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**OPEN LETTER TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL OF THE  
AFRICAN UNION CONCERNING THE SITUATION IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

11 October 2006

Dear Sir/Madam,

As the future of the Côte d'Ivoire is to be examined at the forthcoming meeting of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (PSC) on 17 October, Amnesty International is appealing to your organization to ensure that any decision or recommendation it makes seeks above all to prevent the recurrence of serious human rights violations in that country.

At its next meeting, the PSC is due to make proposals about the ongoing peace process and in particular the future period of political transition leading to presidential elections. The next few weeks are shrouded in uncertainty and Amnesty International fears that the human rights situation may seriously deteriorate.

The victims of the conflict which has been tearing Côte d'Ivoire apart for four years have for the most part been civilians who have been killed, tortured, raped or arbitrarily detained with total impunity by both the government security forces and the armed opposition groups (latterly known as *Forces nouvelles*, New Forces) who rose up against President Laurent Gbagbo in September 2002 and control the northern half of the country.

In the course of these four years of conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, it has been clear that, in very many cases, human rights violations have often been triggered and fueled by the use of exceptionally violent language, including threats against foreign nationals, especially those from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), verbal attacks on members of the international peacekeeping forces and intimidation, especially through the media, of anyone suspected of sympathizing with opposition parties or of being in favour of giving the international community an active role.

Adherence to a frequently xenophobic ideology has led members of the security forces and the self-proclaimed "patriotic" militia to engage in provocation and attacks with total impunity. This advocacy of violence and hatred has resulted in killings, torture, rape and other acts of violence being perpetrated against civilians from the north of the country and neighbouring States as well as journalists accused of being close to the opposition parties.

This advocacy of hatred has been regularly denounced by the African Union and ECOWAS as well as by the United Nations Security Council and United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan. Amnesty International believes that these verbal attacks are at particular risk of triggering further human rights violations and is urging you, as a member of the PSC, to remind the Ivorian authorities that all governments have a duty to take steps to prevent any advocacy of national, ethnic or racial

hatred. This obligation is set out in several international instruments, in particular the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), article 20 of which states that “*[a]ny advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law*”.

Amnesty International is also asking the PSC to give its full support to the civilian protection mission entrusted to the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) under Resolution 1528 of 27 February 2004 and Resolution 1609 of 24 June 2005. The latter mandated UNOCI, in particular, “[t]o contribute to the promotion and protection of human rights in Côte d'Ivoire, with special attention to violence committed against children and women”. This task is particularly crucial because numerous women and young girls have been subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence, especially in the western part of the country, by members of armed opposition groups.

For four years now, all observers have been regularly describing the Ivorian conflict as a “chronicle of a disaster foretold”. Amnesty International has repeatedly issued warnings that Côte d'Ivoire is at risk of collapsing into chaos that could embroil the whole sub-region. So far such a catastrophe has been prevented thanks to the action and determination of the international community, particularly the PSC and the United Nations Security Council which have repeatedly sent out clear messages to all the actors in the conflict requesting them to respect human rights.

The fact that the presidential elections have again been postponed means that the future has never been so uncertain. It is once again up to the PSC to do everything it possibly can to prevent the worst from happening.

Yours sincerely,

Irene Khan  
Secretary General