

Less security concerns as SA companies head to Angola



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Despite not experiencing the level of violent crime as South Africa and Nigeria, Angola still faces serious challenges about its security as petty crime - mostly fuelled by poverty and social injustice - continues to cast a shadow over what many believe is the land of hospitality and endless opportunities. As South African companies prepare to enter the country, security analysts advice is: "Be safe, don't take anything for granted".

Speaking at the SA-Angola Investment Forum, hosted by the International Institute for Research (IIR), in Johannesburg this week, Cassie van der Merwe, G4S Security Services Angola MD said, "Petty crime is rife and care should be taken to secure valuables even when in perceived safe locations like hotels, and so on.

"Travel with locked doors and don't approach strangers or engage in conversation with strangers." van der Merwe added.

According to van der Merwe, the risk of political instability is almost zero, as the ruling MPLA and the opposition entertain a 'cordial' relationship. However, with the rise of civil society and the disgruntled unemployed youth playing a much bigger role these days all over the world, anything can happen at any time.

The other risk

With the country's infrastructure destroyed during 27 years of war, he described roads and infrastructure as the single biggest risk apart from personal safety in Angola.

"Parking space is almost non-existent and travellers must be aware of this. Traffic is so congested in the capital city, Luanda, that it is advisable to plan one meeting a day," he said.

On landmines, he said, "Most of the areas where commercial activities take place have been cleared of landmines. Remote areas are still no-go areas for travel by vehicle, and mine clearance operations are ongoing. Seek advice before venturing into remote areas."

However, despite the uneasy calm currently reigning in Angola, the MPLA-led government is said to be anxious and shaken by the events happening in North Africa, where destitute and oppressed people demand political reforms and equal redistribution of the country's wealth.

Furthermore, the presidential elections due to take place next year are also said to worry potential and existing investors as elections time in Africa is a period of violence, uncertainty and fear.

Understand Angola

Nevertheless, van der Merwe said: "Angola is stable and if care is taken in terms of personal safety, you will discover a wonderful country full of opportunities opening up to investors every day. As things stand, nothing can deter investors to go in there."

In order to assess and manage the risks involved in investing in this country, he said, "Engage a reputable security company to do security risk analysis and advise on personal security, close protection for VIPs, premises, among others.

"Know and understand the Angolan law - this will save you much heartache later on. Appoint a reputable Angolan Law firm to assist with setting up the business or advising on potential joint ventures or partnerships.

"Streamline visa applications through building relationships with Angolan Embassy staff (visas can take up to four weeks to be issued).

"Before entering the market place, appoint a security advisor from reputable company to assess risks and advise on travel, screening of contacts and business associates.

"When traveling for the first time, consider using journey management services from the airport to the hotel and travelling by road to and from appointments.

"Trust is earned in Angola - foreigners are still viewed with a lot of distrust. Do not make yourself a soft target due to your own ignorance."

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Issa Sikiti da Silva is a winner of the 2010 SADC Media Awards (print category). He freelances for various media outlets, local and foreign, and has travelled extensively across Africa. His work has been published both in French and English. He used to contribute to Bizcommunity.com as a senior news writer.

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