



**NGO: EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR LAW AND JUSTICE (ECLJ)**

**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW  
48<sup>TH</sup> SESSION**

**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF ANGOLA  
FOR THE 48<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE  
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

*www.ECLJ.org  
4, quai Koch  
67000 Strasbourg, France  
Phone: +33 (0)3.88.24.94.40*

## Status of Human Rights in Angola for the 48th Session of the Universal Periodic Review

### Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Republic of Angola (Angola) for the 48th session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

### Background

2. Angola is a country located in southwest Africa with a population of approximately 35.1 million.<sup>1</sup> The country is predominantly Christian, with approximately 41% of the population identifying as Roman Catholic, 38% as Protestant, 12% belonging to no religion, and 7% belonging to various other religions.<sup>2</sup> Despite the country being predominately Christian, Angola is ranked as the 71st worst country for Christians.<sup>3</sup> This ranking primarily stems from the fact that unregistered churches are prohibited from evangelizing and gathering together to worship.<sup>4</sup>

3. Angola's last review was held on November 7, 2019.<sup>5</sup> As a result of the review, Angola received 270 recommendations, 259 of which it supported.<sup>6</sup> It was recommended by Haiti, and supported by Angola, that the government “[u]ndertake consultations with Christian leaders to relax restrictions on church registration.”<sup>7</sup> On the issue of abortion, it was recommended by Iceland, and supported by Angola, that the government “[a]mend the Penal Code to decriminalize abortion in all cases, enhance access for women to inclusive health-care services by trained personnel and ensure that all women and girls have access to affordable and modern forms of contraception.”<sup>8</sup>

### Legal Framework

#### *Religious Persecution*

4. Under Article 10 sec. 2 and 3 of the Constitution of Angola:

---

<sup>1</sup> John Kelly Thornton et al., *Angola*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Angola> (July 8, 2024).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> OPEN DOORS, ANGOLA: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER 4 (March 2024), <https://www.opendoors.org/en-us/research-reports/country-dossiers/WWL-2024-Angola-Full-Country-Dossier.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 6, 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Universal Periodic Review – Angola*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ao-index> (last visited July 10, 2024).

<sup>6</sup> *Angola infographic*, OHCHR, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session34/AO/Angola\\_Infographic.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session34/AO/Angola_Infographic.pdf) (last visited July 10, 2024).

<sup>7</sup> OHCHR, UPR of Angola (3rd Cycle – 34th Session) Thematic List of Recommendations, [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session34/AO/UPR34\\_Angola\\_Thematic\\_list\\_of\\_Recommendations.docx](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/lib-docs/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session34/AO/UPR34_Angola_Thematic_list_of_Recommendations.docx) (last visited July 10, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

2. The state shall recognise and respect the different religious faiths, which shall be free to organise and exercise their activities, provided that they abide by the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of Angola.

3. The state shall protect churches and faiths and their places and objects of worship, provided that they do not threaten the Constitution and public order and abide by the Constitution and the law.<sup>9</sup>

5. In 2019, the National Assembly approved a new Law on Freedom of Religion and Belief.<sup>10</sup> This law requires that religious groups must have at least 60,000 members in order to be legally registered.<sup>11</sup> The law also requires that a religious organization must have 1,000 members in each of the country's eighteen provinces.<sup>12</sup> Churches that are not registered are prohibited from operating schools, evangelizing, and carrying out worship services.<sup>13</sup>

6. Angola is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).<sup>14</sup> Under Article 18 of the ICCPR:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.<sup>15</sup>

### *Abortion*

7. Article 30 of the Constitution of Angola states that “[t]he state shall respect and protect human life, which is inviolable.”<sup>16</sup>

8. Under Article 154 of the Penal Code of Angola, “[w]hoever, with the consent of the pregnant woman, terminates the pregnancy or helps to terminate it outside of the cases provided

---

<sup>9</sup> CONSTITUTION OF ANGOLA 2010 art. 10 §2-3, [https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Angola\\_2010](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Angola_2010).

