Sharks or crocodiles: How to get rid of an activist in Angola
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Rafael Marques de Morais [1]
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Since June 20, much has been said and written about the detained Angolan book club activists[2], accused of attempting to bring about a coup d'état[3]. State officials, including Attorney-General Joao Maria de Sousa and Interior Minister Angelo Tavares, have emphasised in their statements to the media that they will zealously uphold the law, make arrests or take any and all other appropriate action against those who conspire to overthrow President Jose Eduardo dos Santos’s government.

But their treatment of another activist, 28 year-old Mario Faustino, detained since May 27, exposes the shambolic nature of the Angolan Justice system.

In an exclusive interview for Maka Angola, from his prison cell in the National Police provincial headquarters in Luanda, Mr Faustino alleges that when he was detained, he was subjected to torture at a military installation, carried out in person by a Brigadier in the Angolan Armed Forces (FAA). According to the detained activist another brigadier and a police commissioner made a chilling statement: that Mário Faustino deserved to be dumped at sea to be eaten by sharks, or tossed into a crocodile-infested river.

Mario Faustino has never served in the military. Nonetheless he was detained and held first in a military installation. And it was only on June 18 that the Military Police sent case file 453/015 to the Provincial Command of the National Police in Luanda. The file was signed by Major Bernardo José Quilombo, and referred to a preliminary investigation into Mário Faustino. Apparently, their “proof” of the alleged criminal activity consisted of some caricatures of President José Eduardo dos Santos, downloaded from the internet. The National Policy duly registered Mr Faustino as their prisoner on June 19, under case file 4527/015 OP.

Contacted by Maka Angola, the Criminal Investigation Service (SIC)’s prosecutor in charge of the case, District Attorney Cangombe, stated that he could only “release the relevant information” on conclusion of the investigation process. "Quite apart from the usual reliance on trumped-up charges, which is the order of the day, the attempt to extend military jurisdiction to a civilian when we are not in a state of emergency or war is truly remarkable", said an attorney who preferred to remain anonymous.

According to the same attorney, “then there is the attempt to turn an alleged possession of a cartoonish caricature of the President into a weapon of treason. This desperate and extraordinary use of State power against a citizen is the very antithesis of the rule of law.”

FIRST ARREST

Mario Faustino was first detained on May 2, when National Police officers, stepped in to arrest him
the minute he attempted to join a demonstration of former combatants in Independence Square. Police broke up the rally and also arrested eight former combatants. By his account: “Police officers beat me with truncheons, iron bars and sticks. Initially, they took me to the police station at Ilha”. Shortly thereafter the activist said he was transferred, along with the eight other detainees (one of them a woman), to the headquarters of the Military Region of Luanda.

For the next 12 days, Mário Faustino was subjected to daily abuse. “I was routinely beaten by five majors and a lieutenant-colonel. Each would arrive, take me out of the cell, accuse me personally of trying to start a new war in the country, beat me, throw me back in the cell and leave”, recalls the activist.

He says the officers wanted “me to identify the leader [of the demonstrations]”. I answered that these demonstrations didn’t have leaders. If there was a leader, I didn’t know who that was.”

He was released on May 14, without ever seeing the military prosecutor. “On my release, a colonel approached me and warned me that I would lose my life if I continued to take part in demonstrations”, he said. Mr Faustino says he responded defiantly: “I told the colonel that if I had to die for taking part in a demonstration, then the government might as well tear up the Constitution, which is the root of the problem”.

SECOND ARREST

Mário Faustino remained determined to exercise his constitutional right to demonstrate in line with Article 47.1 of the Constitution, which states “all citizens are guaranteed the freedom to meet and hold peaceful demonstrations without weaponry, with no need for authorization and within the bounds of the law.”

Just 13 days after his release, he joined another protest attempt in Independence Square and ended up being arrested again. It was May 27.

During the round-up in Independence Square, police officers severely beat seven activists, including Mário Faustino, Nito Alves and Adolfo Campos.

Adolfo Campos says that police officers dragged him across the asphalt until his back was skinned, he was repeatedly hit with truncheons, kicked and punched, and had his right arm broken.

The activists were taken to the Boavista police station, where police officers received orders to transfer Mário Faustino, identified as the supposed “ringleader of the demonstration”, back to the headquarters of the Military Region of Luanda.

“We tried to get Mário left with the rest of our group of detainees. We tried to hold on to him but we were beaten back”, said Adolfo Campos.

