

**24 September 2007**

## **Angola/Switzerland: Millions in Angolan public funds still frozen in Swiss banks.**

International NGOs Aktionfinanzplatz (AFP), Bern Declaration and Global Witness today expressed serious concern over delays in returning \$21 million in frozen public funds from Switzerland to Angola, and called for more transparency to ensure Angolan citizens have oversight over their use.

On 1 November 2005, the Swiss and Angolan governments signed an agreement to return \$21 million in public funds held in Switzerland to Angola for use in humanitarian projects. The funds concerned were blocked in 2002 as part of a judicial investigation in Geneva into misappropriation of public assets related to the rescheduling of Angola's debt with Russia.

After this agreement was signed, the Swiss Development and Aid Department (DDC) took steps to implement it. The DDC proposed several ways for the money to be used, for instance in the construction of agricultural training centres and in demining projects. The Angolan authorities appeared to look favourably on the former proposal, but not on using the funds for demining.

According to information received by the three NGOs, a meeting between the Swiss and Angolan authorities to discuss implementation of the agreement was scheduled for the end of August 2007. However, this meeting was postponed to a future date as yet undetermined.

This is not the first time that such delays have occurred: since 2006, the Angolan side has postponed the discussions several times, perhaps most notably in November 2006 on the grounds that the head of the Angolan delegation had gone on holiday. It has thus been impossible for the Swiss DDC to ensure a transparent negotiation process, as was promised: a website intended to publicize the projects approved for funding has still not been constructed, apparently due to opposition from the Angolan authorities.

In June 2007, Swiss NGOs wrote to the DDC expressing serious concern about the lack of information available to Angolan citizens about the negotiations, and the fact that Angolan civil society has not been involved in the repatriation process. AFP and the Bern Declaration called for local Angolan NGOs to be involved, through the planned public tendering process, in planning and monitoring the projects selected.

To date, this proposal has received no response from the Swiss authorities. It appears that the DDC is only releasing minimal information, claiming that their conclusions will be made public once the negotiations are complete. AFP, Bern Declaration and Global Witness believe that Angolan citizens have a right to know about the process of repatriation of what are public funds and to ask their government for clarification on how such funds will be used. They call on both the Swiss and Angolan governments to release public information about the status of the negotiations and to involve actively Angolan civil society in the repatriation process.

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See also Solidaire 193, Angola: the Swiss Affair. For a copy, contact : [info@ladb.ch](mailto:info@ladb.ch)/+41 21 620 030