

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Côte d'Ivoire: Any settlement of the crisis must involve respect for human rights by all parties to the conflict**

On the morrow of the meeting of 15 member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in Accra, Ghana, on 29 September 2002, Amnesty International notes the decision made by all governments in the sub-region to find a negotiated solution to the 19 September military uprising in Côte d'Ivoire.

*"An essential element of any settlement of this crisis must include respect for human rights by all parties to the conflict, especially a halt to the summary executions, arbitrary arrests and pillaging to which foreign nationals and Côte d'Ivoire citizens from the north of the country have particularly fallen victim, and an end to kidnappings by the rebels."*

While recognizing the right of the Côte d'Ivoire authorities to restore order, Amnesty International has, from the beginning of the crisis, publicly expressed concern about the circumstances in which the Minister of the Interior, Emile Boga Dodou, Robert Gueï, former head of state, his wife, aide-de-camp, Fabien Coulibaly and about 15 other people living at his home, were killed.

Since then, at least two members of the *Rassemblement des républicains* (RDR), Republican Assembly, including the party's assistant spokesperson, Aly Keita, have been arrested at their homes, apparently by members of the security forces. Nothing is known about where they are being detained and what has happened to them. Amnesty International fears that other people may have been arrested by the security forces and are being held at unknown locations.

Amnesty International is concerned about restrictions on the freedom of expression, imposed on certain national and international media. Radio France Internationale (RFI), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Africa No 1 broadcasts were interrupted, apparently one week ago and the building which houses the transmitter is being guarded by the security forces. Several journalists suspected of being close to the opposition have received death threats, which has caused several periodicals to cease publication.

The organization is worried about xenophobic sentiments broadcast by certain media and which has already resulted in the destruction of shanty towns inhabited mostly by foreign nationals and Côte d'Ivoire citizens from the north of the country. A witness contacted by Amnesty International affirmed that some members of the security forces extorted money from the people living in these precarious homes. Before being chased from their homes, these people were forced to pay 10,000 francs CFA (about 15 Euros) to be allowed to take their personal belongings with them.

*“These worrying signs confirm fears of a resurgence in ethnic conflict, which plunged the country into an unprecedented cycle of violence in 2000,” the organization declared today.*

Amnesty International is also concerned at the kidnapping by rebels of François Amichia, the Minister for Sport, captured at Bouaké on the day of the uprising, and of Christophe Koffi, special correspondent for Agence France Presse (AFP), both now detained for more than a week.

*“We appeal to the security forces of the Côte d’Ivoire army and the rebels to respect human rights standards, especially those set out in article 3 of the Geneva Conventions. This article establishes that people not directly participating in hostilities, including members of the armed forces who have put down their arms, should be humanely treated,” Amnesty International said today.*

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