

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety / ill-treatment

10 June 2004

COTE D'IVOIRE

Alphonso Faroy (m) aged 32, refugee from Sierra-Leone
Higgins Bernard Jr (m) aged 21, refugee from Liberia
Mensah Ainankra (m) aged 38, refugee from Togo
Hortense Lotika (f) aged 23, refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo
And some 30 other refugees

Amnesty International is seriously concerned for the safety of the refugees named above and some 30 others who have been attacked by members of the security forces. The refugees, including 12 women, (one of whom is pregnant) and 11 children, are homeless and vulnerable to attack following the closure of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) transit centres in the capital Abidjan on 4 and 5 May 2004.

Frequent police controls and abuse has forced the refugees to constantly be on the move and they have had to rely solely on the generosity of some of the local population for food and water. They have also been living under appalling conditions which have been worsened by the start of the rainy season. Several of the refugees, including children, have contracted malaria for which they have not received medical treatment.

According to reports, the refugees have frequently been subjected to harassment from some members of the local population and the security forces. At 2.00am on 9 June, they were attacked by five uniformed armed members of the security forces as they sheltered in unfinished buildings in Attoban, a neighbourhood of Abidjan. The security forces fired in the air and told the refugees to get out of their shelters and to lie on the ground. They then beat some of them with their belts and told them to leave immediately, saying loudly "In Côte d'Ivoire, there are no refugees, only rebels". Before leaving, the security forces also stole all the refugees' belongings and said they would come back to check whether they had left.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The harassment and attacks of these refugees is occurring against a background of xenophobia encouraged by political actors and parts of the media. Foreigners and Ivorians with Muslim names have systematically been accused of supporting armed elements who attempted a *coup d'etat* in September 2002 which led to the *de facto* partition of the country. Up until then tens of thousands of refugees (mainly from Liberia) had lived peacefully in Côte d'Ivoire for years. Since the attempted coup however, refugees notably in Abidjan have been insulted, physically assaulted and accused of supporting the coup plotters. Other refugees have been forced to join government forces and armed opposition groups which have appeared in the west of the country (See *No escape. Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire*, AFR 31/012/2003, June 2003).

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, English or your own language:

- expressing grave concerns at the recent attack by security forces against Alphonso Faroy, Higgins Bernard Jr, Mensah Ainankra, Hortense Lotika and some 30 other refugees including women and children in Abidjan on 9 June 2004;
- calling on the government to publicly state that it will take immediate steps to ensure the safety of the refugees in collaboration with the UNHCR and in accordance with their obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa;
- calling for the refugees to be provided with food, water, shelter and medical treatment for those who require it;
- calling on the authorities to give the security forces strict orders to respect human rights and protect refugees;

- reminding the authorities that Côte d'Ivoire, as state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, is bound to respect the rights of everyone to life, liberty and security of person, including refugees;
- reminding the authorities that Côte d'Ivoire, as state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, is bound to respect, protect and fulfil the right to housing as an aspect of the right to an adequate standard of living, and the right to health of each child within its jurisdiction, including refugees and children of refugees.

APPEALS TO:

President

Monsieur Laurent Gbagbo
Président de la République
Présidence de la République
BP 1354, Abidjan 01
Côte d'Ivoire

Telegram: Monsieur le Président, Présidence de la République, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire
Fax: +225 20 21 14 25
Salutation: Monsieur le Président

Minister of Security

Monsieur Martin Bléou
Ministre de la Sécurité
Bloc Ministeriel
Blvd Angoulvand
BP V121, Abidjan
Côte d'Ivoire

Telegram: Ministre de la Sécurité, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire,
Fax: +225 20 32 12 24
Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre

Minister of Human Rights

Madame Mme Victorine Wodié
Ministre des droits de l'homme
BP 2020, Abidjan 01
Côte d'Ivoire

Telegram: Ministre des droits de l'homme, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire,
Fax: +225 20 32 00 48
Salutation: Madame la Ministre

COPIES TO: to diplomatic representatives of Côte d'Ivoire accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 22 July 2004.