



Q10001. Cote d'Ivoire – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 26 May 2009.

Treatment of those perceived to be foreigners

The *US Department of State 2008 Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Cote d'Ivoire*, under the heading 'National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities', states:

"The country's population was ethnically diverse, and ethnic groups sometimes practiced societal discrimination against others on the basis of ethnicity. At least one-quarter of the population was foreign. Outdated or inadequate land ownership laws resulted in conflicts with ethnic and xenophobic overtones. There were reported clashes, usually over land tenure, between the native Guere populations and other groups.

Police routinely abused and harassed noncitizen Africans residing in the country. Harassment by officials reflected the common belief that foreigners were responsible for high crime rates and instances of identity card fraud. Harassment of northerners, which increased markedly after the 2002 rebellion, continued to decline from the previous year." (US Department of State (25 February 2009) - *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - Cote d'Ivoire*)

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre states:

"Xenophobia and anti foreigner sentiments are a root cause of displacement (2004)

- The concept of foreigner stands in negative relief against "ivoirité" and leads to its consideration as the root cause of displacement and exclusion
- Thousands of people have been persecuted, harassed, threatened and evicted from their lands during the past few years because they, or their parents were foreign-born
- In November 1999, the anti-foreigner sentiment resulted in the displacement of 15,000 Burkinabes who were chased from their homes in the southwestern town of Tabou
- The conflation of ethnicity, culture and religion has proved particularly dangerous and several massacres have underscored the pattern of ethnic persecution as Muslims and other northerners claimed at the time that security forces in Abidjan had rounded them up and tortured them" (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (18 May 2009) - *Côte d'Ivoire: Needs of IDPs must not be forgotten as peace process edges forward*)

Refugees International state:

"It has been estimated that nearly twenty percent of Côte d'Ivoire's 18 million inhabitants have documentation problems, and nationality and identity were at the root of the war that ravaged Côte d'Ivoire in 2002. In previous decades, the country welcomed millions of West African immigrants, particularly laborers from Burkina Faso, Mali, and Ghana who came to work on cocoa, coffee, and cotton plantations. But when commodity prices declined, the welcome wore thin. Birth on Ivorian soil does not automatically translate to citizenship - a right reserved in most cases for those who can prove at least one parent was also born in the country. Blurring the issue further, many native Ivorians have family ties that stretch across borders drawn by European colonizers in the nineteenth century." (Refugees International (11 March 2009) - *Nationality Rights for All: A Progress Report and Global Survey on Statelessness*)

IRIN reports:

"Outside one courtroom in Bouake, Bazouma Doumbia, a gray-bearded man with a warm, toothless grin, accompanied his niece, an elderly woman who had never travelled out of town and did not know her age.

Doumbia, who was born in Bouake of Ivorian parents, took out a crumpled, yellow ID card that was rendered obsolete in the late 1990s by a new, green nationality document. "The day I obtained my nationality card, I killed a chicken to thank my ancestors," he said.

"That was in 1978. Since then, I've had to renew it twice. The first time, civil servants took a year to investigate my background. The second time, they refused to renew it, saying I was a foreigner. You see, this is how the system works, and there is nothing you can do about it," Doumbia said.

"An Ivorian without papers is like a dog without a master," he said. "You can beat him whenever you want." (IRIN (23 August 2006) - *COTE D'IVOIRE: National unity hinges on individual identity*)

Section IV of a May 2006 *Human Rights Watch* report, under the heading 'Intimidation, Harassment and Extortion of Civilians in both South and North', states:

"Foreigners, or those from an ethnic group originating in the north, are also targeted during routine identification checks of pedestrians' documents, which may occur at any time. Victims interviewed by Human Rights Watch described two such incidents during which they were ordered into gendarme vehicles, driven to isolated locations and then robbed. An incident on February 3, 2006, involved the robbery of money from some fifteen men.⁵⁸ In another incident, a forty-eight-year-old Malian businessman described being robbed in November 2005 by a group of eight gendarmes:

