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December 14, 2015

Nicki Minaj
The Blueprint Group
c/o Cortez Bryant and Gee Roberson

Dear Ms. Minaj,

According to reliable information provided by Human Rights Foundation (HRF) contacts in Angola, you will travel to Luanda to perform at a “Christmas Festival” taking place on December 19, 2015.

As you might know, Unitel, a mobile telephone company controlled by Isabel dos Santos (daughter of Angolan dictator José Eduardo dos Santos) is financing your performance.

I am writing to urgently inform you of the human rights crisis in Angola; to explain the role that dictator dos Santos has played in violating the rights of millions of Angolans; and to request that, in view of your status as a global personality, you cancel your performance. Ms. Minaj, the payment you are receiving from your Angolan sponsors is the result of government corruption and human rights violations.

During their brutal three-decade authoritarian rule, the dos Santos family has exploited Angola’s diamond and oil wealth to amass an illegitimate fortune while maintaining control over all branches of the government, the military, and civil society. Dos Santos has made it his policy to harass, imprison, or kill politicians, journalists, and activists who protest his rule.

In Angola, independent media are subject to systematic legal and physical persecution. Journalists are routinely arrested, beaten, and even disappeared when covering corruption matters and exposing the dos Santos criminal enterprise. Beyond censoring through violence, the Angolan regime owns the only national radio station, controls the only daily newspaper, and exerts control over Angola’s television stations. Artists such as yourself are not allowed to freely express their opinions in Angola, where criticizing the government is a crime punishable with fines and imprisonment.

HRF is not alone in condemning Angola’s dictatorial regime. The country is ranked number 123 out of 180 countries by Reporters without Borders in its 2015 World Press Index. Other major organizations have documented the dos Santos family’s human rights crimes, including Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Committee to Protect Journalists.

To underline the rampant corruption in Angola, consider that in 2014 Transparency International ranked Angola 161 out of 175 countries in their corruption index. Furthermore, according to the highly credible

anticorruption organization Maka Angola, the president's billionaire daughter Isabel dos Santos is the main beneficiary of the "blood diamond" trade in Angola.

The dos Santos regime's ongoing crackdown on dissent is well illustrated by a current trial against 17 peaceful activists in Angola. The 17 individuals, including Angolan hip-hop and rapper star Luaty Beirão, were arrested and detained in June 2015 in the city of Luanda after attending a meeting to discuss democracy and non-violence. Specifically, they discussed Gene Sharp's book "From Dictatorship to Democracy," a guide to non-violent resistance. These activists were jailed for more than 90 days without being formally notified of the charges they were facing. And now they will be tried on charges of plotting to overthrow the Angolan government.

Ms. Minaj, you are well known for being involved with charities such as the Get Schooled Foundation, which helps motivate young people to graduate from high school and succeed in college. Yet, if you move forward with this performance for the dictator and his family, you will be in league with the people stealing educational resources and opportunity from young Angolans. As a strong-willed independent artist shouldn't you be advocating for the release of the imprisoned rapper Luaty Beirão rather than entertaining the dictator and his thieving family?

Considering the information above—and with great appreciation for your work as an artist—HRF believes that your participation in a performance sponsored by a thuggish kleptocratic dynasty involved in gross human rights violations would be improper. Furthermore, it would be disastrous for a public figure of your standing who has articulated a commitment to education and social justice.

HRF asks you to urgently consider canceling your Unitel performance, scheduled for December 19, in Luanda, Angola. If you have any questions, you can contact me at (212) 246-8486 or by email at thor@hrf.org.

Very truly yours,



Thor Halvorssen
President
Human Rights Foundation