

[Angola: Drop charges against journalist and corporate accountability activist Rafael Marques](#)

28.04.2015



(Update - 21 May 2015) - Criminal defamation charges against Angolan journalist and corporate accountability activist Rafael Marques were dropped on 21 May 2105 following a concerted campaign by leading human rights organisations and jewelry companies.

Welcoming the withdrawal of the charges, ISHR Director Phil Lynch said, 'This is a victory for freedom of expression, corporate accountability and the rule of law.'

'The dropping of charges, however, is not enough,' Mr Lynch said.

'The government of Angola and governments throughout the region must take positive steps to respect and protect Rafael and all other human rights defenders who are threatened, restricted and at risk because of their vital work to promote corporate respect for human rights and to expose and seek accountability for corporate human rights abuses.'

(Geneva) - Leading human rights organisations and prominent companies have joined forces to call for Angola to drop charges against award-winning journalist, corporate accountability activist and human rights defender Rafael Marques. Marques has been charged with criminal defamation in connection with his book *Blood Diamonds: Torture and Corruption in Angola*.

The book alleges human rights abuses have been perpetrated against Angolan villagers by or with the involvement of Angolan military officials and private security companies contracted by mining firms, in the course of diamond mining operations. It includes reports of 500 cases of torture and 100 killings, as well as documenting forced evictions, land seizures, and other abuses. Generals in the Angolan army are major shareholders of some diamond firms implicated in the book, and the prosecutor has charged that his reporting is defamatory to them. Mr Marques faces nine years in prison and damages equivalent to US\$1.2 million in proceedings that do not meet international standards for a fair trial.

In an [open letter](#), human rights organisations including the [Business and Human Rights Resource Centre](#), Front Line Defenders, the Open Society Initiative and the International Service for Human Rights said that 'all

jewelry and diamond firms, regardless of whether or not they source directly or indirectly from Angola, should work toward a global diamond supply chain free from human rights abuses. In addition to being the responsible thing to do, this is in their own interest: when an industry is associated with serious human rights violations, all companies in that sector are at risk of reputational damage.' The open letter called on companies to speak out publicly against violations of the rights to freedom of expression and a fair trial in the case of Mr Marques.

Responding to this call, prominent jewelers Tiffany & Co, Leber Jeweler and Brilliant Earth issued an [open statement](#) expressing their concern 'over efforts by the Angolan Government to criminally prosecute the award-winning journalist and human rights activist Rafael Marques de Morais on charges of libel against a number of Angolan generals.' The open statement urged the Angolan Government 'to drop all charges against Rafael Marques' and to establish 'an independent commission that will fairly and objectively investigate the allegations of human rights abuses committed against artisanal diamond mining communities reported by Rafael Marques'.

The companies' joint statement built on an earlier [statement issued by Leber Jeweler](#) in late-March 2015, calling on Angola to 'observe the rights of Rafael Marques de Morais to both freedom of speech and freedom of the press' and urging US retailers 'to deeply question their decision to continue to sell diamonds of Angolan origin in light of this politically motivated trial'.

The joint action by the human rights organisations and jewelers was reported on in [Forbes](#).

Contact: Phil Lynch, International Service for Human Rights, on p.lynch@ishr.ch

ISHR