

ANGOLA: Post-war elections to cost US \$430 million

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President Jose Eduardo dos Santos

JOHANNESBURG, 30 Jun 2004 (IRIN) - Angola's main opposition party, UNITA, said on Thursday the government had underestimated the cost of holding the country's first post-war elections.

A recently published study by the ministry of territorial administration said the country would need up to US \$430 million to stage the national poll.

It recommended a preparatory period of 12 months for the simultaneous presidential and legislative ballots, noting that at an estimated US \$89.4 million, voter registration was likely to be the most costly item.

"UNITA is currently making plans to meet with all the opposition parties as well as other key players, to assess the study's recommendation. But because there is so much involved in organising the election, we think that we are going to need in excess of the US \$430 million," UNITA's secretary for public administration, Alcides Sakala, told IRIN.

Sakala noted that in addition to the general administrative costs of the poll, a significant investment would be required for local transportation expenses, especially if election officials had to travel into mined areas to verify activities at polling station sites.

"We expect that the electoral education campaign and the training of officials will require quite a substantial amount of money, much more than during the lead-up to the 1992 elections," he added.

UNITA said one of the constraints facing opposition parties was the lack of resources. "Even though by law political parties are supposed to be financed, many smaller parties have very limited funds. One of the main points of discussion right now amongst us [opposition parties] is the transparency of financing of political parties," Sakala commented.

He called on donors to coordinate their positions and support for the upcoming poll, "as this would send a message to the [ruling] MPLA that they have to conduct free and fair elections".

President Jose Eduardo dos Santos, who has been facing growing pressure to set a date for elections, last week announced that on 2 July the Council of the Republic, a consultative body, would begin discussing possible dates for the national poll.

UNITA has called for elections by mid-2005, but the government has laid out 14

tasks to be completed before the country can vote, including constitutional reform.

Civil rights activists and opposition parties have called for revision of the constitution to be suspended until after the first post-war general elections are held.