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Côte d'Ivoire : Renewed violence against civilians and incitement to xenophobia must stop immediately

Amnesty International today strongly condemned the latest indiscriminate attacks and violence against civilians provoked by the sudden renewed clashes in Côte d'Ivoire on 4 November 2004.

The pace of events quickened on 6 November 2004, after the Ivorian armed forces bombed French barracks in Bouaké, the main town held by the *Forces Nouvelles*, New Forces. Nine French soldiers and an American citizen, a member of a humanitarian NGO, were killed in the incident. In reprisal, French forces destroyed two Ivorian military aircraft and several helicopters. This resulted in calls to attack French nationals and their interests in Abidjan and led to acts of looting and violence.

"All forces involved must refrain from the excessive use of force and stop violence against civilians," declared Amnesty International.

According to medical sources, more than 400 civilians have been wounded during the last few days in Abidjan and an unknown number of people have been killed. Many people, including Mali and Senegal nationals, have also been wounded or killed in the bombing raids carried out by the Ivorian Armed Forces (FANCI) in the north of the country, which has been held by the *Forces Nouvelles* since the armed uprising of September 2002.

This latest attack hinders the peaceful resolution of a conflict that has been going on for far too long.

The violence of the last few days in Côte d'Ivoire comes after several years of violent xenophobic attacks, especially against the French, the international media and the *Dioulas*, a generic name designating Côte d'Ivoire inhabitants with a Muslim name from either the north of the country or other countries of the region (Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Senegal etc.).

Amnesty International condemns the xenophobic attacks against French nationals by certain supporters of President Laurent Gbagbo, who have encouraged the population to engage in looting and violence, especially in Abidjan.

"The government should send a clear and unambiguous message to the security forces and the population, condemning incitement to hatred and xenophobia and stop all violence against foreign nationals," declared the organization.

In response to anti-French attacks, French soldiers of the *Force Licorne*, Unicorn Force, went to the aid of foreign nationals in Abidjan and confronted the Ivorian military and supporters of President Gbagbo. On 7 November 2004, the French military authorities recognized that French soldiers may have “*wounded or killed some people*”.

"While recognizing the right of the international forces in Côte d'Ivoire to protect themselves and the lives of threatened civilians, Amnesty International calls on these forces to use non-violent means as much as possible before resorting to force and using firearms", declared Amnesty International.

The organization is also concerned at attacks on the freedom of expression carried out or tolerated by the government of President Gbagbo. Since the first day of renewed clashes, on 4 November 2004, broadcasts by Africa No 1, the BBC and *Radio France Internationale* (RFI) have been jammed. There have also been attacks on the opposition press, such as *Le Patriote*, *le Libéral* and *le Nouveau Réveil*, distribution of which has been forbidden in the area controlled by government forces.

"The origin of the Ivorian crisis lies in the drift towards xenophobia, which demonizes others, even neighbours of many years. Others become the abstract representatives of an absolute evil that must be eradicated by either driving them out or killing them. As long as this ideology of exclusion persists in Côte d'Ivoire, respect for the fundamental rights of all inhabitants of the country seems impossible ", said Amnesty International.

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