

### Introduction

**A**ngola is a land rich in economic possibilities, diamonds, oil and fertile valleys, but it is also a land scarred by decades of war and abuse. Potentially one of the wealthiest countries in Africa it is one of the poorest countries in the world. Angola's wounds run deep. However, a ceasefire brokered in 2002 has brought with it the beginnings of hope, healing and recovery.



### History

The land now known as Angola was home to various tribal groups for 14 centuries. In 1482 the first Europeans arrived from Portugal.

During three centuries of Portuguese rule, over three million slaves were shipped to Portuguese sugar plantations in Brazil. The indigenous population was devastated. Resistance to the slave trade and Portuguese occupation of land grew amongst Angolan people but met with little success until 1961. When slavery did officially end, forced labour and exploitation continued with Portuguese settlers exploiting the mineral and agricultural wealth of the country.

In 1961 the fight for independence began in earnest resulting in two major uprisings. When the Portuguese armed forces retaliated with severe force, large numbers of Angolans fled to Congo. Over 14 years the struggle continued until independence was granted in 1975. A provisional government was formed involving the three nationalist movements – the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), UNITA (Union for the Total Independence of Angola), and FNLA (Front for National Liberation of Angola).

The accord between the three groups didn't last and within months war resulted. In 1992 efforts were made to end the war but, with the suspected support of other African countries, UNITA, the bitter rival of the ruling MPLA, continued to

sell its diamonds and buy weapons. A number of peace agreements were signed and soon broken. Eventually, on 4 April 2002, the MPLA-led government and UNITA signed a formal ceasefire to end the conflict. Although the fragile peace has held, the country faces the seemingly impossible task of rebuilding its destroyed infrastructure, disarming the civilian population, resettling thousands of refugees and bringing the country to a strong economic footing.

### Current challenges

- ▶ Despite the end of the civil war, the vulnerable are still suffering; 45 per cent of children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition; one out of four children die before their first birthday; three million children are displaced because of the civil war; and millions more are out of school.
- ▶ There are more than 11 million landmines left in Angola following the civil war. Angola has the highest number of amputees – as a result of exploding landmines – in the world.
- ▶ The average life expectancy is 37 years compared to 78 years in the UK.

### BMS involvement in Angola

BMS World Mission first became involved in northern Angola in 1879. In 1961 there were 31 BMS mission personnel working in the area, involved in education, medical and church work. All BMS workers were evacuated after the War of Independence began in 1961. Since then BMS has continued to support the work of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Angola (IEBA) and currently has two workers in Angola. BMS has given several relief grants to help the country's problems. BMS is involved in the following projects:

#### Medical work and health education

Joan Woodyer is a BMS nurse based in Mbanza Kongo in the north of the country. Joan is working with the IEBA medical department leading seminars and supporting the rural medical clinics in the region.

#### Theological education and church planting

BMS has a long history of involvement in theological education in Angola. A large part of this involvement is through financially supporting

the training of pastors and theological students. This training extends to pastors in rural areas and includes the training of trainers. BMS also supports evangelism and church planting initiatives, including the showing of the *Jesus* film.

### Pre-school Education Projects (PEPEs)

BMS is establishing PEPEs in local churches in Angola. The PEPE programmes are a proven way of addressing the root causes of poverty and violence in poor communities and began originally in Brazil. BMS worker Lynne Brown is helping set up the pre-school programmes in Luanda.

## Background Information

### The land

Angola is a land of fertile coastal plains, extensive inland plateaus covered by tropical rainforests in the north, grasslands in the centre and dry plains in the south. Subsistence farming is practised in the more densely populated areas of the north and west but widespread planting of landmines has made this way of life extremely hazardous. Coffee is the main export crop. There are abundant mineral reserves off the Atlantic coast, but the civil war has meant much of the profits have been spent on armaments. Angola has numerous environmental problems to deal with, including erosion, deforestation and lack of drinking water.

### Religion

Traditional African religions are practised by around half the population but the syncretism that occurs between these religions and Christianity makes it difficult to establish strict boundaries between one religion and another. Christian missions have been operating in the country since the 15th century.

Angola's first president, a Marxist, was determined to eradicate Christianity within 20 years. What ensued was persecution and the repression of Christians. However, the collapse of Communism in the 1990s has meant that discrimination against Christians has largely ceased.

The Igreja Evangelica Baptista em Angola (IEBA) was formed in 1977 and, in spite of the war, has continued to grow not only in the traditional Baptist districts of the north but also in other areas. In Luanda there are now 15 IEBA churches with a membership of over 9,000.

## Prayer points

- ▶ Pray for the work of IEBA and their PEPE programme to reach the spiritual and physical needs of the Angolan people.
- ▶ After 27 years of civil war the government now faces the daunting task of uniting and rebuilding the country. Pray for the government to be open and honest in all its dealings and wise in how it implements its policies.
- ▶ Diamond and oil wealth sustained the warring parties economically. There is a danger that Angola's rich natural wealth will become a source of conflict and instability in the future. Pray for the nation's riches to benefit the whole country, not just a few individuals.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

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