



Huambo Medical Center, of the South-Western Angola Union Mission

Photo courtesy of Diamantino Sawambo.

# Huambo Medical Center, Angola

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## DIAMANTINO ABÍLIO SAWAMBO

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B.A. (Montemorelos University, Mexico), serves as the Publishing, Spirit of Prophecy and Communication director for the Southwest Angola Union Mission since 2015. He previously worked as a district pastor and assistant lecturer at Huambo Theological Seminary. He is now studying for a Master of Arts in Biblical-Theological Studies (MABTS) at the Adventist University of Africa in Kenya. Pastor Sawambo also worked as a journalist for the "Folha8" independent newspaper in Angola.

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Huambo Medical Centre is the most renowned Seventh-day Adventist health institution in the South-Western Angola Union, if not in the whole country of Angola.

## General Overview

Huambo Medical Centre is located along Teixeira da Silva Street, in the upper part of the city of Huambo, Angola. It has 31 employees, including seven doctors, ten nurses, two laboratory technicians, four administrative staff, and eight general workers. It has four service departments, namely: Dermatology, Gynaecology, Stomatology, and the laboratory. It also operates a well-equipped ambulance service.

## Developments that Led to the Establishment of the Institution

The Seventh-day Adventist presence in central Angola dates back to 1927.<sup>1</sup> According to Alexandre Justino, “it was in 1927 that W. H. Anderson, for his need to settle in the district capital, requested the granting of land for a mission in that city [Huambo].”<sup>2</sup> From Justino, we also learn that in that same year the plot of land where the union office is situated today (as built by T. R. Huxtable) was purchased.<sup>3</sup> This led to the transfer of the headquarters office of the Angola Union Mission from Lepi commune near Bongo to the city of New Lisbon (now Huambo) in 1929.

Huambo city is also the capital of Huambo province, with an area of 35,771 square kilometers and a population of 2,301,524 that is predominantly from the Ovimbundu tribe. This province forms part of the constituency of the Central Association Mission, which has a total membership of 164,261,<sup>4</sup> in the South-Western Angola Union Mission. The city of Huambo is 600 kilometers from Luanda, the capital city of Angola. Huambo province is bordered by the provinces of Kwanza-Sul in the north, Bié in the east, Huila in the south, and Benguela Province in the west. The common diseases prevalent in these provinces include malaria, diarrhea, and pneumonia. There are also urinary infections, parathyroid infections, ear infections, and ophthalmologic diseases.

The idea of establishing the medical center in Huambo came from Pedro Balançãs de Freitas, who led the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Angola from 1975-1990, according to Elias Chicomo. Chicomo explained that in 1985,<sup>5</sup> the Euro Africa Division (which supervised Angola Union then) sent medical staff from Bongo Mission Hospital. Dr Verger and his wife, who was a nurse, constituted the medical team. Due to the bad political situation in Angola at that time, the union president decided to transfer the Verger family from Bongo Mission Hospital to Huambo. Dr Verger and his staff began construction work on the building that now functions as the laboratory, with the technical expertise of Antonio Luís Alho, a Portuguese missionary who had arrived in September 1976. While working on the same building, one group was responsible for the first floor and the new group worked on the third floor, independent of each other. The project was under the supervision of the Angola Union.

Today the medical center facilities consist of two separate buildings, one for stomatology and another one for general medical services. The general medical service building, equipped with a total of 16 beds, has three wards (one for men, one for women, and one for children). There are two consulting rooms, and one analysis laboratory. There is a reception room and an accounting room. Meanwhile the Stomatology building has two

consulting rooms, one sterilization room, the reception area, two laboratories, and a storeroom. This building also houses two dental chairs.

## Founding of the Huambo Medical Centre (S.A.)

The history of the founding of the Huambo Medical Center (S.A.) can be presented in three phases, if one takes into account the work of the Adventist medical missionaries. The first part begins with the Huambo dispensary that operated between 1929 and 1933, under the management of Mrs. W. H. Anderson. The first phase starts with Mrs. C. W. Curtis, a nurse who came from the United States of America and served from 1933 to 1941,<sup>6</sup> attending to from 50 to 100 patients daily.<sup>7</sup> During this period, the Angola Union was under the supervision of the African Division and later the Southern Africa Division.

The second phase was from 1976 to 1987, under the Euro-Africa Division. This phase's information is based on the testimony of Dr. Menezes de Freitas,<sup>8</sup> a physician who is also a son of Pastor Pedro Balanças de Freitas, who remembers the existence of a "Clinic Analysis Laboratory." The laboratory was run by Antonio Luís Alho, a Portuguese missionary whose wife, Ivone Rodrigues, worked as an accountant of the union office.<sup>9</sup> Menezes mentioned the names of Julino Kamalanga, Silvino Jeremias, and Dantas de Freitas, as some of Antonio Luis Alho's staff. The Clinic Analyses Laboratory was functioning in the building where the Theological Seminary in Huambo now is.<sup>10</sup>

The third and last phase began in 1985, under the Euro-Africa Division. "In 1985, Dr. Otello Vergères, Swedish citizen, arrived with Dr. Roberto Va, Brazilian citizen, from Germany."<sup>11</sup> These two physicians came to replace the staff which were abducted at Bongo Mission on June 10, 1982.<sup>12</sup> Under the union leadership of Pedro Balanças de Freitas, Dr. Vergeres and his wife who recently had come from Bongo, started working in Huambo on the third floor of the building where the Analysis Laboratory Clinic was.<sup>13</sup> In 1987 the staff was increased by the addition of Elias Chicomo, Albano Chioca, and Baptista Mateus, who also came from Bongo's ministerial seminary. Most of these people coming from the ministerial seminary had been nurses before they started their ministerial studies. Others working in the Analysis Laboratory Clinic were Silvino Jeremias, Dantas de Freitas, Julino Kamalanga, Maria Ester, and Cristina Gonçalves.

