lisbon by the British Foreign Secretary, and the promise of the dispatch of British troops to Portugal at this time, whatever the purpose of such a speech or visit, give assistance to Portuguese colonialism.

The fact that Portugal can master such a degree of support cannot however be attributed solely, or indeed mainly, to her ties with the United Kingdom.

In the neo-colonial world of Southern Africa, the Portuguese colonies and all that they stand for are essential for the purpose

of depressing African wages, preventing trade union organisation and maintaining high profits for expatriate-owned industries and farms.

Let me give you just one example of how Portuguese forced labour is essential for the neo-colonial economy of neighbouring states and territories.

In 1959, the last year when there are available statistics, only one-third of the labour force of nearly half a million workers employed in the South African mines came from South Africa. This figure has only been obtained painfully and laboriously by the pass laws and other methods of pressure which can now be applied within South Africa.

At the beginning of the century, in the early days of South African mining and before pass laws and the policy of repression of Africans generally had really got under way, it was impossible to recruit in South Africa free labour to work in the mines. The Portuguese colony of Mozambique was used, therefore, as a source of forced labour and in 1903, for example, provided no less than 89 per cent of the total labour force of the South African mines. This supply of conscript labour is still an economic necessity to South Africa if wages are to be kept down and trade unions prohibited.

Accordingly, the South African Government has entered into an actual treaty with the Portuguese Government to supply labour for the mines.

This barter deal in human beings, known as the Mozambique Convention, is divided into three parts. The first part fixes the maximum and minimum numbers of Africans who are to be recruited and provides for the payment to the Portuguese Government of registration, engagement and monthly fees in regard to each recruit obtained. Part 2 of the convention gives to Portugal certain advantages in regard to railway traffic and rates, and Part 3 provides for customs advantages in return for the supply of cheap labour. The basis of the agreement is that in return for an undertaking by the Portuguese Government that the South African Chamber of Mines shall be the sole recruiting agency in Mozambique for mines labour, the South African Government formally undertakes that 47.5 per cent of the sea-borne import traffic to the mining areas of South Africa shall go through the Portuguese harbour of Laurencu Marques. Originally, the maximum figure for labour recruits under the convention was 90,000 a

year. In 1940, however, the Portuguese Government agreed to raise the total to 100,000 a year in return for an agreement by the South African Government to export 340,000 cases of citrus fruit each year through Laurencó Marques.

The mines where this Portuguese contract labour works may be situated in South Africa or in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, but the shareholders of the mines are as likely as not to be resident in the United States, in the United Kingdom, in France or in Belgium.

There are therefore powerful influences in these and in other countries who are determined to use their political influence to ensure that their countries support Portugal in maintaining its forced labour system and all the tragedies that flow from it.

What happens in regard to labour for the mines so far as South Africa is concerned is merely, of course, an example. The existence of the Portuguese colonies make cheap labour possible not only in South Africa but in all the neighbouring colonial territories, and is an important element in the profits not only of mining but of many other industries, including plantation farming.

All those with a financial interest in such enterprises cannot therefore allow Portugal to lose her colonial possessions.

Perhaps less important, but of considerable influence in securing further support for Portugal among certain circles abroad, is the fact that much of the investment in the Portuguese colonies is not Portuguese at all, but international.

The Benquela railway, running from Benquela, with a 20-mile addition along the Atlantic coast to Libito, to Beira in Mozambique on the Indian Ocean, stretches for 1,700 miles. It was built largely by British interests to bring out ores from the mines of Katanga. Traversing the great Angola plateau, it passes to a point above Elisabethville in Congo, and then links up with the Rhodesian railway system, after which it passes on to Beira. Ninety per cent of the stock of the Benquela railway is held by the British holding company of Tanganyika Concessions, domiciled since 1952 in Southern Rhodesia.

Tanganyika Concessions is linked up with the copper interests of Northern Rhodesia and with Union Minière and other industrial concerns in the Congo. Through interlocking directorates, this company is linked with Forminière and certain diamond interests which, together with De Beers, the great

South African mining company, control the Angola Diamond Company with mines in the Luanda province.

This company is a state within a state. It possesses a prospecting monopoly over five-sixths of Angola and a labour conscription monopoly over most of the Luanda province, one-third the size of Ghana. One half of its profit goes to the state, the other half to the private shareholders.

No wonder it can influence policy whichever way it likes and holds in its hands the lives of the Africans of the Luanda province.

