

IFEX: Drop defamation charges against author of *Blood Diamonds: Corruption and Torture in Angola*

Reporters Without Borders has joined nine other NGOs in demanding the withdrawal of criminal defamation charges against Angolan journalist Rafael Marques de Morais, who went on trial on 24 March...

The special rapporteurs on freedom of expression and human rights defenders of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the United Nations are urged to support this call.

The target of judicial persecution for years for denouncing human rights violations in Angola's diamond mining industry, Marques was awarded the 2015 Index on Censorship Freedom of Expression Award for Journalism on 18 March in London.

The Angolan authorities should immediately drop all criminal defamation charges against award-winning investigative journalist and human rights defender, Rafael Marques de Morais.



A thing of beauty to some... and of blood to others. (Image: Public Domain)

Marques went on trial on 24 March 2015 on charges of defamation relating to his book, *Blood Diamonds: Corruption and Torture in Angola*. The book describes how Angolan military officials and private security companies committed human rights abuses against Angolan villagers in the course of diamond-mining operations. It includes reports of 500 cases of torture and 100 killings. Days before his trial, Rafael [was awarded](#) the 2015 Index on Censorship Freedom of Expression Award for journalism.

Targeted

It is not the first time Marques has been targeted for the lawful exercise of his rights. The Angolan authorities appear to be using their criminal defamation laws to deter Marques from his critical human rights reporting. This is a violation of his right to freedom of expression. Given the serious irregularities that have already taken place in his case, there is no chance that Marques will receive a fair trial in Angola.

In light of the judgment of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in December 2014 in [Konaté v Burkina Faso](#), it is clear that the time has come for Angola to consider repealing its criminal defamation law. The Court ruled that imprisonment for defamation violates the right to freedom of expression and that criminal defamation laws should only be used in restricted circumstances. The judgment is binding on all African Union member states, including Angola.

In its 2005 decision regarding an earlier defamation case against Marques, the UN Human Rights Committee determined that his prior conviction for defamation violated his rights to liberty and security of person, freedom of movement and freedom of expression.

Along with a coalition of other NGOs, the undersigned filed a Letter of Allegation and an Urgent Appeal with Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression and Human Rights Defenders of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the United Nations, urging them to intervene.

The Letter of Allegation [can be read here](#). The Urgent Appeal [can be read here](#).

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