

22 June 2005

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This Country Information Bulletin was produced by Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Home Office, for use by officials involved in the asylum / human rights determination process. The Bulletin identifies general background information about Côte d'Ivoire from a variety of recognised sources. The material identified concentrates on the issues most commonly raised in asylum / human rights claims made in the United Kingdom and is not intended to be exhaustive. None of the documents identified contain any Home Office opinion or policy.

The Bulletin provides a signpost to the source material, most of which is readily available in the public domain. For Home Office users, the Bulletin provides direct electronic access to each source referred to in the document, via a link on the source number in the source list. For the benefit of external users, the relevant weblink has also been included, together with the date that the link was accessed.

As noted above, the source documents identified concentrate mainly on key human rights issues. For background, some basic information about Côte d'Ivoire, extracted from the Country Profile on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's website ([www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk)), is also provided below.

### 2. BASIC COUNTRY INFORMATION

**Official name:** Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

**Area:** 322,463 sq km; 133,425 sq miles

**Population:** 16,409,950 (2001)

**Capital City:** Yamoussoukro (110,000)

**Economic Capital:** Abidjan (over 3 million)

**People:** 60 ethnic groups make up the indigenous population. The Akan (42%) with its Baoulé sub-group in the South, is the largest. Other groups are the Sénoufou (18%) and the Mandé (29% with the Dioula sub-group) in the North, and the Krou in the West (11% with the Bété sub-group).

**Languages:** The official language is French, but Dioula is the principal vernacular in the north. Baoulé and other local languages are widely used.

**Religion(s):** Muslim (approx. 40%), Christian (approx. 35%); indigenous beliefs (approx. 25%)

**Currency:** CFA Franc (FCFA). Pegged at FCFA 655.957 = euro 1.00

**Major Political Parties:** There are 4 major parties:

PCDI-RDC - Parti Démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire-Rassemblement Démocratique Africain

FPI - Front Populaire Ivoirien

RDR - Rassemblement des Républicains

UDCPI - Union Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire

**Government:** Côte d'Ivoire is a constitutional republic with a directly elected president and a single parliamentary chamber. Both are elected for five years terms. The PCDI (98) and FPI (96) have the most deputies in parliament.

**Head of State:** President Laurent Gbagbo

**Prime Minister:** M. Seydou Diarra

**Foreign Minister:** M. Bamba Mamadou

Membership of international groups/organisations: United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA), African Development Bank (AFDB), International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF).

#### Geography

Côte d'Ivoire is situated on the West Coast of Africa and borders Liberia, Guinea, Mali, Burkina

Faso and Ghana. The country can broadly be divided into two areas with beaches and forests along the coast, and a drier savannah region with a sub-saharan climate in the North.

### **Recent History**

Côte d'Ivoire gained independence from France in 1960, with Felix Houphouët-Boigny as President and chairman of the single ruling party, the Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI).

A new electoral code in 1994, required presidential candidates to have two Ivorian parents and to have resided in the country for five years before the election. Both amendments were aimed at preventing Ouattara, whose party, the Rassemblement des républicains (RDR) gains its support in the main from the Moslem north of the country, from standing in the 1995 presidential election. President Bédié, and the PDCI, won an overwhelming victory, but subsequently failed to deal with growing student and industrial unrest or with problems over pay and conditions in the military.

Legislative elections in December 2000 (from which Ouattara was again banned, leading to an RDR boycott) and municipal elections in March 2001 went relatively smoothly, but the strong support for the PDCI and the RDR, prompted President Gbagbo (FPI) to hold a National Reconciliation Forum in October 2001. Gbagbo, Bédié, Ouattara and Gueï all attended to agree a series of recommendations including acceptance of the October 2000 election results.

All the main parties participated in the first-ever district and regional elections in July 2002. But the elections were marred by inter-ethnic violence between RDR and FPI supporters and by claims of administrative malpractice and contested electoral lists.

