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CÔTE D'IVOIRE

VOICES OF WOMEN AND GIRLS, FORGOTTEN VICTIMS OF THE CONFLICT



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The following are a selection of testimonies given to Amnesty International in 2005 and 2006 by survivors of rape and sexual assault committed in Côte d'Ivoire against the background of the political and military crisis that the country is experiencing since the 19 September 2002 coup attempt.

They are presented here as part of Amnesty International's campaign to obtain comprehensive medical care, justice, and social and economic support for rape survivors in Côte d'Ivoire. All those interviewed gave permission for their stories to be told. All details which might identify them have been changed to protect the identities of the women whose testimonies appear in this report. Further information on sexual violence committed by fighters in Côte d'Ivoire and the plight of rape survivors is provided in Amnesty International's report, *Côte d'Ivoire: Targeting women: forgotten victims of the conflict* (AI Index: AFR 31/001/2007), published simultaneously in March 2007.

“At least 30 men raped me.”

Sylvie, captured by an armed opposition group in western Côte d'Ivoire in April 2003.

“In April 2003 the rebels surrounded the village. Everyone ran away; I couldn't run and I was caught. They took me to their camp at Logoualé (450 kilometres northwest of Abidjan), there were about 40 rebels. Some of them spoke English. They had about 30 prisoners and 10 of us were women. Children were told to watch us and make sure we didn't escape. In the evening, seven of the rebels came and beat me. Then they held down my hands and feet and raped me, one after the other. In total, at least 30 men raped me.

The next day, they asked me to do jobs for them and to prepare food for them. The other women in the camp were raped too. I left them behind because after three days the rebels left me on the road. Since then, I spit blood; they beat me a lot while I was there. I have pains in my womb and my vagina. I haven't done any tests yet because I'm afraid that it will show I've contracted a disease.”

"I'm sore all over, particularly the womb and vagina...
I suffer a lot from memory loss."

**Véronique, captured in November 2002 by an armed opposition group
in western Côte d'Ivoire.**

"When the rebels arrived in November 2002, they told us they weren't going to touch us and that they had come to overthrow the government. Some were in military uniform and others wore the outfit of the dozos [traditional hunters]. Some time later, however, they began to enter our houses and take women by force. One day before the end of 2002, five of them came to my house. Two of them raped me and two others raped my younger sister, aged 19. They took me off to Grand Gbapleu, where there were at least 200 rebels.

Thirty women, including young ones, had been captured by them. They spoke French and Dioula; the French was a bit odd. They asked us to do the cooking for them, and in the course of that the other women told of how they were raped, some recounting that they were beaten when they refused to submit. When they found out that the loyalists [government security forces] were coming, they left for the front and the women were able to get away. I walked to Bangolo, after that I went to Duékoué, then I arrived in Abidjan. I did the test and the ultrasound scan, and that cost me 13,000 CFA francs (approximately 20 euros). I'm sore all over, particularly the womb and vagina. My periods last two weeks. The doctor diagnosed coagulated blood and recommended an operation that's expensive, costing 250,000 CFA francs (approximately 380 euros). I suffer a lot from memory loss.

"One of them pressed on my throat so that I couldn't scream
while another student was raping me."

**Elisabeth, a Cocody University student raped by members of the Ivorian Federation of
Students and School Pupils of Côte d'Ivoire (FESCI) in June 2005.**

"On 23 June 2005, I was distributing pamphlets at Cocody University in Abidjan commemorating the anniversary of the death of Habib Dodo, a student killed on the university campus. After I finished, I went to wait for the bus to go home. I was sitting in front of the stop [waiting] for [the number] 85 [bus], when I was approached by two students who introduced themselves as FESCI members, College of Arts and Technical Sciences Section (FAST). Two other students were watching me from a distance, a classmate was with me. The students asked me to follow them because the general (the head of FESCI on the university campus) wanted to question me. I refused. They replied that I would go with them whether I wanted to or not, so I felt like I had to follow them. Three students were waiting for me. They called the general who asked them to escort me to headquarters, near the palm trees. An escort of at least ten students accompanied me.

They asked me questions about the General Association of Students and School Pupils of Côte d'Ivoire (AGEECI). I refused to answer their questions. They then said I was playing with fire and that instead of giving out tracts I should have stayed in my proper place at home and looked for a husband. They said my name was in their files, they had already asked people about me and they knew where I lived. They said they had ways of making me talk.

