
amnesty international

Côte d'Ivoire Provide protection to journalists!

Between 15 and 23 January 2006 a number of journalists were subjected to physical and verbal abuse as well as systematic intimidation by groups of protesters proclaiming themselves to be “Jeunes Patriotes” (Young Patriots). They were protesting against a statement by the Groupe de travail international (GTI, the international mediation group on Côte d'Ivoire) that the mandate of members of parliament, which had expired on 16 December 2005, “*was not to be extended*”. The actions of “Jeunes Patriotes” have taken place in full view of the security forces who have taken no action to prevent them or arrest those responsible.

These acts of violence and intimidation – condoned by the presence of the forces of law and order – constitute a violation of the right to freedom of expression, and the authorities must immediately take all necessary measures to pursue the perpetrators and prevent their reoccurrence. This violence and intimidation has occurred in a context of continuous attacks against journalists since the beginning of hostilities in September 2002.

Sequence of events

Sunday, 15 January 2006	“Jeunes Patriotes” attempted to set fire to a car in which journalists of the newspaper <i>24 Heures</i> were travelling on their way to a meeting of the GTI. They were accused of being rebels because they were working for an opposition newspaper.
Monday, 16 January 2006	“Jeunes Patriotes” besieged the <i>Radio télévision ivoirienne</i> (RTI) centre. David Mobio, a news presenter, was violently removed from his studio by “Jeunes Patriotes” who demanded to broadcast a statement. They threatened another woman journalist that she would be raped and killed.
Tuesday, 17 January 2006	“Jeunes Patriotes” remained within the RTI and continued to level threats against the journalists. <i>Radio Tchato-Dalao</i> (in the west of the country) was ransacked by a group of “Jeunes Patriotes”.
Wednesday, 18 January 2006	Protesters occupying the television centre made death threats against an RTI official.
Thursday, 19 January 2006	An RTI journalist pushed the Minister with responsibility for communications who had come to the RTI to broadcast an appeal for calm by the Prime Minister, Charles Konan Banny. Konan N'Bra, a journalist for <i>Soir Info</i> , and his team were assaulted at a roadblock in a district of Abidjan by

	“Jeunes Patriotes” who threatened to kill them. They were accused by their attackers of being rebels.
Monday, 23 January 2006	The FPI, the political party of Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo, “warned” the management of public television against any “reprisal” against personnel who had remained at their posts during the preceding week, in particular the journalist accused of having assaulted the Minister with responsibility for communications. It denounced the “attempts to intimidate the staff of the RTI who were engaged in the defence of the Republic”.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS: Please send appeals (in French or in your own language) as soon as possible to the addresses given below, making the following recommendations:

- urge the authorities to give strict instructions to the security forces to respect fundamental human rights and to protect human rights defenders, in particular journalists;
- request the authorities to ensure that the forces of law and order respond immediately to calls for assistance and protection by journalists or the press;
- urge that investigations be opened immediately into the attacks against journalists between 15 and 23 January 2006 and that those alleged to be responsible be brought to justice, in particular those members of the security forces who allowed, encouraged or supported these attacks. The results of these investigations should be made public and members of the security forces under investigation for human rights violations should be suspended from duty until the investigation is concluded;
- the authorities must arrest and bring to justice the groups of civilians claiming to be “Jeunes Patriotes” who are terrorizing journalists and operating with the consent, encouragement and support of the security forces;
- remind the Ivorian authorities of the principles set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, notably Article 3 which provides that: “*Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person*”;
- request that, as a preventive measure, an action plan for the protection of human rights defenders and journalists be implemented which would guarantee that attacks and threats against human rights defenders are systematically investigated, and that members of the security forces are made fully aware of the legitimacy of the activities of those defending fundamental human rights. This action plan should include security measures which would enable immediate intervention if necessary. The series of protection measures provided must comply with the demands formulated by members of organizations working for the defence of fundamental human rights.

Appeals to:

President of the Republic:
Monsieur Laurent Gbagbo

Présidence de la République
BP 1354, Abidjan 01
Côte d'Ivoire

Telegrams: Monsieur le Président, Présidence de la République, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Fax : +225 20 21 14 25

Salutation: Monsieur le Président, Dear President Gbagbo

Chief of Staff of the National Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire

Philippe Mangou
Chef d'Etat-major des Forces armées nationales de Côte d'Ivoire
Abidjan
Côte d'Ivoire

Fax : +225 20 22 28 74

Salutation: Monsieur le Chef d'Etat-major, Dear Mr Mangou

Minister of Defence

Monsieur René Alphing Kouassi
Ministre de la Défense
Ministère de la Défense
Abidjan
Côte d'Ivoire

Fax : +225 20 22 28 18

Salutation: Monsieur le Ministre, Dear Mr Kouassi

COPIES to diplomatic representatives of Côte d'Ivoire in your country

- OLPED (l'Observatoire de la liberté de la presse, de l'éthique et de la déontologie), Maison de la Presse d'Abidjan (Plateau), 06 BP 1675 Abidjan 06, e-mail: saisine@olped.org
- Radio Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI), Direction Générale, for the attention of RTI journalists, fax: + 225 22 44 78 23