No wonder it maintains the fiction that a permit to visit its mines must come from Lisbon.

For these economic reasons, Portugal can count on heavy backing from vested financial interests throughout the world. Her position in maintaining her colonial dictatorship is, in addition, immensely strengthened by her membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Let me at this stage state the policy of the Government of Ghana in regard to such organisations as NATO.

We do not object to—indeed, we have no right whatsoever to object to—other states forming defensive alliances. In so far as such alliances contribute towards peace they are indeed to be encouraged and, in any event, the steps which other nations take to preserve their own security are entirely a matter for the judgment of the independent states concerned. Ghana is in favour of an African High Command, which would provide for the defence of the African continent, and it would be illogical for a country which supports such a proposal to criticise other countries who have formed defence plans on a continental basis. Nevertheless, I consider that Ghana is completely justified in opposing any military alliance in so far as that alliance is directed towards the maintenance of colonialism and imperialism in Africa.

The criticism which Ghana has at the moment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has nothing whatever to do with its defensive aspects. Our complaint is that certain members of the organisation appear to use their position in it to obtain arms and financial support for the worst type of colonial oppression and suppression.

One must ask the question: Why is Portugal in NATO at all? Portugal is an improverished country without military forces of any value and the only possible strategic argument

why it is necessary to include her in the NATO alliance is that she possesses some bases of doubtful value in the Azores.

Do the NATO powers really consider that the possession of these bases is worth the goodwill of the African continent ?

Portugal is only able to wage a colonial war because fundamentally she has the backing of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. If this backing were withdrawn tomorrow and Portugal was excluded from NATO, Portugal's colonial rule would collapse the day after. Is it not worth the while of the NATO powers to secure the end of an intolerable regime in Africa through the sacrifice of the most doubtful military advantages which they obtain through their association with Portugal ?

We must, however, accept the realities of the present situation.

Portugal is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and there are the strongest financial and economic pressures being exercised to maintain Portuguese colonialism.

The African states can only assist the people of Angola, therefore, if the African states themselves escape from the influence of NATO, or if any other defence alliance, and of neo-colonialism. I believe that if African freedom and unity is to be achieved, it will be by a policy of positive neutralism and non-alignment and by the rejection of all neo-colonialism.

At the moment, neo-colonialism is establishing itself among a number of African states.

Take for instance the European Common Market, which is but the economic and financial arm of neo-colonialism and the bastion of European economic imperialism in Africa. The treaty of Rome, which brought into being the European Common Market, can be compared to the treaty that emanated from the Congress of Berlin in the nineteenth century.

The former treaty established the undisputed sway of colonialism in Africa; the latter marks the advent of neo-colonialism in Africa.

In another sense, it may be said that the Treaty of Rome, particularly in its effects on Africa, bears unquestionably the marks of French neo-colonialism. Indeed, the former French Investment Fund for Economic and Social Development which has become the Fund for Financial Assistance and Co-opera-

tion and the European Fund claiming to help newly independent African states economically and financially, are one and the same thing.

The Fund for Economic and Social Development in its implementation in the colonial territory simply reduces that territory to the position of an exclusive market for the economy of the metropolitan country.

If we want to achieve unity in Africa, then at this moment of African nationalist revolution we cannot rely on international organisations that have their concepts and their loyalties beyond Africa. We must create our own organisations and, when we do so, we must adhere loyally and rigidly to them. Creating our own African international trade union organisation, we cannot individually opt to associate with other international unions, for this will do exactly what we must be on our guard against. It will divide our loyalties, it will weaken our own organisation. The African national trade union organisations can affiliate only with the All-African Trade Union Federation if we are going to maintain our identity and our strength. When we are all joined within the All-African Trade Union Federation, then we can associate as a single apex body with the other international apex bodies, for then we shall be equal and not weaker parties to be used by the stronger.

I have discussed this question of neo-colonialism at some length because it is highly relevant to the unity of action among African states which is essential to secure effective action in regard to Angola.

What I have said explains, I hope, the main difference which Ghana has with the Monrovia powers. Nevertheless, this difference should not lead us into a slanging match between individual African states. I much deplore the press attacks which have been made from all sides as a result of what is in effect a genuine difference of opinion, springing from the grave difficulties of having to solve, within a very short space of time, the many problems which we have inherited from a colonial regime.