Then they said I was to be shut up in a room, they hit me and beat me. One of them said that they would make a clean job of it. There were six boys in the room and they said that anyone who wanted to could leave. Two of the students left and four stayed. The room's floor was bloodstained and they said it was one of their classmate's blood and that they were trained to kill. One of them knocked me down. I was struggling and, during the struggle, the glasses one of the students was wearing fell on the floor and the lenses broke. He was furious. They put a canvas bag over my face and one of them pressed my throat so that I couldn't scream while another student was raping me. The others held on to my hands and feet and felt me up. Even though my face was covered, I realized that students were entering and leaving the room. They searched my bag and found a card belonging to a United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) worker. They said I was a rebel.

After a while, their boss told them to stop and they asked me to leave. I later learned that a friend who had seen me had gone to inform the UNOCI, who sounded the alert. They accompanied me to the bus stop. I wanted to take a "bacca" [a vehicle which seats 12] but the two accompanying me said that the general demanded that I take the bus. I didn't go home because during the interrogation they had said that they knew everything about me and where I lived. Instead I went to a friend's."

"His friends tried to tell him I was too old, but he insisted that he was going to rape me."

**Mireille, aged 58, raped in October 2002 in western Côte d'Ivoire
by members of an armed opposition group.**

"In October 2002, when the fighting began, I was in the village. When I heard the shooting, everyone was in a panic, I went into the bush. I'm old, I couldn't run as fast as the others and I fell. The rebels caught up with me and one of them wanted to rape me. His friends tried to tell him I was too old but he insisted that he was going to rape me. He threw me on the ground and tore off my clothes. His two friends held my hands down while he raped me and then they left me there. I lay in the bush all night and the next day I heard a car that I hoped might help. It was a Red Cross car and the people inside it told me not to be frightened."

“I don't want to live in Alepe anymore, I've left the school I used to go to.”
**Catherine, a schoolgirl, raped by a member of the government security forces in
Abidjan in March 2006.**

“On Sunday, 5 March 2006, I went out with some classmates. We went to a maquis [a small restaurant] and at 2200 hours, as we were leaving, some members of the CECOS [Command Centre for Security Operations]¹ who were there invited me to their table. They gave me whisky to drink. Later, one of my friends who was passing by joined me and, around midnight, suggested that we go spend the night at her house. Some members of the CECOS followed us. They knocked on the door. They asked me to join them and threatened to make noise and break everything if I didn't obey. My friend's mother wanted to avoid trouble and advised me to go out and join them. One of the CECOS members asked me to spend the night with him. I told him I was tired but he wouldn't have any of that. He brutalized me and undid my trousers, and I think I passed out. When they left, my friend's brothers came to find me and took me to hospital, where I learned that I'd been raped.

My uncle lodged a complaint with the military tribunal and I was heard by the brigade commander. I don't want to live in Alepe anymore, I've left the school I used to go to.”

“He regarded me as his property”
**Constance, abducted from a village in western Côte d'Ivoire
by an armed opposition group.**

“The rebels were already in our village before December 2002. In February 2003, my sister and I were surprised on Castle Road around 1700 hours on our way back from visiting our maternal grandmother. The rebels spoke to us in English and asked us to get in their vehicle. We refused and they became threatening. My sister and I were standing side by side. One of them fired a bullet between us to frighten us and another shot bullets into the air. They threatened to kill us if we refused to get in the vehicle. Under threat, we got in and they brought us to Danane (about 600 kilometers northwest of Abidjan) and put us in a big house. There were several rooms. There were 50 rebels; some spoke English, others Yacouba, Guéré and Dioula. There were also some young Ivorians among them. These young Ivorians were in charge of watching the women and girls. There were 15 of us. Those who had brought us left to go back to Logoualé and came back some time later. Our job was to draw water, fetch wood and do the cooking. We were constantly under threat. One of [the fighters] who had captured me, a Liberian came into the room where I was. He asked me to take my clothes off. I refused, so he slapped me twice and knocked me over. He put a knife to my throat and in the other hand he had a revolver and was threatening me. He hit me with the butt of his weapon. He took off his clothes and raped me three times; he regarded me as his property. After two weeks, they sent us to shop at the market in Man (about 500 kilometres northwest of Abidjan) and we escaped.”

¹ This unit brings together police and gendarmerie forces.

“I did the test and I discovered I’m HIV positive.”

Nadine, aged 18, captured in late 2002 or early 2003 in western Côte d’Ivoire by members of an armed opposition group. Infected with AIDS, she died of her disease in October 2006.

“My family is not well off, so they sent me to my mother’s sister in a village called Goho, near Bangolo to learn to sew. I was there when the war broke out and I fled. The rebels caught me and brought me to their camp. There were at least 10 of them in the house they were occupying and there were also seven captives. They hit me to try to make me agree. They held down my arms and legs while another raped me. The one who raped me spoke English. For a whole week I suffered all kinds of things. After a week, one of the rebels decided I was too little. He dropped me off in town, I left the other girls behind. I did the test and I discovered I’m HIV positive. I’ve been given medicines. My whole body aches. I’m losing blood regularly, my vagina and my womb hurt. I haven’t had any periods since the rapes. I’ve lost a lot of weight and I’ve gotten very thin.”

