

Angolagate trial - 3rd October 2008

Global Witness welcomes the start of the long awaited Angolagate trial taking place in Paris from October 6th 2008. This long running judicial investigation covers a dark period in Angola's turbulent and troubled history and dissects in intimate detail the geopolitical machinations of various nation states in the post cold war period. It will show how Russian, American and French geopolitical interests tangoed with a morally blind international banking and oil trading system to set up the looting of the Angolan state – which continues to this day to the overall detriment of the long suffering Angolan population.

Global Witness believes that for anything positive to come out of this politically embarrassing trial for the French and Angolan establishment, then lessons must be learned. Many of the key players in this decade long saga are still in positions of government and considerable power utilising the networks and financial systems that were established to covertly arm the ruling Angolan regime.

Key Angolan officials – from the President down – personally benefited to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars in kickbacks or bribes – usually described as 'commissions'. Many of these officials still hold their governmental positions or have gone onto increase their personal power base ensuring that the Angolan state has become their own private business enterprise.

Commentators, regulators and law enforcement officials must look beyond the focus of the trial – the French political and corruption scandal – to the much bigger scandal of how a resource rich but desperately poor country had and is having its natural resources looted for the benefit of a small Angolan kleptocratic elite which included and includes key middlemen and corporate interests.

The banks, oil trading companies, financial institutions, regulators, arms procurement companies, offshore financial centres and governments that were involved in this saga must ensure that the middlemen and government officials that personally enriched themselves with the wealth of the Angolan state must not be allowed to do so again. A significant percentage of the Angolan population still have no access to clean water, education, food or medical attention which should be considered a crime against humanity for a country which is Africa's top oil producer.

For media enquiries call Alex Yearsley on + 44 7773 812 901 or email ayearsley@globalwitness.org