

A Situation of Permanent Violence

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Excerpt of testimony by the Secretary-General of the PAIGC to the Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs of the US House of Representatives, chaired by Rep. Charles C. Diggs, Jr., on 26 February 1970.

We tried during the years of 1950, 1953, 1954, 1955 and 1956 to convince the Portuguese Government that it was necessary to change. In that moment, even we didn't think about independence. We hoped in that moment to change, to have civil rights, to be men, not treated like animals in general, because the Portuguese divided us into two groups, the indigenous people and the assimilado people.

At that moment, after the adoption of the resolution in the United Nations granting independence for all colonies the Portuguese changed a little on paper, but not in practice.

We wanted at that moment, when we were beginning to demand our rights, to pass from the situation of Portuguese of second class to Portuguese like Portuguese. We received, as answer, only repression, imprisonment, torture and in 1959 after the creation of our party, when we called a strike in the Port of Bissau, the Portuguese troops killed about 50 workers in 20 minutes and wounded more than 100. This massacre showed us that it was not well, it was not good, it was not intelligent to fight against the Portuguese with empty hands.

We didn't want, absolutely not, to resort to violence, but we realized that the colonial Portuguese domination was a situation of permanent violence. Against our aspirations they systematically answered with violence, with crimes, and we decided in that moment to prepare ourselves to fight.

In that moment, as you know, sir, Africa began to become independent. The 'wind of change' was blowing over Africa. The other colonial powers decided to decolonialize. Portugal signed the United Nations Charter and later Portugal voted for the proclamation of the right for independence of

all people.

But Portugal never accepted to apply this international decision. Portugal insisted, the Portuguese Government insisted that we were provinces of Portugal.

If in the beginning of our colonial life we were exactly like the Portuguese, we had all the rights the Portuguese had, maybe it would be possible to convince us that we were Portuguese in the Portuguese provinces. But in our country we never had rights, the minimum rights of man, and in that moment it was very late to convince us that our country was a Portuguese province.

We saw Africa beginning with independence, in many African states, and we decided to do our best also to get our right to self-determination and independence. That is the reason for 7 years of fighting.

We have liberated more than two-thirds of the country. In the liberated areas of our country, facing the Portuguese bombs, we are trying to build a new life. In the liberated areas, for example – I can tell you that all of this has been confirmed by journalists and filmmakers and writers, like some men from Sweden and other countries that have been in our country for 1, 2, or more months. We have organized the education, the services of education. We have now more than 130 schools. The Portuguese, in all Guinea, in the time of colonialism, had 45 missionary schools, so-called elementary schools, and 11 official schools.

We have now about 15,000 children in the schools. Before, in my country there were only 2,000 children, but the indigenous people; that is, 99.7% of the population, couldn't go to their official schools, only to the missionary schools.

Now, in our country, we have established in the liberated areas, in spite of the bombing, permanent bombing by Portuguese planes, four hospitals – not very nice hospitals, but what we can do in this stage of our life. We have trained nurses during these years, more than 250 nurses, men and women. We have more than 100 sanitary posts in order not only to assist the wounded or sick fighters, but to assist the population of the liberated regions.

We have organized and developed in the liberated regions, our party, our political organization, our administration, and in this moment we can say that our country is like a state of which a part of the national territory is yet occupied by the colonial forces.

Portugal controls only the urban centres and some little parts in the countryside. We control the major part of the countryside, and in the contested regions we are fighting each day in order to complete the liberation of our country.

One can ask how Portugal, an underdeveloped country also, one of the most backward in Europe which has some regions with more than 46% of illiterates – I am referring to official figures – how can Portugal fight all of these colonial wars in my country, in Angola and in Mozambique?

The Portuguese people are progressively realizing that colonial wars are not only against the African people, but also against their own interests.

We think that with this war the Portuguese Government is losing or making

it possible to lose one of the best chances Portugal has in history, because our hopes were and still are, in spite of all the crimes against our people, that we could, in independence, like an African people, develop the best relations with Portugal, even to study and to decide together some problems concerning the development of our country and the progress of our peoples.