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## **Côte d'Ivoire: ECOWAS mediation must prioritise human rights**

Mediators appointed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) must place the protection of human rights at the heart of their efforts to end the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, Amnesty International said today.

The mediators are set to return to Côte d'Ivoire on 3 January in an attempt to find a solution to the political deadlock following the disputed 28 November presidential election.

"People are living in fear of being shot, arrested or abducted by the security forces or militias close to Laurent Gbagbo," said Erwin van der Borght, Amnesty International's Africa program director.

"ECOWAS must send a strong signal that everything possible should be done to respect and protect the human rights of the population."

"All allegations of grave human rights abuses must be independently investigated".

Amnesty International has received reports of extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, abductions and forced disappearances, mainly committed by the security forces and militias loyal to Laurent Gbagbo, who the UN has said lost the election but has refused to hand over power.

The UN has said that at least 173 people have been killed during post-election violence and that more than 14,000 people have fled Côte d'Ivoire to seek refuge in neighboring countries, including Liberia.

Amnesty International is also particularly concerned about recent attacks on the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) which is trying to investigate reported human rights violations.

On 28 December 2010 security personnel prevented representatives of UNOCI from visiting a site in N'Dotré on the outskirts of Abidjan where dozens of bodies are reported to be buried.

Also on 28 December a UNOCI convoy was attacked in the district of Yopougon in Abidjan and a Bangladeshi soldier was wounded in the arm with a machete.

On 29 December 2010, another UNOCI patrol came under gunfire in Abobo, Abidjan.

"ECOWAS mediators must formally protest against the attacks against UNOCI and demand that peacekeeping forces can safely conduct their mission of monitoring and protecting human rights," said Erwin van der Borght.

At a press conference in Abidjan on 29 December 2010, Alain Le Roy Deputy Secretary General in charge of the UN peacekeeping force, attributed the attacks against their forces to "propaganda" and "hate speech" broadcast by the Ivorian state broadcaster.

Amnesty International urges ECOWAS to reiterate that no Ivorian politician should incite the commission of human rights violations or abuses and warn that perpetrators of such abuses could be held to account by the International Criminal Court.