

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

CÔTE D'IVOIRE MISSION REPORT

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An Amnesty International research team has just returned from a four week mission to Côte d'Ivoire where they investigated ongoing human rights violations connected with the disputed November 2010 presidential election and the subsequent political rift between outgoing President Laurent Gbagbo and Alassane Ouattara, the internationally recognized winner of the election.

The team conducted research in the commercial capital Abidjan and in parts of the west of the country controlled by either the security forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo or the Forces Nouvelles who back Alassane Ouattara. The Forces Nouvelles are an armed opposition group that took control of the north and part of the west of Côte d'Ivoire after an armed uprising in September 2002.

The Amnesty International research team documented human rights violations and abuses both by the security forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo and by the Forces Nouvelles. Documented violations include extra-judicial executions, ill treatment, arbitrary detention, disappearances and sexual violence including rape.

The team investigated the many human rights violations and abuses that occurred before, during and after the 16 December 2010 march organized by the supporters of Rally of Houphouetists for Democracy Peace (RHDP - the coalition supporting Alassane Ouattara) in Abidjan. During the march there were violent clashes between protestors and the security forces. Dozens of unarmed demonstrators were killed, arrested and ill-treated by security forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo and three policemen were killed at the PK18 (an Abidjan suburb) by demonstrators armed with guns.

In addition, the team investigated inter-communal clashes in parts of the west of the country that have caused some 70,000 people to flee their homes, half of them have sought shelter in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) in the area or are staying with relatives in other villages and the other half have crossed the border to neighboring countries notably Liberia.

This report sets out some of the key findings of the research mission. A further and longer document will detail other important developments which took place.

I. Human rights violations committed by security forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo

Amnesty International delegates documented allegations of extrajudicial executions, excessive use of force and rape by security forces in Abidjan.

Extrajudicial executions and excessive use of force

Amnesty International documented incidents of extrajudicial executions of people both at demonstrations and within their homes.

One witness told Amnesty International:

“The night of 5-6 December a large group of forces came to our home, some in uniforms and others in plain clothes; we did not open and from the window saw seven cargos (pick-up vehicles). When we thought they had gone we opened the door and me and my brother, Fofana Youssouf,

went out but more forces were still there and started shooting. We rushed back into the courtyard and at that point my brother was hit. He died shortly after."

On 19 January 2011, Bamba Mamadou, nicknamed Solo, a football player, was beaten to the ground and then shot dead by security forces patrolling in the Banfora Adjamé neighbourhood of Abidjan.

An eyewitness told Amnesty International:

"Between 7 and 8 am, I saw members of the security forces in a car shooting in the air. Then I saw four people, including three in uniform punching and kicking Mamadou who was lying on the ground. Another member of the security forces shot him dead."

Amnesty International researchers raised this case with the relevant authorities and met the member of the security forces (a gendarme - a paramilitary police officer) who shot Bamba Mamadou. He said that Bamba had a machete and injured his right hand with a knife when he shot and killed him.

Rape

Amnesty International documented several cases of rape committed by security forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo in Abidjan. One rape victim told Amnesty International:

"On the 19 December, they came to my house in Abobo. They came in the middle of the night; I was sleeping with my husband and my children. They were hammering at the door. Our door is right on the street, we didn't open. They then broke down the door, our door is made of wood. They came in, eight of them, four in plain clothes and four soldiers in military fatigues and balaclavas. Two of them took my husband outside and six of them came upon me. They told me to undress and when I didn't, they came at me again. They all took turns raping me and threw my children to the floor, the children were crying. I was screaming. I don't know what they were doing to my husband. After, I heard two gun shots. Then they left and I found my husband outside lying on his stomach. He was dead. The people who raped me and killed my husband told me that if I wanted to complain, I should go to Alassane Ouattara."

Disappearances

A number of people have disappeared after being arrested by security forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo. This was especially common during the 16 December 2010 demonstration.

One of the December 16 demonstrators, Dao Sago, born in 1971, was detained by security forces.

An eyewitness told Amnesty International:

"A group of security forces and militiamen arrested him, they took off his clothes and began to beat him with clubs and gun butts. We fled and then I called him on his mobile. A voice answered me and told me that they were killing Dao. We went to look for him in all the police stations and in the morgues and couldn't find him".

