



Covering events from January - December 2000

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

Head of state: Laurent Gbagbo (replaced General Robert Gueï in October)

Head of government: Affi N'Guessan

Capital: Yamoussoukro

Population: 14.7 million

Official language: French

Death penalty: abolitionist in practice



During 2000 the security forces committed some of the most serious human rights violations to take place in Côte d'Ivoire in three decades. Killings and torture were carried out with total impunity. At least 57 opposition supporters, whose bodies were found in a mass grave in Youpougon in October, were reported to be victims of extrajudicial execution. An inquiry was set up to investigate the massacre but no information about its nature or progress was available by the end of the year, and no arrests or investigation were known to have been initiated.

Background

After the government of President Henri Konan Bédié was overthrown by a military coup on 24 December 1999, General Robert Gueï headed a transitional government which included representatives of the main political parties. In July the military government introduced a new Constitution which was approved by a public referendum. It stipulated that presidential candidates must be born of Ivorian parents and have never held another nationality. This provision focused public debate on the nationality of Alassane Ouattara, leader of the opposition party, the *Rassemblement des Républicains* (RDR), Republican Assembly. The Supreme Court ruled that he was ineligible to run in the October presidential elections and the December legislative elections on grounds relating to his nationality.

The presidential election was won by Laurent Gbagbo of the *Front populaire Ivoirien* (FPI), Ivorian Popular Front. General Gueï, who was also a candidate in the elections, tried forcibly to reject the results. However, after two days of mass demonstrations in Abidjan, the economic capital, in which several people were killed, he handed over power. In December protesters clashed with the security

forces over the exclusion of Alassane Ouattara's candidacy in the legislative elections. President Gbagbo declared a state of emergency. The elections went ahead despite a boycott by RDR supporters and widespread calls for a postponement, and were won by the FPI. Voting did not take place in many northern constituencies because of the boycott and elections there had not been held by the end of the year.

Parallel military units

During the first half of the year military personnel, including unofficial gangs of soldiers known as the *Camora* or the Red Brigades, committed a wide range of human rights violations. They killed suspected offenders, sometimes in public, and arrested, ill-treated and threatened others, including critics of the government. Sometimes abuses took place in public or at the *Primature*, the Head of State's offices.

- Several times in the first three months of the year officers raided Douakro, the birthplace of former President Konan Bédié, assaulted his relatives and seized money and valuables that the new government considered had been obtained fraudulently.
- In May Thomas N'Dri, a lawyer, was forcibly taken by soldiers from his office and detained for several hours at a military camp in Akouedo, near Abidjan, apparently in an attempt to extort money from him.
- Also in May soldiers detained and beat several journalists from *La Référence* newspaper.

Excessive use of force and extrajudicial executions

The security forces reportedly killed protesters and extrajudicially executed political opponents.

- In Abidjan, on 24 October, General Gueï's presidential guard fired on hundreds of peaceful demonstrators who were calling on the military government to respect the results of the presidential election two days previously. The security forces also fired at demonstrators who had fled into a lagoon at Carena, in Abidjan. The bodies of more than 20 men and women were subsequently retrieved from the lagoon, some of them with bullet wounds.
- On 25 and 26 October dozens of suspected sympathizers of the RDR were arrested, some at their homes, by the gendarmerie. Subsequently, 57 bodies were found in a mass grave in Youpougon, in north Abidjan. Two survivors reported that the detainees had been taken to a gendarmerie commando camp at Abobo, in north Abidjan, where most of them were killed. The few surviving detainees were forced to load the bodies onto a lorry to be taken to an area of wasteland at Youpougon. Before they were buried, the security forces reportedly fired further shots to kill any who were still alive. When the mass grave was discovered shortly afterwards, the new civilian government announced that an inquiry would investigate the killings. However, by the end of the year no information had been made available about the nature or progress of the inquiry, and no arrests or investigation of alleged perpetrators had been carried out despite compelling evidence.

Torture/ill-treatment

Torture and ill-treatment of detainees, resulting in at least three deaths, was also reported.

- In September, three armed forces officers, including Staff Sergeant Souleymane Diomandé, reportedly died as a result of torture. They were among about 30 officers detained at the Akouedo military camp in Abidjan who were alleged to have attacked General Gueï's residence on 18 September. Members of General Gueï's presidential guard reportedly tied them down onto barbed wire and trampled on them in the presence of senior military justice officials. An internal inquiry was opened into the deaths but no information about its progress was made public by the end of 2000.
- In December scores of detainees reported being beaten, burned or raped. On 4 and 5 December hundreds of people were arrested after they protested at the blocking of Alassane Ouattara's candidacy in the legislative elections. AI considered some of those arrested to be prisoners of conscience, arrested solely because of their suspected support for the RDR or their ethnic origin, since the RDR receives much of its support from Muslim northerners. In December an AI delegation visited detainees held at the Police Academy in Abidjan. Most bore visible traces of injuries and burns, and many said they had been thrown on a fire or beaten with belts and clubs. Some women detainees said that, after their arrest, police had handed them over to RDR opponents who had raped them. Many people had witnessed these rapes. After AI published its concerns, President Gbagbo ordered an inquiry which concluded that the rapes had occurred. The President said that the perpetrators would be punished.

AI country report and visits

Report

- Côte d'Ivoire: Some military personnel believe they have impunity above the law (AI Index: [AFR31/003/2000](#))

Visits

In May AI sent a delegation to Côte d'Ivoire, led by its Secretary General, Pierre Sané, which met General Gueï and carried out research. A further research visit was carried out in November.
