

AMERICAN COMMITTEE ON AFRICA
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I think you will be interested in these excerpts from a communication from Dr. Ian Gilchrist dated May 13, 1963, on the work he is doing among the Angolan refugees.

George M. Houser

The trip to Cabinda was both rewarding and disappointing.... most of the refugees I met resent being called Cabindais, or reference to their country as Cabinda. They like to think of themselves as Angolans, and of their country only as part of Angola. The links and amount of exchange with Northern Angola is considerable. The country is fertile, and I am told that it is also rich in minerals. I saw no evidence of any popular support of any of the small Cabinda political groups.

We made one wrong turn on the way up and took a very bad road via Seke-Banza. Went from there to Lukula and then in over a trail to a frontier village called Yema-Yanga. My impression that the number of refugees in the Congo is grossly underated was reinforced by the number of refugees we saw here, and later elsewhere. Most of the Congolese Government officials in the area are in reality Angolans who have been refugees for many years. Most of the mechanics and craftsmen are Angolans, and most of the stores are owned by Portuguese. We were well received by all, visited a number of adjacent refugee villages, and made a couple of sorties across the border into Angola. Stayed at Yema two days, and then left for Tshela.

Our reception at Sanda-Masala was by far the best we had received anywhere, with singing, dancing, and volleys of rifle fire and drumming. This is an area of "talking drums" and they talked all night. One big advantage that this and the adjacent villages have is that they are populated exclusively by Angolans, which makes everything a lot easier for everyone. Here the people are defiant. There are probably better than 5,000 refugees in this area, and none have returned to Angola. On the Congolese side the village is a typical poverty stricken refugee settlement, high up on the mountain. On the other side can be seen the neat, nice homes they have left. All down the valley of the Chiloango, this is repeated. When a Portuguese patrol came some months ago, they camped in these houses, which was a mistake, because the Angolans attacked and killed many. Now the Angolans use the village as headquarters for the local Command, and the Portuguese have stopped all such patrols confining their troops to the towns. So this is essentially Free Angola, but the people cannot move back in because of Portuguese air power. But they continue to cross into Angola, and have even built a rope bridge where everyone who crosses must pay 15F! They call this their "Douane,"* and have already some 3000F in the kitty which they plan eventually to use for reconstruction.

Of patients there were plenty, with a great predominance of helminthic and parasitic infestations. Because the country is fertile, there was less malnutrition, and because of the military situation there were few recent wounds or burns. In two days our drugs were exhausted but patients continued to come while we waited for gas.

* Customs post

On the way out of Sanda-Masala, the road was even worse for large parts of it had been covered by landslides, but with a lighter load, and some strong men, we made good time to Tshela. When we arrived at Sanda-Masala we found a man with a strangulated hernia, discovered we had left our emergency surgery kit behind, and prepared to do a repair with almost nothing. Fortunately it reduced at the last moment. However, I determined to take him to Leopoldville to prevent a future and fatal repetition. When we got as far as Tshela, it strangulated again and I had to take him to a company hospital where it was repaired as an emergency. Only later did I find out that the doctor, who is new there, is Portuguese! This whole part of the Congo is filled with plantations of rubber, timber, coffee, palm, and cocoa, and bananas (Belgian-owned) hence the company hospital.

Stuck in the mud again between Boma and Matadi and this time out only with the aid of a tractor. Spent the night there and finally back to Leo the next day. We had hoped to do an additional clinic at a refugee village across the river from Matadi, but because we had used up everything, it will have to wait for another time. Quite large numbers of the Matadi refugees are now moving from the city across the river to farm.