

Prepared by  
The American Committee on Africa  
211 East 43rd Street  
New York 17, New York  
212 TN 7-8733

6  
April/May 1964

## BACKGROUND

on

DR. F. IAN GILCHRIST

and

THE SITUATION IN ANGOLA

GENERAL: Ian Gilchrist, the 29-year-old Canadian doctor serving among Angolan refugees in the Congo, is making a short speaking tour of the US and Canada to make known the facts about the war in Angola and the plight of more than 300,000 refugees. His work is sponsored by ERA (Emergency Relief for Angola, a division of the American Committee on Africa). Congo authorities, while doing their best, cannot extend help to the refugees; the International Red Cross has halted its program; the United Nations cannot act because of Portuguese pressure; this leaves responsibility for the care of the refugees on private organizations and individuals. Exactly four doctors are serving the medical needs of the refugees -- and F. Ian Gilchrist is the only one from North America.

GILCHRIST . . . is the son of a medical missionary still in Angola today. He was born in Halifax and grew up on his father's mission. Here he learned to speak the local African languages as well as to see things from the African point of view rather than that of the Portuguese administration. He received his medical training in Canada and joined the Emergency Relief to Angola program in January 1963. His wife and two children live with him at the Leopoldville clinic-compound, where he sees an average of 80 patients a day. When not at the clinic, he loads up his station wagon (donated by American contributors) and takes to the bush roads.



Diet diseases and malaria are the two commonest causes of suffering, he reports. He also treats a fair number of wounded guerrillas brought back from encounters in Angola. Almost all the drugs he dispenses have been donated by American drug manufacturers.

Dr. Gilchrist has been stuck in the mud, isolated in lonely villages, shot at by Portuguese planes; he's been hungry, tired, poor, and forgotten . . . but he's never been beaten.

ANGOLA . . . is a Portuguese colony on Africa's west coast, which shares a common border with the Congo. The population is made up of Africans (4 million), whites (200,000), and mulattoes (75,000). The colony's coffee, diamond, and cotton exports make it Portugal's only profitable territory in her empire. Angola has been a Portuguese possession for almost 500 years. Illiteracy in Angola is more than 95 percent, and slavery was practiced by the Portuguese into the 20th century. When the Congo became independent in 1960, Angolans also demanded their freedom. But the Portuguese refused to consider such a possibility. Thus, in 1961, the Africans rebelled violently against Portuguese rule. In retaliation, the Portuguese struck terror into the hearts of the civilian population: rebellious villages were bombed and burned; the bush was set on fire to flush out hidden villagers; thousands of refugees fled to the neighboring Congo.

Today, a war between Portuguese and Angolans is being waged silently and relentlessly. The United Nations has repeatedly called for an end to Portuguese colonialism; the United States has requested Portugal to change its policies. But to no avail. Angolans receive help from Algeria, Tunisia, the Congo, and other African countries.

THE REFUGEES: Dr. Gilchrist recently wrote: "We do not delude ourselves into thinking we have much more than scratched the surface of providing



relief for close to half a million refugees. But we have, we believe, done that much. We have posts and workers stretching about half-way along the Congo-Angolan border and extending down into Angola as far as Luanda. Early in the new year we hope to start on the other end of the border and begin working through from Katanga."

These border posts are necessary to reach the refugees as they stumble across the frontier. As Gilchrist described one such incident: "Looking at these new refugees as I have done so often in the past year, I saw a group of about 20 individuals. The Ovimbundu (people from southern Angola) had come farthest. They were three men, two women, and two children. Three of their children had died along the way. All were in a bad state physically, in tatters and rags, and mentally numbed. One man, his head covered with sores, his eyes white with the lowest hemoglobin level compatible with life, said to me: 'I was ashamed to see you because I am almost nude.' Yet they were here. After six weeks of hiding, running, starving, suffering, and dying, they had escaped. With all the odds against them they had won the game, all of them except the three small bloated bodies that lay along the way."