Angola jails 17 activists for rebellion after public reading of political book

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By Reuters

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<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/28/angola-jails-17-activists-rebellion-public-book-reading>

A court in Angola has jailed 17 young activists, some for more than eight years, for rebelling against the government of José Eduardo dos Santos, after [they organised a reading of a US academic’s book](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/30/angola-book-club-dos-santos-arrests).

The activists were arrested in the capital, Luanda, last June after organising the reading of From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation, by Gene Sharp. The book’s blurb describes it as “a blueprint for non-violent resistance to repressive regimes”.

[They were charged with acts of rebellion](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/17/angolan-activists-charged-rebellion-state-book-reading), planning mass action of civil disobedience in Luanda and producing fake passports, among other charges. Their sentences ranged from two years and three months to eight years and six months.

They were sent to jail immediately but their defence lawyer requested the sentences be suspended pending an appeal in [Angola](https://www.theguardian.com/world/angola)’s supreme court.

“These boys who were debating their rights are the ones they want to condemn but President José Eduardo who steals everything is getting protected,” the mother of one of the activists, Adalia Chivonde, told Reuters after the sentence was handed down. “This sentence is garbage for me, it means nothing.”

A halving of oil prices last year has piled hardship on Angolans as its currency, the kwanza, plummeted in value and the government cut public spending in one of the most unequal societies in the world, leading to an increase in anti-government sentiment.

Human rights groups have accused Dos Santos of using the judiciary to crush dissent. Angola’s state secretary for human rights said last year the country needed to restore trust in its justice system.

A prominent human rights activist, José Marcos Mavungo, was sentenced to six years in prison last year for an “attack on the sovereignty of the Angolan state” after he organised anti-government protests in the northern oil region of Cabinda.

Dos Santos has been in power for 37 years but [announced earlier this month that he planned to step down in 2018](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/14/angola-president-dos-santos-giving-up-power-2018-should-we-believe-him).