

COUNTRY INFORMATION BULLETIN

Republic of Cote d'Ivoire

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Introduction

- **1.1** This Bulletin has been produced by the Country Information and Policy Unit, Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Home Office, to identify information about Côte d'Ivoire obtained from a wide variety of recognised sources. It does not contain any Home Office opinion or policy.
- **1.2** This Bulletin has been prepared for background purposes for those involved in the asylum / human rights determination process. The information it identifies is not exhaustive. It concentrates on the issues most commonly raised in asylum / human rights claims made in the United Kingdom.
- **1.3** The Bulletin is sourced throughout. It is intended to be used by caseworkers as a signpost to the source material, which has been made available to them. The vast majority of the source material is readily available in the public domain.
- **1.4** This Bulletin is intended to cover major developments that have taken place in Côte d'Ivoire since publication of the Country Bulletin in March 2003 and must be read in conjunction with that.
- **1.5** This Bulletin and the accompanying source material are publicly disclosable. Paper copies of the sources that are not available in electronic format have been distributed to nominated officers in Asylum Caseworking Directorate and all Presenting Officer Units.

Background

- 2.1 According to several reports, the situation in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire has remained fluid and volatile since the conflict began in September 2002. [3a] (p1) [3d] [5b] (p3) [5c] (p2)
- **2.2** According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) report of January 2004, "The internal conflict that broke out in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002 officially ended in July 2003, yet the country has made only limited progress towards peace and reconciliation." [3a] (p1) The International Crisis Group (ICG) added in its report of November 2003 "A year of conflict has sharpened political differences, deepened ethnic, religious and communal divisions, and made violence commonplace." [4] (p3)
- 2.3 According to the HRW report of January 2004, despite the ceasefire the former rebels, the Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire (Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire, MPCI), the Ivorian Popular Movement of the Far West (Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest, MPIGO) and the Movement for Peace and Justice (Mouvement pour la justice et la paix, MJP), now collectively known as "the Forces nouvelles" (New Forces), controlled the north and much of the west of the country. The government, however, controlled the south, including the official capital, Yamoussoukro, and Abidjan, the commercial and diplomatic centre of Côte d'Ivoire. [3a] (p1)

Political Developments since March 2003

- **2.4** Following the signing of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement in January 2003, a comprehensive ceasefire was signed on 3 May 2003 by FANCI [National Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (Forces armées nationales de Côte d'Ivoire)] and the Forces nouvelles. [4] (p3) [5a] (p1) The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) report of August 2003 noted that "Under the terms of that agreement, the French Licorne forces and the forces of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) deployed to the western region of Côte d'Ivoire jointly with FANCI and the Forces nouvelles on 24 May 2003, to create a weapons free zone of confidence, extend the cease-fire line to the border between Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, and arm or expel armed Liberian elements from that area." [4] (p3) The report added that "As a result of the deployment of troops, the security situation in the western region of the country significantly improved, resulting in the return of displaced villagers and the resumption of humanitarian activities." [5a] (p1)
- 2.5 On 4 July 2003, military chiefs from FANCI and the Forces nouvelles signed a declaration proclaiming the official end of the war almost ten months after fighting erupted. [2] (p1) [4] (p3) [5c] (p3) [6a] [6b] Both sides pledged there support to the President and vowed to work for the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR). [2] (p1) [4] (p3)
- **2.6** According to the UNSC report of 6 January 2004, "During the period April to early August [2003], the new Government made encouraging progress towards implementing the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, including the elaboration of a

draft programme for the implementation of the agreement, the development of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and the establishment of a National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration and a National Reunification Committee, as well as the adoption of an amnesty law." [5c] (p3)

