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## **Cote d'Ivoire: Injured protesters denied medical care**

Eyewitnesses have told Amnesty International that protestors seriously injured during yesterday's mass protests in the Côte d'Ivoire city of Abidjan were denied medical treatment amid threats from security forces.

Media reports said that up to 30 people were killed on 16 December as Ivorian security forces opened fire on unarmed protestors who had taken to the streets in an attempt to break the political deadlock that has followed the country's disputed presidential election on 28 November. Eyewitnesses told Amnesty International they had seen 10 people killed during the violence.

"Amnesty International unequivocally condemns this brutal and unjustified behaviour," said Salvatore Saguès, Amnesty International's West Africa researcher.

"The Ivorian security forces continue to behave deplorably, firing on unarmed protesters, denying them medical care and threatening medical personnel. Those responsible must account for their actions."

Medical staff working at the Centre Hospitalier Universitaire (CHU) in Cocody area of Abidjan, told Amnesty International by telephone that at 10 am Thursday morning they received orders from hospital management to stop treating wounded protesters.

At that time, there were six seriously wounded people waiting for treatment. Two of them required surgical procedures; one had a bullet in his back, the other a broken thigh. As of 4pm on Thursday 16 December neither had received any treatment and Amnesty International has been unable to verify if they have subsequently received medical care.

At around 11.30am Thursday, medical staff told Amnesty International that some gendarmes (paramilitary forces) had arrived at the hospital and threatened several doctors. Many of the staff fled and some are remain in hiding.

According to eyewitnesses, other gendarmes arrived at the hospital with a seriously injured man.

"The gendarmes threw him on a stretcher that touched violently the wall. We were not allowed to see him. A few minutes later, a doctor saw that he was dead. A relative of the dead person protested and asked the military officials to spare him; he was beaten by the security forces and pushed into the vehicle by the gendarmes who took him to an unknown destination," said one witness who could not be named for security reasons.

Other witnesses told Amnesty International that Red Cross ambulances carrying injured protesters to the CHU hospital were not allowed to discharge their patients and were sent away.

Medical personnel at CHU said they were instructed to send wounded demonstrators to Abidjan's military hospital. One doctor who asked not to be named told Amnesty International that medical staff

protested saying it was tantamount to sending them to death.

“Denial of medical care amounts to cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment, forbidden under article 7 of the Ivorian Constitution that ensures equal access to health and also under article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Côte d’Ivoire is a State party,” said Salvatore Saguès.

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

Ivorian security forces fired tear gas and live bullets at the protesters who took to the streets Thursday. The situation remained calm Friday with most people staying in their homes and most businesses closed.

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.