SHARKS OR CROCODILES

Separated from the other protestors and now back in the hands of the military, Mario was then subjected to chilling threats: “In the barracks, the soldiers told me I would have to die because I was a reactionary”.

“A brigadier and a Commissioner [of the National Police] came in to me [in my cell] the next day and stated that I deserved to be thrown into the sea to the sharks or into the river to the crocodiles, because I was trying to start a war.” Mr Faustino cannot name the officers who spoke to him, since they did not identify themselves or the positions they held; he could only identify their ranks from the uniforms they wore.

The next day, a major from the Military Police interrogated him. “The major asked me if I had the backing of a political party and wanted to know how much I was being paid.”

When he replied in the negative to the question, the major went on to ask him how he supported
himself. Mário Faustino stated that he was unemployed and an activist. “I told him I would continue to defend the rights of the Angolan people.”

Mário Faustino remained imprisoned in the Military Region of Luanda for another 12 days. He was then transferred to a military installation he was unable to identify and put into solitary confinement. “Military Police escorted me by car to a different location. I couldn’t see anything. When we arrived, somebody told me that we were in the Cidade Alta [the area where the Presidential Palace and the Ministry of Defence are located].”

“They [the soldiers] undressed me and left me completely naked in the hands of a brigadier and a lieutenant-colonel in uniform.”

“The brigadier told me that they planned to come and get me in the cell during the night and throw me into the deep sea. Then, the two officers beat me all over my body with batons and truncheons.”

“The lieutenant-colonel would beat me severely with a wooden-bar, while four soldiers held me down.”

Mr Faustino spent almost 20 days in solitary confinement and was largely denied food or water. “Some of the guards took pity on me, and gave me bread and water on the quiet”, he revealed.

One of these soldiers “offered” him a cigarette lighter as a means of drawing attention to his plight. “I was to set fire to the mattress so that I would be removed from the cell. The soldier took pity on me because he feared his superiors wanted to kill me right there.”

After this, the activist was transferred to the Criminal Investigation Service (SIC) within the headquarters of the Provincial Command of the National Police, where he is still being held.

Last Friday, July 3, the activist was finally produced before District Attorney Cangombe. “The prosecutor showed me the case file and asked if I had been questioned by another prosecutor. I said no”, he explained.

The prosecutor asked him what he had done and what had got him sent to jail. In spite of the fact that the military prosecutor had never questioned him, or explained the case against him, during his incarceration in the headquarters of the Military Region, Mário Faustino was then informed that the Military Police had opened a preliminary investigation file. Appended to the file, as proof of criminal activity, were the caricatures circulating on social media of President José Eduardo dos Santos. In one of these caricatures, the president is tied up and being led away by FBI agents.

A CANDIDATE FOR SPECIAL TREATMENT?

Up until 2010, Mário Faustino worked as a civil servant, employed by the President’s Security Bureau at the Special Rubbish Collection Brigade, in Kikolo, Luanda. He was a member of a group which included Ives Kamulingue and Isaías Cassule, who were notoriously murdered by state security agents three years ago.

Both men were heavily involved in organizing protests against the President. They represented a group of former employees, dismissed from the Security Bureau, and including ex-presidential guards, who attempted to stage a demonstration on May 27, 2012 to demand back pay.

Subsequent testimonies in court revealed that Alves Kamulingue was executed [4] with a shot to the head on the day of the attempted demonstration, by one of a group of operatives of the National Police and the State Intelligence and Security Service (SINSE). Around the same time, Isaías Cassule was assassinated [4] by asphyxiation, and his body was allegedly thrown to the crocodiles by another group of operatives under the direct command of the provincial committee of the ruling MPLA in Luanda. Some police and intelligence officers have been convicted for these murders, but the head of the military counter-intelligence, Lieutenant-General José Afonso Filomeno Peres, whom the convicted denounced as the mentor of the operations, is yet to be charged. The fate of his former fellow activists gives Mário Faustino good cause to fear that he may face a similar end.
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* Rafael Marques de Morais is a multi-award winning Angolan journalist. He publishes the website Maka Angola [5], where this article was previously published.

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Article-Summary:
Angolan political activists exercising their constitutional right to peaceful protest face illegal arrest, torture and assassination in the hands of the security forces. The justice system has also been compromised to protect the government of President Jose Eduardo dos Santos.

Category: Governance [11]
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