On that day I had gone to buy medicine for a friend. As I was walking I was stopped and asked for my identification papers by a group of gendarmes. All my documents were in order but it didn't matter. The gendarme ordered me into the truck. When I got inside I saw there were two others like me—I later learned one was from Ghana and the other from Nigeria. The gendarmes told

us to keep our heads down then started driving around. Every time we tried to raise our heads they beat us on our heads and backs. After driving around for several minutes they reached their hands in the pockets of the Nigerian, stole his money, then stopped the vehicle and ordered him to get down.

They started driving again and several minutes later did the same thing to the man from Ghana. Several minutes later they did the same to me. One gendarme reached in and grabbed the 35,000 CFAs [about U.S.\$67] I had in my pocket. The one who stole my money then gave it to his comrade who put it into a black bag. I guess that's where they kept all their day's loot. After they did this I said, "Look...you asked me for my ID, I gave it to you. Now you've taken all my money. What do you really want?" Then one of them said, "Shut up! Do you want to end up dead with a bullet in your head?" Then he told me to go and pushed me off the vehicle." (Human Rights Watch (25 May 2006) - "Because they have the guns . . . I'm left with nothing." *The Price of Continuing Impunity in Côte d'Ivoire*)

A November 2008 *Africa News* report states:

"Voter registration, also after a long delay, began earlier this year but the exercise has been marred by violent attacks at registration sites. A sound voter identification and registration process is seen as indispensable to stability. The 2002 rebellion, which had widespread support at the time in the north, stemmed largely from northerners' complaint that they have been treated as foreigners and excluded from the political process." (Africa News (11 November 2008) - *Côte d'Ivoire; November Election Officially Canceled*)

Another *Africa News* report from January 2008 states:

"Still, the briefing paper says, issues of identity and citizenship are at the core of the Ivorian crisis. In the 1995 and 2000 elections a new citizenship law resulted in many northerners claiming disenfranchisement and discrimination. Alassane Ouattara, a northerner, was disqualified from running in both presidential elections, when doubts about his citizenship arose.

Indeed, a central grievance raised by the rebels is the high number of Ivorians (as many as three million) who do not have identity cards; as a result many suffer from discrimination and disenfranchisement, as they are perceived to be foreigners." (Africa News (14 January 2008) - *Côte d'Ivoire; Will The Peace Deal Hold?*)

In a section titled 'Foreign Nationals', the *BBC World Service* states:

"The number of foreign nationals who live in Ivory Coast is largely unknown. Estimates vary from 25% to 50% of the country's population of 16 million.

Concentrated primarily in the north, most of the immigrants originate from the bordering countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea, as well as nearby Senegal. Seventy percent of the immigrants are Muslim, while native Ivorians are generally Christian.

Despite their large numbers, immigrants and their descendants are increasingly viewed as inferior non-citizens. They are deprived of a fundamental human right: the right to a nationality." (BBC World Service (Undated) - *Case Study: The Issue of Nationality in Ivory Coast*)

Also in the same report:

"Citizenship in the Ivory Coast is now circumscribed to those who can prove they hail from an Ivorian village. Some immigrants and children of immigrants have been denied passports, have been stripped of their identity cards and have been subjected to arbitrary detention and beatings.

Following Laurent Gbagbo's victory in the 2000 presidential election, Human Rights Watch reported that government security forces targeted civilians solely on the basis of their religion, ethnicity or national origin.

Nearly all of the victims hailed from the Muslim north of the country, or were immigrants or the descendants of immigrants.

According to Human Rights Watch, in October 2000, security forces massacred fifty-seven young men and buried their bodies in a mass grave just outside of Abidjan.

In January of 2001, the president of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade, controversially declared, "These days in the Ivory Coast, citizens of Burkina Faso are treated worse than black people in Europe." (Ibid)

References

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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