<sup>10</sup> *New Law on Freedom of Religion, Belief and Worship in Angola Unanimously Approved*, DIÁRIO DE NOTÍCIAS (Jan. 23, 2019), <https://www.dn.pt/lusa/interior/aprovada-por-unanimidade-nova-lei-sobre-liberdade-de-religiao-crenca-e-culto-em-angola-10476312.html/>.

<sup>11</sup> OPEN DOORS, *supra* note 3, at 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 6, 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Status for Angola*, OHCHR,

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=5&Lang=EN](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=5&Lang=EN) (last visited July 10, 2024).

<sup>15</sup> International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, *adopted* Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> [hereinafter ICCPR].

<sup>16</sup> CONSTITUTION OF ANGOLA 2010 art. 30, *supra* note 9.

for in paragraph 1 of article 156 . . . is punished with a prison sentence of 1 to 5 years.”<sup>17</sup> Article 156 states that:

1. There is no criminal liability when the termination of pregnancy, carried out at the request or with the consent of the pregnant woman:

a) Constitute the only means of removing the danger of death or serious and irreversible injury to the physical or psychological integrity of the woman;

b) It is medically certified that the fetus is unviable;

c) Pregnancy results from a crime against sexual freedom and self-determination and termination is carried out in the first 16 weeks of pregnancy.<sup>18</sup>

9. In the cases listed above “[v]erification of the circumstances that exclude responsibility for the interruption of pregnancy is certified by a medical report, written and signed before the intervention by a doctor other than the one by whom, or under whose direction, the interruption is carried out . . . .”<sup>19</sup>

10. Further, under Article 156 paragraph 5, the punishment for having an abortion is mitigated when “[t]here are strong reasons to predict that the unborn child will suffer from a serious illness or incurable malformation and the termination takes place in the first 24 weeks of pregnancy.”<sup>20</sup>

11. Additionally, under Article 6 of the ICCPR, “[e]very human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.”<sup>21</sup>

12. Angola is also a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).<sup>22</sup> Under Article 6 of the CRC:

1. States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.

2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.<sup>23</sup>

13. Moreover, Angola also has a responsibility to protect the lives of preborn babies under other international instruments such as the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the 1994 Cairo Conference of Population and Development.

### **Religious Persecution**

14. Despite the majority of the country being Christian, the government has been increasingly controlling religious groups by requiring these groups to be registered in order to

---

<sup>17</sup> CÓDIGO PENAL ANGOLANO [PENAL CODE] art. 154 ¶ 3 (Angl.), <https://abortion-policies.srhr.org/documents/countries/11-Angola-Penal-Code-2019.pdf> (unofficial internal translation).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.* art. 156 ¶ 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* art. 156 ¶ 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* ¶ 5.

<sup>21</sup> ICCPR art. 6, *supra* note 15.

<sup>22</sup> *Status for Angola*, *supra* note 14.

<sup>23</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 6, *adopted* Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>.

carry out religious activities such as evangelism and collective worship.<sup>24</sup> Religious leaders belonging to unregistered religious organizations risk being arrested and having their place of worship shut down.<sup>25</sup> Currently, only eighty-four religious organizations are legally registered in the country.<sup>26</sup> Christians belonging to non-traditional denominations have great difficulty registering<sup>27</sup> and, therefore, face difficulty celebrating weddings, baptisms, and even funerals.<sup>28</sup> Many Christians are forced to have baptisms at home because they are not able to have a church.<sup>29</sup> For funerals, many cemeteries are controlled by registered religious organizations, leading to conflicts over burial rites.<sup>30</sup> In some cases, Christians are forced to be buried according to non-Christian rites.<sup>31</sup>