I would like to see a truce in press warfare between African states, and I suggest that we might inaugurate this truce by declaring a unilateral "cease fire" in Ghana. What the present situation requires is not abuse, but argument. If we are to convert others to our point of view, we shall not achieve this by calling them names. We may achieve it, and I believe that

we shall, if we can secure a forum where the issues we put forward can be impartially examined.

Let me now come in detail to the situation in the Portuguese territories and particularly in Angola.

The first essential which we must make the world realise is that the Portuguese territories in Africa are slave states and have always been slave states.

Outright slavery, called by that name, continued in Angola until some one hundred years ago. Though theoretically abolished in 1875, slavery was still continued by various methods which were put into definite legal shape by a Portuguese law of 1899. This law, which is still in force to-day, provides that "all natives", that is to say all Africans, are subject to "a moral and legal obligation" to acquire by labour the means of subsisting or "bettering their social condition." Under this law every African male in Angola, which is in practice interpreted as those above the apparent age of ten years, is obliged to show either that he has worked for six months in the year previous to investigation or that he is working at the time of the investigation. Since the investigators are those who are charged with recruiting the labour, it is unlikely that they come to any very objective decision on this matter. What in fact happens is that employers who want forced labour indent for it to the Governor-General. The Governor-General then allocates forced labour in accordance with a theoretical calculation of the numbers which may be available. Requests are then sent to the local administrators up and down the country until they reach what would be the equivalent of a district commissioner in old colonial times in Ghana. The district commissioner then proceeds to enter into a contract for the services of the forced labour. The contract is, however, not signed by the workers concerned; it is a contract entered into collectively on their behalf by the chiefs and headmen who are entrusted with the duty of producing, within the times given, the specified number of labourers who are required.

It is true that less than half of the labour employed in Angola is officially classified by the Portuguese authorities as contract labour, that is to say, forced labour. Over half of it is theoretically voluntary labour but in practice the position of the voluntary labourer is not better than that of the forced labourer. The voluntary labourer cannot leave his job because if he does he will become liable to be classed as "idle" and

therefore subject to forced labour. His only chance of escape is by emigrating from the Portuguese territories and attempting to obtain work in other neighbouring states. Portuguese sources have estimated in the ten years previous to 1947 that over one million people had left the Portuguese colonies by way of clandestine immigration. Indeed the only way to evade the torture of life in the Portuguese colonies is to escape across the border. But not all the people can go, and those who are left behind often bear the brunt for those who have gone. And they have no avenue of articulation, no medium through which they can make their grief known, their sorrows heard, nowhere to turn for mitigation of their plight. When others have been in the same position, there have been those who have raised their voices for them. All over the world we have heard cries for people who are reputed to exist in conditions which would be paradise to the Africans of the Portuguese colonial territories.

In an attempt to cover up this system of slavery, the forced workers are, in theory, paid wages. In fact, however, three quarters of these wages are deferred until the end of their contract period and are not handed over until the state has deducted taxation. This is so high that at the end of their period of employment, they are left with scarcely any balance at all.

For example, in one authenticated case, a man employed in the fishing industry had, after he had worked for four years, a final balance of £3 2s. 6d.

The indescribable misery of Angolan conditions has continuously been brought to the notice of the Portuguese Government, but nothing except paper reforms have been carried out. In 1947 Captain Henrique Galvao, Deputy for Angola in the Portuguese National Assembly and Senior Inspector of Overseas Territories, investigated these conditions on the request of the Portuguese Government and submitted a comprehensive report.

Galvao had been appointed because the Portuguese Government expected from him, as a fervent government supporter, a whitewash report which they could use in the United Nations and elsewhere. In fact, Captain Galvao was so shocked by what he saw in Angola that he changed his political views and submitted an honest and balanced account of what was taking place in the Portuguese possessions overseas.

As might be imagined, the Portuguese Government did everything possible to suppress the report and Captain Galvao was thrown into prison for his presumption in telling the truth. Ultimately he escaped from Portugal to appear dramatically on the scene when he led a band of seventy brave men to seize the Portuguese liner *Santa Maria*.

One of Captain Galvao's chief criticisms of the Portuguese regime was its deceit. In theory and on paper it had abolished forced labour on behalf of private firms and individuals. In fact, forced labour was being stepped up.

