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## **Fatal shelling in Côte d'Ivoire condemned**

Côte d'Ivoire security forces must halt the shelling of civilian areas, Amnesty International said today, after forces loyal to the outgoing President Laurent Gbagbo fired shells into an Abidjan market, killing at least 20 people and wounding around 60.

Mortar shells fell without warning on a market in the district of Abobo in the north of Abidjan on Thursday afternoon. The shelling was one of the most serious incidents to take place in Abidjan since the beginning of the current crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, which was sparked by a disputed presidential election four months ago.

"The security forces responsible for this appalling shelling must immediately end the use of force that causes the deaths and injuries of people going about their daily lives," said Véronique Aubert, Amnesty International's Africa deputy director.

"Under international law, security forces should use only such force as is proportionate to the objective. To launch an attack of this kind that kills and injures a large number of people who are not posing an immediate threat is completely unacceptable."

An eyewitness told Amnesty International's researcher in Abidjan: "This afternoon, before one o'clock prayers, women were selling their goods in the market of Gagnoa Gare, in Abobo. Everything was quiet when suddenly we heard an awful sound and a shell hit the ground. At least ten people, mainly women, were killed and others wounded."

Another shell hit the courtyard of a family in Abobo. One survivor told Amnesty International: "We were quietly seated in the courtyard when a shell fell on us. Three of my family died. Their bodies were sent to the morgue of Anyama".

One woman present in the courtyard at the time of the attack said: "My teenage son was severely wounded by the shell and died a few hours later in the Abobo hospital."

Another eyewitness recalled how just after prayers children were playing on the ground when a shell landed. "A woman, Bamba Aminata came in with her baby. She was hit by a shell and died in the hospital a few hours afterwards. Her baby was wounded. Another 16 month-year-old baby was killed by the same shell."

One man who had been to the hospital in Abobo told Amnesty International that he had seen the bodies of 13 people including a woman and a child aged five or six.

An armed group calling themselves "the invisible commandos" has clashed with security forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo in Abobo over the past several weeks.

This week, for the first time since the beginning of the crisis, fighting has extended to other parts of

Abidjan notably in Yopougon, Adjamé and Cocody where the "invisible commandos" are trying to expand their presence.

Violence has recently escalated in Côte d'Ivoire in the wake of the disputed presidential election of November 2010. Opposition candidate Alassane Ouattara is the internationally recognized winner of the poll but the outgoing President Laurent Gbagbo has refused to recognize these results.