15. Due to Angola’s stringent and outlandish requirements to become a registered religious group, from 2004 to 2021, the government did not recognize any religious groups.<sup>32</sup> In 2004, the government set a registration requirement requiring “100,000-member signatories.”<sup>33</sup> In 2018, the government “closed the existing four ecumenical forums that [had] until [then] enabled unregistered churches to operate,” setting further registration requirements for churches.<sup>34</sup> This change resulted in thousands of churches being closed.<sup>35</sup> In 2019, the government revised requirements for religious organizations to register with the government.<sup>36</sup> The new requirement reduced the membership requirement from 100,000 to 60,000.<sup>37</sup> Further, it introduced a new provision that requires a religious organization to have at least 1,000 members from each of the eighteen provinces in the country.<sup>38</sup> The new requirements “has actually made it more difficult for churches to submit an application.”<sup>39</sup> In June 2022, the government recognized only four Christian groups under these new regulations: the Christian Missionary Assembly, the Josafat Church, the United Pentecostal Church in Angola, and the Presbyterian Church of Angola.<sup>40</sup> Even though some religious organizations were able to register under these new regulations, an estimated 1,100 unregistered religious organizations are still operating in the country.<sup>41</sup> Some of these religious organizations have applied for recognition and have been waiting for more than a decade to hear back from the government.<sup>42</sup>

16. Prohibiting unregistered religious organizations from partaking in religious activities infringes on the ability of Angolans to freely and publicly practice their faith. Further, it gives the government control over which religions are allowed to spread their message and which

---

<sup>24</sup> OPEN DOORS, *supra* note 3, at 6, 10.

<sup>25</sup> INGE AMUNDSEN, ANGOLA: RELIGION AND REPRESSION 3-4 (2022), <https://www.cmi.no/publications/8283-angola-religion-and-repression#pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>27</sup> OPEN DOORS, *supra* note 3, at 10.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 23.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 6.

<sup>33</sup> Marko Joesnsuu, *Angola’s Government Targets Thousands of Churches for Closure, Obstructs Protests*, CHRISTIAN TODAY (Dec. 2, 2018), [https://www.christiantoday.com/article/angolas-government-targets-thousands-of-churches-for-closure-obstructs-protests/131103.htm#google\\_vignette](https://www.christiantoday.com/article/angolas-government-targets-thousands-of-churches-for-closure-obstructs-protests/131103.htm#google_vignette).

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *See id.*

<sup>36</sup> OPEN DOORS, *supra* note 3, at 10.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> *Id.*

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

<sup>40</sup> *Id.* at 6.

<sup>41</sup> AMUNDSEN, *supra* note 25, at 3.

<sup>42</sup> OPEN DOORS, *supra* note 3, at 25.

ones are not. During its last UPR, Angola claimed to support a recommendation calling for the easing of requirements for religious organizations to register but has since only slightly reduced the amount of members needed to register, but at the same time, also introduced the requirement that religious organizations need at least 1,000 members from each of Angola's eighteen provinces. These overly burdensome requirements for registration are in contravention of the ICCPR, which states that everyone "either individually or in community with others and in public or private, [has the right] to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."<sup>43</sup>

## Abortion

17. For much of Angola's history, Angola has protected the lives of preborn babies, especially those that may be born with fetal abnormalities. This changed in 2019 when the Penal Code of Angola was amended, introducing an exception whereby preborn babies may be aborted if the fetus is medically certified to be unviable or if carrying out the abortion could harm the "psychological integrity of a woman."<sup>44</sup> The law does make a distinction between the preborn baby being unviable and the presence of fetal abnormalities or malformation. While abortion is permitted if the preborn baby is deemed by professionals to be unviable,<sup>45</sup> the law still prohibits abortions in cases of abnormalities.<sup>46</sup>

18. In the case of protecting the psychological integrity of the woman, the law does not provide specifics and only states that it must be verified by a medical report.<sup>47</sup> Abortion is the deliberate killing of a human being and protecting the psychological health of the woman is not a justified excuse, especially when other options exist to protect both the mother and the preborn baby. For example, a woman can put the baby up for adoption which allows for the baby to live and can protect the psychological health of the woman, who may feel she is incapable of caring for the child.

