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Côte d'Ivoire urged to assist ICC in post-election violence probe

It is time for the Côte d'Ivoire authorities to cooperate fully with an International Criminal Court (ICC) probe into human rights abuses following the disputed 2010 presidential election, Amnesty International said a year after the conflict's most violent episode.

Hundreds were killed in the Duékoué area, 500km west of the capital Abidjan, during three days of intense fighting between forces loyal to outgoing President Laurent Gbagbo and those supporting President Alassane Ouattara from 28 March 2011.

To Amnesty International's knowledge, none of those suspected of responsibility for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Duékoué have been brought to trial. The ICC has said it will investigate the violence.

"The Ivorian authorities must live up to President Ouattara's repeated commitment to put an end to impunity and take action to ensure the terrible crimes committed in Duékoué 12 months ago do not go unpunished," said Salvatore Saguès, Amnesty International's researcher on West Africa.

"President Ouattara's government must support the ICC's investigation and also start a national process of investigating those suspected of responsibility for war crimes, crimes against humanity and human rights abuses - regardless of their political affiliation.

"If there is sufficient admissible evidence, the government must bring those responsible to trial."

The FRCI (Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire), loyal to President Ouattara, launched the 28 March 2011 attack on forces loyal to Gbagbo, who was refusing to cede power.

Throughout that day, pro-Gbagbo forces looted the belongings of Malinkés (Dioulas) and killed civilians.

The FRCI, supported by local traditional hunters known as Dozos and armed groups, took control of the town the next day.

Hundreds of Guérés suspected of being Gbagbo supporters were killed on ethnic and political grounds. Today, hundreds of families displaced by the fighting have still not returned home.

Victims were asked to give their names or show identity cards before they were killed. Some of these identity cards were found beside the bodies.

An International Commission of Inquiry concluded that there were human rights abuses by both sides during the post electoral period that could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Gbagbo was transferred to the ICC in November 2011, as the Court took the first step towards addressing impunity. The former president is accused of murder, rape and other forms of sexual violence,

persecution and other inhumane acts.

"The transfer of Laurent Gbagbo is a positive step, now the ICC and the Ivorian government must address the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by both sides during six months of deadly violence following the elections," said Salvatore Saguès.

An Amnesty International delegation in Côte d'Ivoire gathered more than 100 witness statements from people who survived the 29 March 2011 killings in Duékoué and neighbouring villages.

The statements all indicate that the killings were part of widespread, systematic attacks on a civilian population committed by both parties, including pro-Gbagbo Liberian mercenaries, pro-Ouattara uniformed FRCI forces and Dozos.

Amnesty International has also documented further crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in the country over the past decade.

A Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in September 2011 to provide a forum for victims of the violence and its aftermath.

"The Commission must ensure that all victims are included in the reconciliation process and uphold the right of all victims to obtain truth, justice and full reparation," said Salvatore Saguès.

Background

In February 2012, the ICC Pre-Trial Chamber authorised the Prosecution to extend its investigation beyond crimes committed after 28 November 2010 to include crimes committed in Côte d'Ivoire since 2002.

The Prosecutor has yet to announce whether the investigations will cover the whole period.

To ensure its full cooperation with the International Criminal Court, Amnesty International called on the government of Côte d'Ivoire to ratify the Rome Statute and enact national legislation providing for full cooperation.

It also called for a review of national criminal law to ensure that it can prosecute crimes against humanity and war crimes effectively before national courts.