



Côte d'Ivoire

25 March 2011

Hundreds of lives lost in Ivory Coast amidst slow international response

International and African organizations call for urgent action in face of deteriorating situation

Paris, 25 March 2011 - Greater measures to protect civilians and meet fundamental humanitarian needs in Ivory Coast are urgently needed, a coalition of 32 international and African civil society organizations including Human Rights Watch, the International Federation for Human Rights, and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa have warned today.

Increased fighting and insecurity have taken the total number of displaced towards the half million mark with new displacements of people in the capital, Abidjan, and in the Western part of the country. UNHCR has documented nearly 500,000 people displaced in Abidjan and western Côte d'Ivoire [1], with more than 100,000 refugees in Liberia - of which more than a half have arrived since late February [2]. Hundreds of thousands of people are in urgent need of food and non-food aid, including medicine. The coalition warns that the current provision of funding for humanitarian aid is already insufficient.

"The humanitarian situation caused by the conflict in Ivory Coast has reached a critical level. Aid distributions have been postponed as a result of new fighting around Abidjan and the plight of IDPs in Ivory Coast and refugees into Liberia and other neighboring countries is of grave concern. It is of critical importance that the international donor community steps up funding to meaningfully address the deepening humanitarian crisis in the Ivory Coast and Liberia", declared Elisabeth Rasmusson, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

The conflict has already resulted in the reported killing of more than 460 civilians [3] in addition to dozens of reported rapes (many politically motivated) as well as illegal detention and enforced disappearance by Gbagbo's security forces. Heavy arms and explosive weapons have been used in populated areas with no discrimination between civilians and armed actors. According to recent field research conducted by members of the coalition, Ivoirians and immigrants from neighboring West African countries are being targeted by pro-Gbagbo forces, beaten to death or doused with gas and burnt alive. Reports also indicate that pro-Ouattara fighters have also committed extrajudicial executions against real or perceived pro-Gbagbo supporters in territory under their control.

The coalition calls for those responsible for serious human rights violations to be held accountable for their crimes. On March 25, the UN Human Rights Council will decide whether to establish a Commission of inquiry to investigate grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law during the post-election period. Such an inquiry could help prevent impunity of perpetrators and deter further atrocities, particularly if it worked to identify those most responsible for these abuses and make clear recommendations aimed at holding them responsible.

In January, the UN Security Council authorized the deployment of 2000 additional troops. They have still not been deployed, as the situation continues to worsen significantly for civilians in Abidjan and the far west of the country. The coalition is calling for the UN Security Council and its member states to ensure that the peace-keeping mission in Ivory Coast (UNOCI) is swiftly equipped and augmented to provide more effective protection to civilians on the ground.

"The situation in Ivory Coast is deteriorating on a daily basis. As the international community grapples with events in the Middle East and North Africa, we fear that the violence in Ivory Coast may spiral out of control. The UN Security Council has promised 2000 peacekeepers but these are nowhere to be seen. The international community must show that their concern and will to act extends to the plight of civilians in Ivory Coast. The failure to act could cost 1000s of lives", warned Corinne Dufka, West Africa senior researcher at Human Rights Watch.

The coalition urges the international community to take the necessary steps to:

" Increase humanitarian aid through quick release of additional funds, with a view to provide assistance to vulnerable people in Ivory Coast as well as to refugees in neighboring countries.

" Secure increased capacity on the ground to enable UNOCI to efficiently enforce its mandate to protect civilians through quickly deploying the 2000 reinforcements agreed upon by the UN Security Council 3 months ago, and make plans for additional deployment of well-trained and equipped troops as well as equipment (such as helicopters) should the situation deteriorate further.

" Increase UN and French peacekeepers' patrols in volatile neighborhoods and use legitimate force, when necessary, to protect civilians under imminent danger, as outlined in their mandates.

" Agree on contingency plans for other troops to support UNOCI in protecting civilians should further support be needed.

" Establish a UN commission of inquiry referring to the UN Security Council, to investigate post-election human rights and humanitarian law violations, with a broad enough mandate to cover crimes committed by all parties of the conflict and make recommendations for accountability, including by the International Criminal Court.

" Consider expanding the list of those subject to UNSC sanctions to include individuals responsible for incitement to violence, notably the director of Radio Television Ivoirienne (RTI).

"The situation in Ivory Coast is falling into civil war. The international community must act faster and stronger in order to ensure international humanitarian law and human rights are fully respected, and to prevent massive human rights violations", asserted Souhayr Belhassen, President of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH).

Signatory organizations

- Action pour les droits humains et l'amitié - Senegal
- Association africaine de défense des Droits de l'Homme (ASADHO) - Democratic Republic of Congo
- Association mauritanienne des droits de l'Homme (AMDH) - Mauritania
- Coalition de la société civile pour la paix et le développement démocratique en Côte d'Ivoire (COSOPCI) - Ivory

Coast

- Comité des journalistes congolais contre la peine de mort (CJCPM) - Democratic Republic of Congo
- Coordination des organisations de la société civile pour la défense de l'environnement et le développement du bassin du fleuve Sénégal (CODESEN)
- The Botswana Centre for Human Rights (DITSHWANELO) - Botswana
- Global center for the responsibility to protect (GCR2P)
- Groupe Lotus (GL) - Democratic Republic of Congo
- Human Rights Watch
- Interchurch organization for development cooperation (ICCO)
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- Journalistes pour la promotion & la défense des droits de l'homme (JPDH) - Democratic Republic of Congo
- Liga Guineense dos direitos humanos (LGDH) - Guinea Bissau
- Ligue des électeurs (LE) - Democratic Republic of Congo
- Ligue ivoirienne des droits de l'Homme (LIDHO) - Ivory Coast
- Ligue sénégalaise des droits de l'Homme (LSDH) - Senegal
- Ligue tchadienne des droits de l'Homme (LTDH) - Chad
- Ligue togolaise des droits de l'Homme (LTDH) - Togo
- Maison des droits de l'Homme du Cameroun (MDHC) - Cameroon
- Mouvement ivoirien des droits humains (MIDH) - Ivory Coast
- Mouvement burkinabé des droits de l'Homme et des peuples (MBDHP) - Burkina faso
- Norwegian refugee council (NRC)
- Observatoire congolais des droits de l'Homme (OCDH) - Democratic Republic of Congo
- Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA)
- Organisation guinéenne de défense des droits de l'Homme et du citoyen (OGDH) - Guinea
- Peace direct
- Rencontre africaine pour la défense des droits de l'Homme (RADDHO) - Senegal
- Union interafricaine des droits de l'Homme (UIDH)
- West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOFF/FOSCAO)
- West African Civil Society Institute (WACSI)
- West African Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons Network - Senegal
- Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (Zimrights) - Zimbabwe

[1] OCHA website, 24 March 2011, <http://ochaonline.un.org/UrgencesEm...>

[2] AFP, « Côte d'Ivoire: les pro-Ouattara avancent à l'ouest, le camp Gbagbo recrute », 21 March 2011, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/af...>

[3] OCHA website, 24 March 2011, <http://ochaonline.un.org/UrgencesEm...>

<http://www.fidh.org/Hundreds-of-lives-lost-in-Ivory-Coast-amidst-slow>