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## **Côte d'Ivoire: Security forces kill at least nine unarmed demonstrators**

Eyewitnesses have told Amnesty International that at least nine unarmed protesters were killed today in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, during mass protests over a political deadlock following presidential elections.

The demonstrators were joining the mass street protests called by the internationally recognized president Alassane Ouattara following disputed elections. They were marching from various locations in the capital Abidjan in an attempt to seize the state broadcaster Radio Télévision ivoirienne (RTI) when security forces opened fire at point blank range.

“Amnesty International is appalled by this completely unjustified and disproportionate use of force and calls on the Ivorian security forces to stop these killings immediately,” said Salvatore Saguès, Amnesty International’s West Africa researcher. “Those who opened fire on these people, as well as those who gave the order, will have to account for their acts.”

On Tuesday 14 December, Alassane Ouattara called for mass street protests to seize the state broadcaster and government buildings, still held by officials loyal to Laurent Gbagbo, who is refusing to leave office.

Eyewitnesses participating in the protests told Amnesty International that at least nine people had been killed at two locations in Abidjan.

In Abobo neighbourhood, witnesses said at least six people were shot dead by security forces.

“When we saw security forces near the police station of the 21<sup>st</sup> arrondissement, we raised our hands and told them that we were unarmed. They refused to answer and threw tear gas grenades. Then immediately they shot at us. I saw dead bodies in the street. I know three of them,” one eyewitness told Amnesty International by phone.

Near the Makassi crossroads at around 9am security officials fired teargas and then opened fire on another group of protesters killing three people including a young car washer, Salami Ismaël, who was nearby and not participating in the march.

“A young man, car washer, who was not participating in the demonstration, was shot dead by two men wearing military uniforms, with hoods. The young man was standing in front of the garage waiting for drivers in order to wash their vehicles when two military arrives. One of them tripped him up, he fell down. One of the military who was wearing sunglasses shot at him at point blank with a gun,” an eyewitness told Amnesty International.

“Every effort must be made to prevent an escalation of violence. There is a very real threat that many more lives will be lost if the security forces continue to shoot at protesters indiscriminately,” said Salvatore Saguès.

“Côte d’Ivoire has never been so close to a resumption of civil war. Every effort must be done to prevent further escalation of violence that could have a huge impact on the country and on the whole sub-region pushing thousands of people to flee the country.”

#### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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. But following the November 28 vote both candidates declared themselves president and set up respective governments. Tensions have been rising in the country ever since.

Today, in an interview with the France 24 news channel the International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor, Louis Moreno Ocampo, said he would prosecute those responsible if deadly violence breaks out in Ivory Coast after its disputed election.

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