- 2.7 Several Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) reports mentioned that the amnesty law, as required by the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, was adopted by the National Assembly on 6 August 2003. The amnesty law covered all civilians and military personnel who sought to overthrow the government after the controversial presidential elections of 2000. [7a] [7b] The amnesty excluded people guilty of serious human rights abuses or economic crimes during the conflict. [7b] According to a news report by Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) dated 12 August 2003, in the week following the approval of the amnesty law, the government released 54 political prisoners (16 military personnel and 38 civilians) from prison in Abidjan. [7a]
- 2.8 As documented by several reports, on 12 September 2003, President Gbagbo announced the appointment of René Amani, a retired civil servant, and Bleou Martin, a human rights activist, to fill the controversial positions of Minister of State for Defence and Minister of State for Internal Security. Despite opposition from the Forces nouvelles and the Rally of Republicans (Rassemblement des Républicains, RDR) one of the main opposition parties, the two Ministers were sworn in on 13 September 2003. As a result of the appointments, and because of the government's failure to fully implement the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, eight of the nine ministers from Forces nouvelles suspended their participation in the Government of National Reconciliation on 23 September 2003. [2] (p1) [56] (p2) [56] (p3) [76] [76] [77] They also withdrew from the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration and the Commission on National Reunification. [2] (p1) [56] (p2)
- 2.9 The UNSC reports of November 2003 and January 2004 noted that following the departure of the Forces nouvelles from the Government of National Reconciliation, the security situation deteriorated in Côte d'Ivoire. The streets of Abidjan and Bouaké saw an increase in the number of demonstrations and political rallies. [5b] (p3) [5c] (p3) Several reports observed that in addition there were concerns about militias and youth groups, such as the 'Young Patriots' (Jeune's Patriotes) and the Group of Patriots for Peace Groupement des Patriotes pour la Paix, GPP). [3b] (p1) [5b] (p4) [5c] (p3)
- **2.10** On the 16 October 2003, in a meeting of the Council of Ministers, a decision was taken to impose an immediate three-month banon public demonstrations and marches. [55] (p4) [75] [76] The government also ordered the immediate disbanding of the GPP. [55] (p4) [60] [75]
- **2.11** Several reports, however, stated on 29 November 2003, a large group of 'young patriots' accompanied by about one hundred soldiers from FANCI attempted to break through the ceasefire line controlled by the Licorne troops, south of the Forces nouvelles stronghold Bouaké. As a result the two sides

exchanged fire and several government troops were injured. [1a] (p1) [5c] (p3) [7c] In November 2003, the UNSC report of January 2004 noted that "a group of FANCI soldiers forced their way into the Ivorian national television station in Abidjan and broadcast a statement demanding the withdrawal of the Licorne forces from the zone of confidence to allow the Government forces to fight the Forces nouvelles and "reunite" the country." [5c] (p3) The soldiers also demanded the resignation of the army chief of staff, General Mathias Doue, and other senior military officers. [1a] (p1) [5c] (p3) [7c] [7d] Then in early December 2003, several hundred 'young patriots' violently demonstrated outside the French Licorne base in Abidjan demanding that the French troops leave the country. [1a] (p1) [5c] (p4) [7c] [7d]

- **2.12** A meeting chaired by President Gbagbo between senior military officers of the FANCI and Forces nouvelles, with the participation of representatives from Licorne and ECOWAS mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ECOMICI), as well as United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI), took place on 4 December 2003. [1a] (p1) [5c] (p4) As a result of the meeting, both parties withdrew forces from the zone of confidence and on 7 December 2003 the Forces nouvelles released 40 military personnel that had been held in detention since the beginning of the conflict on 7 December 2003. [1a] (p1) [8]
- **2.13** According to the UNSC report of January 2004, "A follow up meeting was held in Bouaké on 10 December [2003] at which FANCI and the Forces nouvelles decided to begin dismantling their checkpoints and withdrawing heavy weapons from the zone of confidence to specific quartering locations. In addition, they reaffirmed their decision to implement the cantonment of their respective troops at 17 previously identified sites." [50] (p4)
- 2.14 Nevertheless, several new reports noted on 12 December 2003 a group of armed assailants attempted to attack the building of the national television & radio (RTI). The gendarmerie guarding the building, exchanged fire with the assailants and nineteen people were killed as a result. [1a] (p2) [9] According to an Agence France-Presse (AFP) report of 12 December 2003, The clashes were the bloodiest in Abidjan since the ceasefire was declared. [9]
- 2.15 The UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) situation report of 2 January 2004 advised that the "Withdrawal of heavy artillery from the cease-fire line by both sides, and dismantling of dozens of checkpoints took place during 13-24 Dec, comforting the national and international opinion that the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) will start without further delays." [16] (p1)
- **2.16** The OCHA situation reports of 20 January 2004,18 February 2004 and 1 March 2004 noted that throughout January and February 2004 ethnic clashes continued in the west, particularly in villages around and between Zou, Bangolo, Blolèquin and Guiglo, located within and south of the zone of confidence. [1c] (p1) [1e] (p1) [1f] (p1) The French Licorne forces found a number of bodies of people killed as a result of ethnic clashes. [1c] (p1) According to the OCHA situation report 18 February 2004, one of the Forces nouvelles leaders was shot dead by unknown assailants on 7 February 2004. [1e] (p1) In the