He described how in Angola, openly and deliberately, the state acts as a recruiting and distributing agent for Labour on behalf of a band of settlers who, as though it were quite natural, write to the Department of Native Affairs for "a supply of workers". This word "supply" is used indifferently of goods or men. He had no doubt in his mind as to the existence of slavery but he explained—and I quote his actual words—"in some ways the situation is worse than simple slavery. Under slavery, after all, the native is bought as an animal; his owner prefers him to remain as fit as a horse or an ox. Here the native is not bought, he is hired from the state, although he is called a free man. And his employer cares little if he sickens or dies, once he is working, because when he sickens or dies his employer will simply ask for another."

These opinions he backs up with horrifying statistics showing in some cases a death rate of 40 per cent among the forced labourers.

Forced labour of this sort can of course only be maintained by the exercise of the utmost brutality both on the part of the colonial authorities and the employers themselves. The situation has recently been made much worse by the introduction of a large settler class.

The precarious state of the Portuguese economy at home makes it necessary for Portugal to export its own poverty and to compensate citizens for the work which the state cannot provide them with at home by dispossessing the African population of the colonies and by providing, for incoming Portuguese, land and cheap African labour. Just as the farmers of South Africa are much harsher and crueller employers than are the mines and the big industrial concerns, so are the Portuguese settlers, in the main, more ruthless and cruel than the international big businesses which have been established in Angola.

One final consideration explains the Portuguese ferocious attempts to put down the present liberation movement and their determination at all costs to maintain their hold upon their African colonies.

Twenty-three per cent of the total export trade of Portugal goes to her African possessions where she can maintain a system of excluding other competitors. Textiles, which are the largest single import into the Portuguese territories, are 89 per cent Portuguese. The second largest import is wine. It all comes from Portugal. In the same way as the early European traders in West Africa dealt largely in gin, so Portugal finds in its colonies one of its finest outlets for its alcohol.

The real question is whether, if these exports from Portugal were to be cut off, the Portuguese economy could survive.

Portugal is at home an old fashioned despotic oligarchy, established and maintained in the interests of a minute group of extremely wealthy families, and at the same time is the poorest of all European countries. There is therefore a potentially revolutionary situation in Portugal itself. All those who are afraid of social change in Europe thus become the allies of Portuguese colonialism since its maintenance appears to be the only method by which Portugal itself can be saved from revolution.

All the injustice, social degradation and slavery of the Portuguese regime has now reached a climax in the revolt in Angola. In such a situation, what practical and immediate steps can we take?

The independent African states should band themselves together to end once and for all Portuguese and other colonialism in the African continent.

Thanks to the initiative of the Afro-Asian group at the United Nations, the Security Council will next week debate the Angola question. All pressure should be put on the United Nations to see that a positive and effective resolution is adopted. Action through the United Nations is of the greatest importance and Ghana will support to the full any positive proposals which may be made by the Security Council. Our experience, however, of United Nations action in the Congo should warn us against trusting exclusively to action by the Security Council for resolving the crisis in Angola.

Resolutions of the Security Council require to be backed by action by all African states, working in concert and within the framework of the United Nations Charter.

I have already sent a message to the heads of government of each of the independent African states calling their attention to the serious situation in Angola.

What more can we do?

Our immediate task is the enlightenment of the conscience of mankind. We must build a machine in co-operation with all other independent African states to expose in detail exactly what is taking place in Angola to-day. We must appeal by every peaceful means at our command to the people of Portugal itself, to put an end to this unjust and inhuman colonial war.

We must make concerted arrangements for the assistance of the wounded and the refugees from Portuguese territory. We must appeal to the great international trade union movements of the world for concerted action against Portugal. We must appeal to dockers not to load arms destined for Portugal. We must appeal to seamen not to carry goods of any description to or from Angola.

We must use African external broadcasting systems to publicise throughout Africa, and beyond, the facts about what is happening in Angola to-day.

But, as I have said before, and as I emphasise in closing my address to you, above all we must seek unity of action among the states of Africa on this issue, irrespective of our differences in other matters.

Divided we can do nothing for the people of Angola. United we are certain of securing their triumph.

Let the Union of the Populations of Angola and the Revolutionary Front for the Independence of Angola unite and go forward together in their grim fight to achieve self-determination and freedom for the people of Angola.

The African's duty is clear. All Africans must stand united behind them.

If all this should fail, then we will have to find some other means.

Mr. Speaker, Members of the National Assembly, I now leave you to your deliberations.

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