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## **Côte d’Ivoire: Both sides responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity**

Forces allied to both former Côte d’Ivoire President Laurent Gbagbo and incumbent Alassane Ouattara committed war crimes and crimes against humanity during six months of deadly violence following disputed elections, Amnesty International said in a report released today.

‘They looked at his identity card and shot him dead: Six months of post-electoral violence’ contains shocking testimonies from victims and witnesses to massacres, rapes and manhunts and concludes that forces loyal to both parties committed serious violations of international humanitarian law.

“Human rights violations are still being committed against real or perceived supporters of Laurent Gbagbo both in Abidjan and in the west of the country,” said Gaëtan Mootoo, Amnesty International’s West Africa researcher.

“Alassane Ouattara’s failure to condemn these acts could be seen as a green light by many of his security forces and other armed elements fighting with them to continue. Alassane Ouattara must publically state that all violence against the civilian population must stop immediately.”

An Amnesty International delegation that spent over two months in Côte d’Ivoire and gathered more than 100 witness statements from people who survived a 29 March 2011 massacre in Duékoué (about 500 km west of Abidjan) and neighbouring villages.

The statements all indicate a systematic and targeted series of killings committed by uniformed FRCI forces (The Forces Républicaines de Côte d’Ivoire were created by Alassane Ouattara on 8 March 2011) who executed hundreds of men of all ages on political and ethnic grounds.

Before killing them they asked their victims to give their names or show identity cards. Some of these identity cards were found beside the bodies.

A woman who lived in Duékoué told Amnesty International:

“They (FRCI forces) came into the yards and chased the women. Then they told the men to line up and asked them to state their first and second names and show their identity card. Then they executed them. I was present while they sorted out the men. Three young men, one of whom was about 15, were shot dead in front of me.”

Amnesty International’s report also details the inaction of the United Nations Operations in Côte d’Ivoire (UNOCI), based just 1 kilometre from the main site of the killings in Duékoué. Victims told Amnesty International that they had repeatedly requested help from UNOCI but received no response.

UNOCI’s presence in the Duékoué region was also limited to one battalion of just 200 soldiers meaning

protection for tens of thousands of displaced people was not provided.

Amnesty International has made several public and private appeals for UNOCI to strengthen its presence in the area but this has not been done.

“UNOCI has a mandate to protect the civilian population yet in some cases it clearly failed to do this,” said Gaëtan Mootoo. “UNOCI officials told us that it is the duty of the state to protect civilians; however as the national forces firstly under Laurent Gbagbo and then under Alassane Ouattara themselves committed horrific crimes how can we expect them to protect the civilian population?”

Attacks against villages inhabited by people belonging to ethnic groups considered supporters of Laurent Gbagbo continued in the first weeks of May. Between May 6 and 8 several villages were burned and dozens of people killed. The FRCI justified these acts by saying that they were looking for arms and Liberian mercenaries.

Since December 2010, forces and militias loyal to Laurent Gbagbo also committed war crimes and crimes against humanity including extrajudicial executions, torture and rape.

In late February these forces began to shell a densely populated neighbourhood of Abidjan that had come under the control of anti-Gbagbo armed elements, killing a number of people.

One witness to the shelling told Amnesty International:

“I can still see those two women with their legs blown off by the shell. They were taken to hospital but did not survive their injuries.”

Militias loyal to Laurent Gbagbo also burned people. The victims were mainly people with a Muslim name or wearing Muslim clothes.

An eyewitness also told Amnesty International how a person was burnt alive on 27 February 2011:

“The militiamen were beating up a young man. They were armed with machetes, clubs and bricks. As they hit him, they said that he was not from the neighbourhood and accused him of being a rebel. They put several tyres around his neck, he was still alive when they set fire to the tyres.

The mass violations committed by all parties in the last six months have left thousands of victims, their families and large sections of the population scarred and traumatised. Amnesty International is urging the new authorities to urgently re-establish the rule of law and the people’s trust in impartial security forces.

Without justice for all victims regardless of their political affiliation or ethnic group, any appeals for reconciliation runs the risk of foundering on an unstable and unsatisfactory compromise that could lead to more bloodshed and vengeance in the future.

“For more than a decade, Côte d’Ivoire has been subject to amnesia and amnesties and successive governments have deliberately refused to accept their responsibility to fight impunity. This cycle must end,” said Gaëtan Mootoo.

“President Ouattara has committed himself to ending impunity. To avoid further revenge attacks and violence, he must fulfil this commitment.”