### **Recent Events and Political Developments**

On 19 September 2002, an attempted coup took place in Abidjan and in the north of the country. The uprising in Abidjan was quickly suppressed, although Gueï, and Interior Minister Boga Doudou, were killed in the ensuing violence. The rebels had more success in the north, seizing control of the major cities of Bouake and Korhogo. The rebels, who subsequently identified themselves as the Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI), included factions of the military unhappy at government proposals to retire them, but also drew wider support from those who opposed the existing political regime.

The Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS) responded swiftly to the crisis, negotiating a ceasefire between the two sides on 17 October 2002. However the situation became more complex following the emergence in November 2002 of two new rebel groups in the west, the Mouvement Patriotique Ivoirien du Grand Ouest (MPIGO) and the Movement for Peace and Justice (MJP). There was a fresh round of fighting in the west, and also a number of ceasefire breaches in the north.

All Ivorian political parties and the three rebel groups attended Round-Table discussions in Paris in January 2003, which led to the Linas Marcoussis Agreement (LMA). This provided for a new Government of National Reconciliation and addressed the key issues underlying the current crisis. On 29 May 2003, the new government presented its programme, closely based on the requirements of the LMA, to the National Assembly. Following the declaration of a comprehensive ceasefire, the ceasefire line was successfully extended to the Liberian border in late May, and the situation in the west stabilised significantly. The Forces Armées Nationales de Côte d'Ivoire (FANCI) and the New Forces issued a joint declaration on 4 July 2003 declaring a permanent cessation of hostilities. The National Assembly agreed an Amnesty Law, as required by the LMA, on 6 August 2003 (this is not intended to provide amnesty for those who committed serious human rights abuses or economic crimes).

Despite this progress, levels of confidence between both sides continued to fluctuate. Although the New Forces re-joined the Government in January 2004, any sense of optimism was short-lived. In March 2004, the PDCI suspended their participation in Cabinet meetings, accusing Gbagbo of stalling on the reconciliation process. Pro-Marcoussis parties including the PDCI and the RDR, announced a march in support of the LMA, despite a ban on all demonstrations. When the resulting 25 March demonstration was forcibly repressed by the authorities, leaving more than a hundred dead, (see under 'Human Rights') six other parties, including the RDR and the New Forces (the G7) joined the PDCI boycott.

A UN Peacekeeping Force (UNOCI) began to deploy in April, with the bulk of the 6,000 plus troops expected to be in place by the end of September. The G7 returned to government in August, following the signature of the Accra III accord which called for the President to facilitate the passing of all LMA-related legislation by 30 September and for the Demobilisation, Disarmament and Re-integration (DDR) process to start by 15 October at the latest. The National Assembly has, however, made little progress to date on the enactment of the legislation. Bills on Nationality and the composition of the Independent Electoral Commission are blocked, and no progress has been made on amending Article 35 of the Constitution on eligibility to stand as President.

Ivorian government fighter planes dropped bombs over the rebel stronghold of Bouake on 4 November 2004. Following an air strike on 6 November by Ivorian government forces on a French military base near Bouake in which nine French peacekeepers were killed, the French destroyed the Ivorian government's aircraft. Retaliation by Ivorian government forces and pro-government militias followed swiftly. Between 6 and 8 November, French peacekeepers clashed with Government troops and pro-government militias near the airport in Abidjan, at the French military base and in various locations throughout the city. Militia groups also attacked foreign businesses and residences. British, French and other governments assisted around 8,000 foreign nationals to leave.

UN Security Council Resolution 1572, which was unanimously agreed condemned the actions of the Government of Côte d'Ivoire, endorsed the Linas-Marcoussis and Accra III Agreements and imposed an arms embargo against Côte d'Ivoire with immediate effect. The resolution also imposed an assets freeze and travel ban on individuals who were blocking the peace process on 15 December and established a committee to designate those individuals. On behalf of the African Union, President Mbeki embarked on a mediation mission in November. He set out a roadmap for a resolution to the crisis. Following the failure of both sides to meet their commitments, there were further clashes in the Zone of Confidence in February and March. All parties to the conflict have agreed to attend a fresh set of talks in Pretoria in the first week of April.