- northern and northwest, factions of the Forces nouvelles continued to clash which resulted in several deaths. [14] (p2) The Forces nouvelles and the local authorities in Bouaké spent the week during 8 to 13 March 2004 sensitising their troops and the population on the DDR process. [19] (p2)
- **2.17** Several IRIN news reports stated that on 6 January 2004 seven of the eight Forces nouvelles ministers returned to the Government of National Reconciliation. Guillaume Soro, the leader of Forces nouvelles and Minister of State for Communications, however, did not attend the first cabinet meeting since the Forces nouvelles boycotted the Government. [76]
- 2.18 According to the OCHA situation report dated 1 April 2004 "Political tensions culminated on Thursday the 25th March when the protest march planned by opposition parties pushing for the full implementation of the Linas Marcoussis peace accord, was violently disrupted by President Gbagbo's security and defense forces." Opposition parties claim that between 350 to 500 people were killed by government security forces whereas government authorities have reported that 37 were killed including two police officers. [1h] (p1) [7g] [7h] The Ivorian Movement for Human Rights (MIDH), nevertheless estimated that about 200 people died and another 400 were injured. [7h] The most severely affected districts of Abidjan included Abobo, Port Bouet, Youpougon, Adjamé and Koumassi. [1h] (p1) [3c] The OCHA situation report of 1 April 2004 reported that "Security forces opened fire on non-armed demonstrators and used MI 24 helicopters to spread teargas over the crowds." [1h] (p1)
- **2.19** The OCHA report added "On the 25th March [2004] Demonstrations also took place in Bouaké, Korhogo and Yamoussoukro. In Yamoussoukro 25 people were wounded and one killed. Forces Nouvelles decided to pull out of the demonstration in Abidjan to show that it had no intention of staging a coup d'etat as warned by Government authorities. The Forces Nouvelles are on alert, have reinforced their troops and have reportedly approached the "zone of confidence". Demonstrations continued in Man and Korhogo. On the 31st March [2004] the French forces became the target of demonstrations in Korhogo." [1h] (p1)
- 2.20 In response the Forces nouvelles and RDR announced on the same day that they would suspend their participation in the Government of National Reconciliation. [1h] (p2) [3c] [6c] The other main opposition party the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (Parti Democratique de la Côte d'Ivoire, PDCI) withdrew from the government earlier in March. [1h] (p2) According to the OCHA situation report of 14 April 2004 "This mass walkout has left independent Prime Minister Seydou Diarra with only 15 of his 41 ministers still at their posts and has brought Côte d'Ivoire's peace process to a standstill." [1i] (p1)
- **2.21** According to the OCHA situation report of 1 April 2004, during March 2004, there was also a significant rise in the number of organised hold-ups and robberies in Bouaké. The OCHA report added "In response to this situation the Forces Nouvelles have increased their search operations and arrested numerous youths, many of whom are addicted to drugs." [1h](p2)

- **2.22** The OCHA situation report of 14 April 2004 advised that "On 4th April [2004], MINUCI officially became ONUCI (council resolution 1528), integrating 1400 ECOWAS troops already deployed in Côte d'Ivoire as part of the 6240 UN peacekeeping troops." [1i] (p1)
- **2.23** The OCHA situation report of 14 April 2004 noted that "President Laurent Gbagbo continues to press for negotiations to be held with opposition parties, however the SG [secretary general] of Parti Democratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), the main opposition party, refuses to meet with the President unless he provides security, freedom of expression and acknowledges of the number of deaths that have taken place." [11] (p1-2)
- **2.24** The OCHA report added that "In response to the many reports of exactions in the poorer neighbourhoods of Abidjan, committed by police forces and unidentified 'parallel uniformed forces', the government has requested international military forces (LICORNE and UNOCI) to conduct mixed patrols alongside the Ivorian armed forces to help maintain law and order." [11] (p1)