There are reports that he is being held with some 50 others at the headquarters of the Republican Guard.

Ill-treatment

Amnesty International documented a number of cases of people who were beaten and ill-treated at the time of their arrest and on arrival at the detention facility. Two journalists, Sanogo Aboubakar and Kangbe Yayoro Charles Lopez who work for a TV station based in Bouaké (a Forces Nouvelles stronghold) were arrested on January 28 2011 in Abidjan by security forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo. Amnesty International met the journalists in detention.

One of them said:

“They began to beat us, they were some 30 of them. We were surrounded by them and they punched us, slapped us and kicked us with their boots during some 30 minutes. One of them tried to strangle me and I fainted. When I woke up, they beat me with iron bars and burnt me three times with cigarettes.”

Amnesty International calls for their immediate release unless they are charged promptly with a recognizable criminal offence.

II. Human rights abuses committed by the Forces Nouvelles (FN)

The Amnesty International research team received credible testimonies of rape, arbitrary detention and ill-treatment by members of the FN in areas under their control.

In the absence of any functioning justice and accountability mechanisms – a longstanding problem which the FN have done nothing to address since they took control of the area in September 2002 - FN commanders are all-powerful in their areas and residents have no recourse to justice.

Arbitrary and deliberate killings

In October 2010 members of the FN summarily executed eleven men that they had detained and accused of being “coupeurs de route” (road cutters) and of having murdered several travelers in Touba (some 680 km west of Abidjan). Though the incident is publicly well known (FN members themselves filmed the incident, including the bodies of the 11 detainees after they had been killed) no concrete measures are known to have been taken by the FN leadership to hold those responsible accountable.

Arbitrary detention and ill-treatment

In Mahapleu, a village between the towns of Man and Danane (some 600 km west of Abidjan) where most of the inhabitants reportedly voted for the outgoing president Laurent Gbagbo, nine men were detained by the FN in mid-January 2011 and severely beaten and ill-treated for several days. They were eventually released without charge or trial but were threatened with further abuses and most of them have fled as a result.

One of them told Amnesty International:

“They took me to the former health centre which they now use as their military base; they beat me very harshly with the butts of their rifles and they stepped on me. They put me into two large bags (the bags used for rice) and tied the bags with rope around (like a mummy) so that I could not move my hands and legs and beat me and threatened me with death.”

Rape

Also in January, in the same village, a woman and a 15-year-old girl were raped by an FN commander. This girl told Amnesty International :

“I was going home, at about 4pm. This FN commander forced me into his vehicle, drove to a field outside the village and raped me in the back of the vehicle; then he left me there and left; I walked home. I told a friend of his what he had done. At night he came to our home; I fled to the fields near home with my brother. When my mother said that I was not home he saw my brother's wife and he hit her; he said she knew where I was. Then they arrested my brother and my father. Now I cannot go home anymore; I am in hiding with relatives far away” . .

Liberian refugees targeted

After the 16 December 2010 march, supporters of the RHDP targeted Liberian refugees who had lived in Abidjan for several years or decades. They accused them of being “mercenaries” hired by forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo.

One of the refugees told Amnesty International:

“On the 17th December, around 7 pm, five people entered in our common compound and asked for the ‘Young Liberians’. They pulled me out of my room, beat me with a stick and accused of being a mercenary. I begged them to leave me and told them that I was living in Côte d’Ivoire for the last twenty years after losing my parents in the Liberian conflict. I had to leave my home and I need protection”.

III. Inter-communal violence and rape in the West

The Amnesty International delegation also visited the west of the country; an area controlled in part by Gbagbo’s forces and in part by the FN, and where long-standing inter-communal tensions between ethnic groups have been exacerbated by the ongoing political standoff. As a result, some 70,000 people have fled their homes, half of them have sought shelter in camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) in the area or are staying with relatives in other villages and the other half have fled to different neighbouring countries, notably Liberia.

In January 2011 in Duékoué (some 500 km west of Abidjan), some 40 people were killed in fierce inter-communal clashes, hundreds of homes were burned to the ground and thousands of people fled to makeshift (IDP) camps in the west of the country.