### **Basic Economic Facts**

**GDP per head:** US\$ 587 (projected 2002)

**Annual Growth:** -2.2% (2003)

Inflation (consumer prices): -0.1%

**Major Sectors:** Agriculture: 29%, Industry: 21.6%, Services: 49%

**Exchange rate:** Euro 1 = 655.957 FCFA

Human Rights

Côte d'Ivoire is home to a large immigrant population. Problems of discrimination and ethnic tension have been exacerbated by the concept of 'Ivoirité', which many see as divisive and favouring the largely Christian south. Tensions became increasingly serious following the outbreak of the current crisis in September 2002.

A large number of people, including immigrant workers and refugees, were displaced by the fighting and by attacks on the immigrant community. A UN fact-finding mission which visited Côte d'Ivoire in December 2002 concluded that all sides to the conflict had committed serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. They found that reports of mass graves in conflict areas were credible, and that death squads were operating in Abidjan. In April 2004, a report into the 25 March events (see under ('Recent Political Developments')) by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights concluded that "indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians and the committing of massive human rights violations" occurred under the "direction and responsibility of the highest authorities of the State". In August 2004, UNOCI announced the existence of three mass graves, containing at least 99 bodies, in the area around Korhogo in the New Forces controlled north of the country. The report of the UN Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights Violations since 19 September 2002 which visited Côte d'Ivoire from June- August 2004 will be published later this year.

The international community, including the UK, has condemned human rights violations and stressed that all the parties in Côte d'Ivoire, including the government, must take the necessary action to bring to justice those responsible, and to prevent further violations.

Human rights organisations generally operate freely in Côte d'Ivoire. The Constitution provides for

an independent judiciary. Police brutality and petty corruption are issues. Child trafficking is a growing phenomenon in Côte d'Ivoire. A number of significant human rights violations including the Yopougon massacre remain unresolved. In April 2004, the National Assembly voted in favour of the creation of a National Commission on Human Rights, one of the requirements of the LMA. There has, however, been no progress since on the establishment of the Commission.

Côte d'Ivoire has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its first Optional Protocol, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Côte d'Ivoire abolished the death penalty for all crimes in July 2000, when the new constitution was adopted.

An Amnesty Law was passed by an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly on 6 August 2003. This law offers amnesty to all offences against the security of the state committed since the events of 17 and 18 September 2000, and those linked to the armed crisis of 19 September 2002. Serious human rights abuses and economic crimes do not fall under the scope of the amnesty. This law was an element of the Linas Marcoussis agreement, and its acceptance is widely seen as a key part of the peace process.

### Social Issues

Although an estimated 12% of the population is thought to have HIV-AIDS, this issue does not have a high profile.

Literacy levels are static and the birth rate remains high. Although unemployment is falling, the number of people living below the poverty line is increasing. They tend to be concentrated in urban slums. Only 50% of girls attend primary school. Crime, including armed robbery, is increasing in Abidjan.

One of the most important issues in Côte d'Ivoire is land reform. A law passed in December 1998 provided that only Ivorian citizens and the State were able to have title to land. Land tenure is addressed in the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement.

Information extracted from: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Country Profile Last updated - 31 March 2005 <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xc/elerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1007029394365&a=KCountryProfile&aid=1019672556734> Date accessed 21 June 2005

### 3. INDEX TO KEY SOURCE DOCUMENTS

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<b>Map</b>	[15] Reliefweb Map Centre _ Cote d'Ivoire
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<b>3. Human Rights - specific</b>	
(In addition to general reports above, information on the following issues is provided in the documents listed below)	
<b>Ethnic Groups</b>	[1] Foreign & Commonwealth Office - Country Profile Last updated 31 March 2005
	[2] US Department of State:
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