Human Rights

- **2.25** According to the HRW report of January 2004, "Despite the official end of hostilities, civilians continue to suffer abuses on both sides of the ceasefire line. Many displaced civilians, who numbered close to a million as a result of the nine-month conflict, remain unable to return to their homes. Ivorian society remains deeply polarised by years of political manipulation of ethnicity, intercommunal strife and impunity of state security forces." [3a] (p1)
- **2.26** The UNSC report of January 2004 noted that "The human rights unit of MINUCI reported to the assessment mission that serious and widespread human rights violations continued to be perpetrated against civilians, including harassment, killings, arbitrary arrests, torture, the detention of persons incommunicado, roadblocks, house searches, theft and extortion. There are also reports of continuing use of child soldiers and of frequent cases of sexual abuse against women, including sexual slavery and rape, committed by elements from both Government forces and Forces nouvelles." [5c] (p7) Militias and youth groups also committed human rights abuses against civilians. [5c] (p7)
- 2.27 The USSD report of 2003 stated "The Government's human rights record remained poor; although there were some improvements in a few areas, serious problems remained... The Government and NF [Forces nouvelles] employed mercenaries from Liberia; however, during the second half of the year [2003], military and rebel forces worked together to reduce the number of Liberian fighters and abuses subsequently declined. Security forces frequently resorted to lethal force to combat widespread violent crime and sometimes beat detainees and prisoners... The targeting of Muslims suspected of rebel ties diminished somewhat during the year, although Muslims and practitioners of indigenous religions were subject to discrimination... Discrimination and

violence against women, abuse of children, and female genital mutilation (FGM) remained serious problems. There were incidents of violent ethnic confrontation; societal discrimination based on ethnicity remained a problem. Child labor as well as some reports of forced child labor and trafficking in children and women also persisted." [2] (p2)

- 2.28 The USSD report added "The NF's [Forces nouvelles] human rights record was extremely poor. The rebels in the north summarily executed persons, killed numerous civilians, arbitrarily arrested and detained persons, and conducted arbitrary ad hoc justice. Mass graves were found during the year [2003] in rebel-held territory. In Bouake, the NF continued to operate the national television station and aired their leaders' speeches and deliberations. Citizens in the north were cut off from news aired in the south. The rebels severely limited freedom of movement within and from the territory they held and forcibly conscripted persons, including many child soldiers. Rebels and mercenaries committed particularly grave abuses in the western region of the country and in the north; under various rebel sub-leader warlords serious abuses were committed." [2] (p2)
- 2.29 The OCHA situation report of 1 April 2004 noted that during March 2004 "There have been numerous reports of abuse and raids carried out by security forces in the various districts of Abidjan. In Cocody and Treichville, eyewitnesses reported that police were shooting at individuals as they were running away." [1h] (p1) The HRW report of March 2004 stated "Human Rights Watch also received reports that dozens of people were rounded up and arrested by state security forces today and in the days preceding the march. These round-ups occurred in the poorer neighborhoods inhabited primarily by West African immigrants and northern Ivorians, often perceived as supporters of the Rally of Republicans (Rassemblement des Républicains, RDR) opposition party." [3c]

Humanitarian Situation

- **2.30** According to the UNSC report of January 2004, "There are an estimated 500,000 internally displaced persons, 69,000 refugees and thousands of affected host communities in the country...The public health system, including the provision for safe water and sanitation, has been severely disrupted. Eighty percent of health facilities that existed before the outbreak of the conflict in September 2002 in the north and west of the country have closed or operate at best with minimal facilities. Health facilities in the south are overstretched due to the influx of internally displaced persons in need of medical attention." [5c] (p9)
- **2.31** The report added, "Issues of protection, health and education are currently the key concerns of the humanitarian community in Côte d'Ivoire. The protection needs of those caught in inter-ethnic conflicts or in clashes between national and foreign communities, as well of returning populations, have largely not been addressed and require urgent attention." [5c] (p9)

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