18. Using abortion to protect the "psychological integrity of a woman" is ironic, because many studies have shown that abortion is harmful to both the physical and psychological health of the woman. With regard to physical health alone, one recent study of 715 patients who received an abortion in Angola found that 8% of the patients studied, fifty-seven, experienced severe complications and six of the patients had died as a result of an abortion.<sup>48</sup> In addition to the physical harm, women who have undergone abortions often experience negative psychological harm, the very thing Angola's law is reportedly trying to protect. These women have reported experiencing everything from shame to drug abuse and suicidal thoughts.<sup>49</sup>

19. The dignity, value, and rights of preborn babies have been enshrined in numerous fundamental human rights documents. The 1994 Cairo Conference on Population and Development affirmed that U.N. Member States have an affirmative commitment to "reduce

---

<sup>43</sup> ICCPR art. 18, *supra* note 15.

<sup>44</sup> PENAL CODE art. 156 ¶ 1 (Angl.).

<sup>45</sup> *Id.*

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* ¶ 5.

<sup>47</sup> *See id.* ¶ 2.

<sup>48</sup> Natérica de Almedia et al., *Characterisation of Induced Abortion and Consequences to Women's Health at Hospital Central do Huambo – Angola*, 40 J. OBSTETRICS & GYNAECOLOGY 558, 558 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443615.2019.1635096>.

<sup>49</sup> Priscilla K. Coleman et al., *Women Who Suffered Emotionally from Abortion: A Qualitative Synthesis of Their Experiences*, 22 J. AM. PHYSICIANS & SURGEONS 113, 116-17 (2017), <https://www.jpands.org/vol22no4/coleman.pdf>.

the recourse to abortion”<sup>50</sup> and to “take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion, *which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning.*”<sup>51</sup> The UDHR, a universally accepted human rights document, provides that “[e]veryone has the right to life.”<sup>52</sup> Article 6 of the ICCPR likewise states that “[e]very human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law.”<sup>53</sup>

20. Even though Iceland recommended Angola expand access to abortion, it must be noted that this is not the consensus view of U.N. Member States. In fact, out of the 193 U.N. Member States, the majority maintain strict limits on abortion, with the remainder setting gestational limits.<sup>54</sup> U.N. Member States are correct in maintaining strict limits on abortion and protecting life, as we have discussed above, numerous international documents enshrine the right to life and not one of them contains the right to abortion. Further, these documents do not distinguish between healthy individuals and ones with abnormalities, in fact, they protect individuals with disabilities. All of the reasons discussed above show why Angola must protect all human life.

## Recommendations

21. Angola must uphold protections for religious liberty and ensure that all its citizens are free to peacefully practice their faith. Placing burdensome registration requirements on religious organizations prevents people from practicing their faith. The government should amend its laws to make it easier for religious organizations to register and ensure that such requirements are not being used to restrict religious freedom.

22. While Angola has some restrictions on abortion, more can be done to protect both the lives of preborn babies and mothers. Angola must remove exception to protect the psychological health of the mother, especially when options exist to protect both the mother and the preborn baby. As we stated above, studies have shown that abortion is actually determinantal to both the physical and psychological health of the mother, the very thing Angola is claiming to protect. In order to protect the health of the mother and guarantee the right to life for preborn babies, Angola should restrict abortion.

---

<sup>50</sup> International Conference on Population and Development, *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development*, ¶ 8.25, U.N. Doc. A/CONF/F.171/13/ Rev. 1, [https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/a\\_conf.171\\_13\\_rev.1.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/a_conf.171_13_rev.1.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> *Id.* ¶ 7.24 (emphasis added).

<sup>52</sup> G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 3 (Dec. 10, 1948).

<sup>53</sup> ICCPR art. 6, *supra* note 15.

<sup>54</sup> *The World's Abortion Laws*, CTR. FOR REPROD. RTS. (June 9, 2023), [https://reproductiverights.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CRR\\_WALM\\_2023\\_FINAL-1.pdf](https://reproductiverights.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CRR_WALM_2023_FINAL-1.pdf).