

Côte d'Ivoire (16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence Letter Writing Action)**Brief summary of the Issue:**

"I was with my daughter at home in our bedroom when the militia and soldiers entered... They told us they were looking for arms... When they left, they took my daughter Sita... I tried to protect her but they pushed me to the ground. She came back a few hours later... She told me...they all took it in turns to rape her."

Mother of a girl who was raped in Abidjan on 18 December 2010.

Since the beginning of the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002 following a failed coup attempt, hundreds and possibly thousands, of women and girls have been victims of human rights violations including widespread and at times systematic rape, as well as other forms of sexual violence, committed by combatant forces or by civilians with close ties to these forces. Women have again been targeted after the resumption of the post electoral violence in December 2010 where both parties loyal to the outgoing President Laurent Gbagbo and the internationally recognized President Alassane Ouattara attacked women and girls, raping and beating them.

The scale of rape and sexual violence in Côte d'Ivoire during the armed conflict has been underestimated. Many women have been gang raped or have been abducted and forced into sexual slavery by fighters. Rape has often been used to humiliate the community to which women and girls belong and was often accompanied by the beating or further torture (including additional torture of a sexual nature) of the victim. Rape has been committed in public and in front of family members, including children. Some women have been raped next to the corpses of family members.

Throughout this ten year crisis, women have been the forgotten victims of this conflict. The extent of the attacks launched against women and girls amount to crimes against humanity as they were directed against a civilian population as part of a widespread or systematic attack, and as part of a state or organizational policy. The Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court also characterizes these abuses as crimes against humanity.

Although rape is a crime in Côte d'Ivoire, the Ivorian Penal Code does not define "rape," which could make it difficult for survivors to obtain effective remedies, including equal and effective access to justice. This absence of definition has prevented many women and their advocates to lodge complaints before the judiciary and seek reparation.

Amnesty International believes it's essential for this obstacle to be lifted and is calling on the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire to amend the Penal Code to define rape and other crimes of sexual violence in a way that is consistent with existing international law as a first step to allow rape survivors to have access to effective remedies and reparations.

Call for Action:

Amnesty International is asking members to write to Ivorian authorities appealing to them to amend without delay the Penal Code in order to define rape in accordance with international law.

Objectives:

The new authorities, elected in November 2010, propose a draft law to amend the Penal Code to define rape within the next six months in order for the rape survivors to have access to judicial remedies including reparations.

Activities:

Write letters to the President and the Minister of Justice asking them to amend the Penal Code to define rape (See Appendix 4)

Model Letter**Address:****M. Ahoussou KOUADIO****Minister of Justice****Fax: +225 20 21 85 10 (Tel: +225 20 21 17 27)****Email: memjci@yahoo.fr****Salutation: Dear Minister**

Dear President/ Dear Minister

In the last decade, and most notably since the beginning of the armed conflict in September 2002, hundreds if not thousands of women in Cote D'Ivoire have been raped or subjected to crimes of sexual violence. Some women have suffered gang rapes or have been abducted as sex slaves. Acts of rape have often been accompanied by other acts of torture or ill treatment. Such acts of sexual violence have been committed in public and in front of family members, including young children. Some women have even been raped next to corpses of their families. These acts have been committed with total or nearly total impunity by all parties to the conflict and have occurred as recently as May 2011.

Many of the women continue to suffer injuries or illnesses caused by rape – some of which are life- threatening. Very few have access to judicial remedies, including access to reparations.

The absence of a definition of rape in the Penal Code has prevented many women and their advocates from lodging complaints before the judiciary and seeking reparations. It is time for the new Ivorian government to amend the Penal Code and include a definition of rape as a first step in ensuring access to justice and reparations for rape survivors who continue to be the forgotten victims of this conflict.

By adopting a legal definition for rape and other crimes of sexual violence in a way that is consistent with existing international law, your government will allow victims to access justice and will help end impunity for the perpetrators of these acts.