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## **Côte d'Ivoire security forces urged to protect civilians as tensions rise**

Amnesty International has called on the security forces in Côte d'Ivoire to protect civilians, as the number of people shot dead in violent incidents following the country's presidential elections rose to at least 20. Tensions have risen in Côte d'Ivoire since both presidential candidates in the 28 November election declared themselves the winners on Friday. Both the incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo and his rival Alassane Ouattara have sworn themselves in, prompting increased clashes between supporters of both parties and the security forces.

The call comes ahead of meeting of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Nigeria on Tuesday to discuss the crisis.

"The international community, especially the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and ECOWAS must take steps to prevent further escalation of violence in Côte d'Ivoire," said Salvatore Saguès, Amnesty International's West Africa researcher.

"It is also essential that the former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, who is mediating between the two parties, sends a clear message that only a peaceful solution which respects human rights can avoid Côte d'Ivoire being plunged into a crisis with consequences for the whole region."

On Friday 3 December, the Côte d'Ivoire Constitutional Court rejected a declaration by the electoral commission that Alassane Ouattara, leader of the Rally of Republicans (RDR) party had won the election and declared incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo the winner.

Supporters of President Gbagbo had tried to block the long-delayed result, alleging fraud in the north.

On Friday the military sealed the country's borders and blocked foreign media following the outcome of the elections.

The same day, security forces including members of the Brigade anti-émeute (BAE, anti-riot Brigade) police unit, went to Abobo, a neighbourhood in Abidjan and destroyed many cars and shot with live bullets killing three people - Soumahoro Ladji, Sangaré Djaridja and Diomandé Issouf.

Two more people were shot dead by the security forces on Saturday 4 December in the Port-Bouët, area of Abidjan, eyewitnesses told Amnesty International.

Bayo Alassane, a man on his way to buy cigarettes and Kaboré Moumouni, a butcher who was going to work, were both shot, the witnesses said.

"After the end of the curfew, Bayo Alassane went out to buy some cigarettes. Everything was calm, there were nearly no one in the street but the security forces shot him dead as well as Kaboré Moumouni, a butcher who was going to work," one eyewitness, who cannot be named for security reasons, told Amnesty International.

"The security forces in Côte d'Ivoire are bound by international standards on the use of force and cannot fire live ammunition at people who are not threatening their lives or the lives of others," said Salvatore Saguès..

"In a situation where the security forces have been acting for years with total impunity, there is a serious risk that the violence could intensify. The key role of the international community and above all of the African international and regional bodies is to avoid escalation of violence."

An armed raid led by a paramilitary force (gendarmierie) on Alassane Ouattara's headquarters in Abidjan 1 December left at least four people dead and several wounded.

Dozens were also injured in clashes that took place on 26 November in Abidjan between student groups supporting both parties.

The second round of Côte d'Ivoire's presidential election had been postponed five times since 2005. Many had hoped the election would put an end to the crisis which began when the armed uprising of September 2002 split the country in two.

In a public statement dated 3 December 2010, Fatou Bensouda, Deputy Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court also said that “all reported acts of violence will be closely scrutinized” by the ICC.

The country is also under a UN embargo on arms transfers and diamond exports that was renewed in October 2010 for a further six months. The Security Council has also renewed sanctions against individuals responsible for inciting hatred and grave human rights violations.