People were killed and their homes and property burned and looted because of their ethnicity. Neighborhoods inhabited by one community were burned down by the other. In mixed neighborhoods homes were targeted based on ethnicity and alleged political affiliations. Almost everyone interviewed by Amnesty International in Duékoué described their attackers with ethnic labels – “the Dioula” (considered to be Ouattara’s supporters) or “the Guéré” (considered to be Gbagbo’s supporters).

According to the communities of Duékoué, the security forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo were either unable or unwilling to intervene to prevent attacks by either side.

One Guéré woman told Amnesty International:

“When the Malinke (Dioula) came to attack the neighbourhood I took refuge at the home of a neighbouring family from Burkina Faso. The Malinke came to ask if there are any Guéré to send

them out, to kill them, and my host said that there are only foreigners here, only Dioula. He then helped me to leave the neighbourhood and I came here to the Catholic Mission”.

Most of the victims in Duékoué were members of the Guéré community, but members of the Dioula (Malinke) community were also similarly attacked.

A witness told Amnesty International:

“Those who came to attack our neighborhood on Monday (3 Jan), I know them personally. This saved my life. I begged them to spare my house and they did. But they burned all the other houses of people who are not Guéré. They killed a neighbour, a Guinean; he was visiting his Malian friends here in the neighbourhood and when they came he hid behind the door and they caught him and killed him (they cut off his hand and his penis and put his penis at the end of their rifle)”.

Several Guéré women told Amnesty International that they had been attacked and gang raped in their own homes, which were then set ablaze. One of these victims of rape told Amnesty International:

“On Tuesday, 4 January, in the afternoon there was shooting and we hid in the house; there were many of us as other neighbours (f) had come to shelter in our house, in my father’s house. They broke the door and came in and started to hit the boys and to rape the women. They were Dioula, were dressed in boubous (traditional dress) and with amulets. Several women were raped in the house; they pushed some of the boys outside and hit pregnant women. I was raped by 3 men; they told us to lay flat and said: we’ll kill you. We fled the same night.... We went to the Mission Catholique in town but there was no space and now we are staying with my sister in the Carrefour district; she lent us a very small room by her house”.

Amnesty International delegates later accompanied the woman back to her charred house in the Toguéi neighbourhood of Duékoué. Toguéi is now full of the remains of burned houses and the only people milling around were non-Guéré.

A Guéré woman who is now in Abidjan after fleeing her town told Amnesty International:

“On Monday 3 January, they came early in the morning. I was in my home in my father’s compound with my mother, my older sister and my little brothers. I was alone in my house, the courtyard is not enclosed. They had knives and machetes. They broke the door and grabbed me. Their faces were blackened with charcoal; they said nothing, threw themselves on me and did horrible things to me; they raped me, three or four of them. They burned my house, the house of my family and they killed my brother. They stole everything from my shop and then burned it down. We fled the same day, with my mother and my sister-in-law and her children. We hid in the bushes and then went to a small village and after a day came here”.

In the west part of the country, there has been in the last few months a marked increase in the number of reported cases of women attacked and raped mostly while traveling to market. Such attacks are perpetrated by the “*coupeurs de route*” operating both in areas controlled by security forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo and by the Forces nouvelles. The attackers are virtually never caught and the victims have no hope of obtaining justice and reparation.

IV. Recommendations

Amnesty International calls on Laurent Gbagbo and the Security Forces in Abidjan to:

- Issue clear public instructions to all security forces to comply with human rights law and Ivorian law, and make clear that those responsible for ordering, carrying out, or failing to prevent any abuses, especially those involving extrajudicial killings, disappearances, or sexual violence, will be held accountable for their actions.
- Take immediate measures to carry out independent, impartial and thorough judicial investigations into these very serious human violations and bring to justice those responsible.
- Immediately reveal the fate and the whereabouts of the people who disappeared after being arrested by security forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo.

Amnesty International calls on the Forces Nouvelles to:

- Issue clear public instructions to all their armed members to comply with human rights law and make clear that those responsible for ordering, carrying out, or failing to prevent any abuses, especially those involving deliberate and arbitrary killings or sexual violence, will be held accountable.
- Amnesty International urges the leaders of the New Forces to exercise a strict control over their forces and to hold responsible for their actions any member who has committed human rights abuses, or allowed them to be committed. Furthermore, the leaders of the Forces Nouvelles must ensure that any person suspected of such actions is removed from any position of authority or duties which would provide them with the opportunity to commit further human rights abuses.