“They did everything they wanted with us.”

Isabelle, captured in April 2003 and taken to a camp by an armed opposition group.

“When the rebels arrived in our village (Babli, near Bangolo) in April 2003, we fled. Our husbands had already fled and left us with our children. We joined up together in an encampment and I found myself with four other women. The rebels came and caught us there and forced us to follow them. They had pillaged a lot of things. We and the children were used as porters. When we arrived in their camp, they said we belonged to them. There were other women in their camp. [The fighters] spoke several languages including Lobbi, Yacouba, Moré and French. They asked us to prepare food for them. It was hard to refuse, they did everything they wanted with us. If a woman refused to have sex, they’d call for others to help them and they’d threaten us. Two rebels would hold the woman’s hands down and two others would hold her feet while a fifth raped her. They took turns, sometimes they’d sit on our hands and feet while one of them raped us. They hit and beat us too. After some time they left for the front and we escaped. I haven’t done any tests yet. I have pains in my stomach and my periods come regularly, except now they’re black, before they were a different colour. I have a hard time [urinating], and when I am able to, it burns terribly. I also have dizzy spells and chest pains.”

“He said I had no choice: either I had sex with him or it would be with several prisoners.”

Fatou, a Malian woman raped at checkpoint by a member of the government security forces in May 2005.

“When I got to Duékoué (450 kilometres northwest of Abidjan) in May 2005, I didn’t really want to show my identity papers because friends had warned me about how the security forces behave to foreigners. A soldier asked for my papers and I said I didn’t have any. He told me to follow him with my bags and he searched me and found my papers. When he discovered I was Malian, he began assaulting me. The one who

searched me was called X and he put two fingers in my vagina and then wiped them on my body. Then he left.

The driver who was waiting for me apologized for me. I also apologized, but the soldiers wouldn't have any of it. Delta came back and asked me to have sex with him. I said I couldn't and he threatened to shut me up with prisoners who wouldn't hesitate to rape me. He said I had no choice: either I had sex with him or it would be with several prisoners. He dragged me to a car and drove to another place. He told me to wash and then came back and said he wanted to have sex with me. I pleaded with him but he threw me on the floor and raped me and then put two fingers in my vagina. Then he told me to get in the car and, while we were driving, he told me to fellate him and hit me until I did. Then he pulled me out of the car, stripped me and sodomized me.

It was late, nearly 2300 hours and I had nowhere to sleep. He said that he was married and that he couldn't keep me at his house. He took me to a hotel where I spent the night. The next day, the innkeepers asked me to pay the bill. I told them I didn't have any money and they threw me out and took my bags. I left. I met a representative of the Malian community in Côte d'Ivoire and he took me to the police station to register a complaint."

"Get fucked, you bitch, it's your men who are killing our relatives, you'll all see..."

**Mary, a Liberian refugee raped by government security forces
in Abidjan in October 2002.**

"It was 27 October 2002, around 1800 hours. Men in uniform came aboard two trucks and began searching all the shacks. Two of them came to my place and asked me for my identity card. Frightened, I hesitated for a moment and then went into my room to get my identity card. The taller of the two gendarmes- I knew they were gendarmes because they were wearing gendarmes' uniforms and red berets- pushed me onto my bed and asked me to undress, intimidating me with his Kalashnikov.

As I tried to struggle, the gendarme said: 'Get fucked, you bitch, it's your men who are killing our relatives, you'll all see....' I let him have his way since I was powerless to do anything about it, and a few moments later he had himself replaced, saying 'It's your turn'. The two colleagues raped me one after the other while chuckling.

When they had finished their dirty work, I locked myself in, hoping to escape. While they were searching my neighbours' shacks- my neighbours were mostly Burkinabés, I took a bundle with my things in it and tried to escape through the backyard. But, bad luck, a group of gendarmes who were beating two young Burkinabés who had nothing to give them saw me.

When they saw me, they asked where I was going. I replied that I was going to a friend's. The one who was holding the strap grabbed me by the hair- I had long braids- and dragged me to my room and told me to hurry up and lie down. He pulled my loincloth and tore my corsage; when I tried to resist by holding tight to the bed, he threw himself on me and took me from behind. He sodomized me several times. I cried all the tears in my body. I screamed to let his colleagues know I was in danger.

But those people were no good. Drawn by the noise, another one — very young that one — got down to it by also taking me from behind. They took pleasure in seeing me suffer like that.

I was saved when one of theirs told them to get going because the trucks were full of people who had been rounded up and that they had to go.

I stayed there, terrorized, powerless, not knowing where to turn.”