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Deadly raid on Côte d'Ivoire opposition headquarters condemned

Amnesty International has condemned an armed raid led by a paramilitary force (gendarmerie) on an opposition party headquarters in the city of Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire on 1 December, which left at least four people dead and several wounded.

The raid happened at the offices of the Rally of Republicans (RDR), the party of Alassane Ouattara, a presidential candidate in last Sunday's election. More than 10 people were arrested during the attack in the Yopougon neighbourhood of Abidjan. The whereabouts of those arrested are unknown.

"If the authorities do not condemn this attack and bring those responsible to justice, it will be a sign that they condone this very serious human rights violation," said Salvatore Saguès, Amnesty International's West African researcher.

An eyewitness wounded during the attack, who did not want to be named, told Amnesty International:

"It was around 10 pm, we were watching TV, some of us were drinking tea when we heard knocking on the door. We did not open because of the curfew and we were told: Open the door or we'll climb the walls and kill you all. Then we saw gendarmes in uniform and people in plainclothes that climbed the walls and began to shoot at us. Some of the gendarmes were wearing red caps, others were hooded".

Another eyewitness said: "When I saw the gendarmes, I went to the toilet to hide. They broke the door and asked me to raise my hands and lie on the floor. When I was on the floor, they shot at me and hit me at the leg. They left me for dead."

According to eyewitness accounts, at least two of those killed were shot by the paramilitary force while trying to flee the headquarters by climbing the fence.

After the attack, the gendarmes left and returned with police officers to take the bodies of the people killed as well as the wounded.

A number of the wounded were transferred to a gendarmerie camp in Abidjan. There has been no news of them since.

An eyewitness confirmed the presence of a gendarmerie lorry just before and during the attack.

"Nothing can justify the fact that the security forces shot people lying on the floor in the back at point blank range," Salvatore Saguès said.

The attacks come amid further outbursts of violence following the country's second round of presidential elections on Sunday. The results have not yet been announced.

The Ivorian Popular Front (Front populaire ivoirien, FPI), party of the incumbent president, Laurent

Gbagbo, has demanded that the results be cancelled.

Today, an FPI office in Abidjan was attacked and the FPI accused Ouattara's supporters of being responsible.

Outbursts of violence also occurred in other parts of the country ahead of the elections on Sunday.

Dozens were injured in clashes that took place last Friday in Abidjan between student groups supporting President Laurent Gbagbo and those backing his election rival, former Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara.

The second round of Côte d'Ivoire's presidential election had been postponed five times since 2005.

The election was hoped to put an end to the crisis which began when the armed uprising of September 2002 split the country in two.