## Building, Rehabilitation and Opening of the Dental Department

During the course of its operations, the Huambo Medical Center (S.A.) needed improvements in its structure. The first rehabilitation work was done under the management of Elias Chicomo in 1987. A ceiling was added to the house. No record was found for the cost of the improvements made to the house. The second rehabilitation work was done by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), during 1994 -1995, after the civil war that had started after the first Angola election in 1992. ADRA rehabilitated the medical center after it was damaged in the 1993 war in Huambo. In 2013, under the management of the Central Association Mission,

Huambo Medical Center benefited from additional rehabilitation work valued at about US\$150,000, according to Emilio Cupua,<sup>14</sup> who was the treasurer of the association at the time.

In 2012 the medical center saw its Stomatology services strengthened by the arrival of Dr Miguel O. Rodriguez, a dental surgeon from Mexico. By 2013 a building had been constructed and equipment had been donated by the National Association of Seventh-day Adventist Dentists (NASDAD). This led to the official opening of the Adventist Dental Clinic on May 30, 2014, and patients began to visit the clinic.

As time went on, it became very apparent to Dr Rodriguez that for the Adventist Dental Clinic in Angola to be successful, a local dental laboratory was needed. In 2015 the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division donated funds for purchasing additional dental equipment and establishing the dental laboratory, which officially opened in late 2015.<sup>15</sup>

Beginning September 11, 2018, the Adventist Dental Clinic joined the Huambo Medical Center under the supervision of Dr. Miguel O. Rodriguez, who became the manager of Huambo Medical Center (S.A.). In the last South-Western Angola Union Mission Executive Committee, a vote was taken that the medical center would be under the supervision of the union. The union committee also decided that the same person should manage both the medical center and the dental clinic, since they are located at the same place. Under Dr. Rodriguez's leadership, the medical center is benefiting from minor repairs, budgeted at two million kwanzas.

## The Management of the Medical Center

The management of the Huambo Medical Center may currently be seen from two perspectives. Initially the operations of the medical center were not well defined, as they depended much on the church financial appropriations, even in the paying of salaries. In other words, "the gospel ministry was the mother of health work." Lately, however, there is a certain degree of autonomy and the institution is becoming more self-supporting.

On September 11, 2018, the medical center was renamed "Centro Medico Adventista do Huambo S.A." (Huambo Adventist Medical Center). The name was changed to comply with the new law of the country. With this change, according to Angola government law, the medical center is regarded as a separate organizational entity. Since the merger of the two entities, the medical center attends to an average of 20 patients per day,<sup>16</sup> and earns on average 43,000 kwanzas per day.<sup>17</sup>

In regard to spiritual and community service activities, the medical center workers offer prayers, distribute missionary books, and conduct health campaigns where they give free service, as they did on Sunday, September 9, 2018. On the other hand, students from the Faculty of Theology in Huambo offer chaplaincy services. For example, Silverio Daniel Uiembe and Jesse Manuel Gunza, fourth-year theology students, have offered prayers and held devotional Bible studies with the patients.

## Huambo Medical Centre's Future Outlook

Plans are being discussed with Adventist Health International (AHI) for future cooperation with Huambo Medical Center. AHI's initial support was limited to dental work.<sup>18</sup> Then Dr Richard H. Hart, president of Adventist Health International, visited the city of Huambo in July 2018 with a group of medical professionals. AHI is also assisting in the training of medical staff, as initially two young people were recently sent to Mexico for training through the initiative of the Dental Clinic.

## List of Directors

Mrs. W. H. Anderson (1929-1933); Mrs C. W. Curtis (1933-1941); \_\_\_\_ (1942-1975); António Luís Alho (1976 -1979); Dantas de Freitas (1977-1985); Dr. Verger (1985-1987); Elias Chicomo (1987-1989); Maria Lofita de Freitas (1989-1993); Silvino Jeremias (1993-1995); Bernardo Cassule (1996-1998); Angelina Jonas (1999-2003); Celestino Lopes (2003-2013); Samuel José (2013-2014); Miguel Obed Rodrigues (2015); Maily Rodrigues (2016); Sandra Acosta (2016-2017); Miguel Obed (2018-present).

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## NOTES

1. Alexandre Justino, *Pregoeiros da Verdade Presente: A História da Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia em Angola (1924-2004)*, 2007, 128.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. South-Western Angola Union Secretary's Statistical Report of Second Quarter of 2018, consulted on April 10, 2018.

5. Ibid, 282.

6. Alexandre, 153; "Angola Union Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1933), 173, accessed August 28, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Yearbooks/YB1933.pdf>.

7. Ibid.

8. Menezes de Freitas, interview by the author, Huambo, Angola, September 14, 2018.

9. Ernesto Ferreira, *Arautos de Boas Novas (1904-2004) - Centenário da Igreja Adventista do Sétimo Dia em Portugal*, 2008, 397.

10. Ibid.

11. Alexandre, 278.

12. Ibid., 277.

13. Elias Chicomo, interview by author, Huambo, Angola, March 6, 2014.

14. Emílio Cupua, Data collected at the opening of the Huambo Medical Center on April 12, 2013.

15. Dustin Jones, "Dental Clinics Continue AHI Mission," in *Adventist Health International Annual Report 2017*, 12-15.

16. Ruth Capeia, interview by author, Huambo, Angola, September 20, 2018.

17. Data given by Dr. Miguel Obed, on September 25, 2018. The data represents only the last two months, and for the Dental area only, due to the fact the data for the two merged entities started only in October 2018.

18. Dustin Jones, "Dental Clinics Continue AHI Mission," 14-15.

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