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Côte d’Ivoire: Dozens of Gbagbo supporters detained without charge

Authorities in Côte d’Ivoire are holding at least 50 people without charge, including several high-profile Ivorian politicians, following the arrest of former President Laurent Gbagbo two months ago, Amnesty International has discovered.

At least 21 Gbagbo supporters, among them the former Prime Minister and the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, are being held at the Pergola Hotel in Abidjan, the economic capital.

A number of others are being held in the north of the country, including Laurent Gbagbo, his wife Simone Gbagbo and Pascal Affi N’guessan, the president of Laurent Gbagbo’s political party, the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI).

"This is hardly a promising start to Alassane Ouattara’s presidency," said Véronique Aubert, Amnesty International’s Deputy Director for Africa.

"Detaining people without charge is in direct breach of international human rights standards. The authorities in Côte d’Ivoire must promptly charge all detainees with a recognizable criminal offence, or else release them immediately."

Beatings in detention

Amnesty International is concerned that a number of individuals held at the Pergola Hotel and possibly in other locations may be prisoners of conscience, held solely because of their political opinions, actual or perceived.

The organization is particularly worried about the plight of 23 members of the police and military held in the northern town of Korhogo in conditions that may be life-threatening.

A recent Amnesty International delegation visited detainees at the Pergola Hotel, but was denied access to those being held in the northern towns of Korhogo, Bouna and Odienné, including Laurent Gbagbo and his wife.

A number of those detained at the hotel were beaten by the FRCI, forces loyal to President Alassane Ouattara, at the time of their arrest, at least one severely enough to lose consciousness. French and UNOCI soldiers were present during the detainees’ arrest and transfer to the hotel, but did not intervene to prevent the ill-treatment.

"All the detainees – particularly those held in Korhogo – must be provided with appropriate medical attention and treatment," said Véronique Aubert.

UN forces around Pergola hotel

Several of those being held at the Pergola Hotel went there voluntarily, believing they would be protected from the widespread violence and reprisals in Abidjan in the days following Laurent Gbagbo's arrest. People in this group were not informed that they would be detained.

While Ivorian security forces are responsible for security within the Pergola Hotel complex itself, UNOCI soldiers are also posted by the hotel to provide security along the building's external perimeter. This means they exercise some degree of supervision over who is allowed to enter the grounds.

"The presence of UN soldiers at the hotel where the perceived supporters of Laurent Gbagbo are being arbitrarily held raises troubling questions," said Véronique Aubert.

"UNOCI officials must ensure that UN soldiers and police are only involved in detentions that conform to international human rights standards. UN personnel should not assist with security at detention centres where people are arbitrarily detained."