



Rafael Marques de Morais: “For Press Freedom, I Have Had to Fight to Free the Angolan People from Fear”

By Clara Zid



Rafael Marques de Morais has something that defines his whole life: the Civil Courage Prize, which recognises his *“steadfast resistance to evil at great personal risk”*. Rafael is a journalist and political activist from Angola, fighting government corruption through his online watchdog [Maka Angola](#) and the [Makaleaks](#) whistleblower platform.

To understand the world of corruption in which Marques lives, he tells us about his last investigation: *“A former provincial governor diverted the funds to build schools and a hospital in a rather depressed community, and instead built his own private luxury lodge to welcome foreign hunters to hunt lions and elephants”*.

Between 1999 and 2002, Marques de Morais wrote a series of articles about the diamond trade which gave birth to the book *“Blood Diamonds: Corruption and Torture in Angola”*. [According to the Wikipedia](#), the articles *“described the killing and terrorizing of villagers by private security companies and Angolan military officials in the name of protecting mining operations”*. In November 2011 the journalist issued a criminal complaint accusing nine Angolan generals of crimes against humanity in connection with diamond mining. This is Marques style. His fight is against fear: *“For*

there to be press freedom, people must speak freely, without fear. So, I have had to fight to help free the Angolan people from the shackles of fear as well. Otherwise, journalism is like building a sand castle near a high tide”.

“On my first trial, in 2000, the two female assistant judges came to whisper to my ear that they were praying for me”

This means becoming an activist: *“I have forged my skills under a dictatorship, and there was no way I could just do journalism. I have had to defend and fight for the very space to fulfill my duties as a professional and as a citizen”.* Now, he says, we see even in the United States that *“many media outlets and journalists are getting bolder, and being activists, as President Trump accuses them of being the “enemies of the people”.*

Marques de Morais is proud to have never fought alone: *“On my first trial, in 2000, the two female assistant judges came to whisper to my ear that they were praying for me, and wished me Godspeed strength”.* He had been left with no lawyer, no witness, in a trial held in camera for calling the President Dos Santos corrupt and a dictator. *“But I was not alone, I had the two assistant judges giving me strength. It is the first time I share this story”*, he states.





Author: Barbican C. Alex Brenner

Marques doesn't remember how many times he's been in prison: *"I lost count. The longest I stayed in prison was for 43 or 44 days, but I have been briefly detained many times"*. Once, he was arrested while going to buy tomatoes for a salad: *"I saw a Swiss human rights researcher being chased by some militias. I stopped to help her, and then I ended up at the police station with my tomatoes in the car"*, he says.

Another time, a friend asked him to accompany him to buy fish, early in the morning. Without them knowing it, the police had destroyed tens of fishermen's huts and houses and forcibly removed the people and dumped them out of the city: *"Needless to say, I was blamed as the agitator by the police and briefly held"*, Marques asserts.

In 2013, he went to cover the trial of young protesters. He was interviewing them outside the court when *"54 special police forces besieged us with machine guns and all the anti-riot gear, and an armored car. We were taken to the Rapid Intervention Police where some of us were tortured and taunted with death threats"*. All the action was filmed by a camerawoman because, according to Marques, *"the regime's hatred for me inspired them to film my beating"*.

He has *"a lot of kafkaesque stories to write about one day, including ambushes"*, but he has never surrendered. In 2009 he launched Maka Angola to publish the material he had in excess for his dissertation at Oxford University on *"The Transparency of Looting"* in Angola. *"I wanted to share all the information I had gathered"*, he says, as the great journalist he is.

Qurium has been hosting Maka Angola and Maka Leaks since 2016. Maka Angola had received many cyberattacks since he joined Virtualroad, by a colleague's recommendation: *"Every since I have had a peace of mind, for it has become a great line of defence against cyber attacks and I have not been bothered by a single attack since Virtualroad became Makaangola's host"*, he says.

Does Marques de Morais think the Internet is a good or a bad tool for journalists? *"It's only a tool, it*

all depends on the strength of the journalists who use it for good journalism, vis-à-vis the armies of trolls at the service of authoritarian regimes, and the mushrooming industry of online disinformation". We're sure which side is he on.

In 2018 the International Press Institute awarded Rafael Marques de Morais with the World Press Freedom Hero prize

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