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# RI BULLETIN

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## **Côte d'Ivoire: 10,000 Displaced by Duékoué Massacre Require Assistance**

Following a massacre in and around the Central Western Ivorian town of Duékoué on June 1, 2005, approximately 7,500 Ivoirians from the Gueré tribe have sought refuge at the nearby Catholic Mission and an additional 2,500 have sought refuge elsewhere. Despite the severely overcrowded conditions, Mission personnel and international agencies have begun providing emergency services, including vaccinating against measles, reuniting lost children with their families, digging latrines, and setting up large tents to provide temporary shelter from the elements. Needs are outstripping these actions, however, and much work remains to be done by local authorities and international agencies to prevent epidemics and malnutrition and to ensure the protection and security of those who have been displaced.

Inter-ethnic violence has intensified in recent months between the Gueré, whose ancestors originally possessed the land, and several tribes from the arid north of Cote d'Ivoire and neighboring countries of Mali and Burkina Faso, who settled the fertile forest lands of the west during the past few decades at the invitation of then President Houphouet-Boigny to develop coffee plantations and trade. The recent tension reflects the dynamics of the civil war which divided the country in two in 2002. Currently a ceasefire agreement is in place, encompassing a 40 kilometer wide corridor across the country, known as the Zone of Confidence, which is monitored by the UN force, UNOCI, and French troops. Duékoué is located just a few kilometers south of the Zone of Confidence.

The southern part of the country is governed by President Gbagbo in Abidjan, and the northern part is controlled by the Force Nouvelle. A peace agreement brokered in Pretoria by South African President Mbeki includes a disarmament process slated to start this month and elections, currently scheduled for October 2005, meant to reunify the country.

The first displaced Gueré families from surrounding villages started to arrive at the Catholic Mission in Duékoué at the end of April. In the month leading up to the massacre on June 1, thousands of people had already sought safety within the Mission's walls, with around 400 remaining by the end of May. According to a spokesman from the UN battalion, "In the two weeks leading up to the events of June 1<sup>st</sup> there were several inter-ethnic killings. For example on May 26<sup>th</sup>, four members of a northern tribe were killed by Gueré milita. On the night of May 27, four Gueré youths between the age of 12 and 17 were found dead with machete wounds. On May 31<sup>st</sup>, a Burkinabé [foreigner] was apprehended by the Gueré and handed over to the Ivorian army (FANCI). In addition we were receiving rumors of a coming attack from many different sources."

Despite these forewarnings, no one was prepared for the surprise attack at about 2:30 am on June 1<sup>st</sup> on Guitrozon and Petit Duékoué, two outlying areas of the town of Duékoué. According to a group of men from Guitrozon, who returned to protect their homes, “Between 200 and 300 men arrived early in the morning from a dirt road leading south from Man [a town on the other side of the Zone of Confidence]. The attackers went house by house initially with machetes killing all of the inhabitants, including women and children, and burning homes. Anyone who stayed in their house was killed. Some of us were awake attending a funeral, so we screamed to warn everyone else and ran to the FANCI checkpoint, 50 meters from the entrance to the community on the main road. Instead of providing a defense, the army fled. So we ran on toward the UN battalion to get help. The UN did mount a patrol, but the assailants were not found.” 48 inhabitants were killed, including an estimated 15 women and babies.

The events triggered an evacuation of Guitrozon, Petit Duékoué, and other neighborhoods of Duékoué to the Catholic Mission. Based on the Mission’s food distribution list, a little over 7,500 people were registered as displaced as of June 8. An additional 1,500 people were thought to be living in their homes during the day, but coming to sleep at the mission at night because of fears of ongoing attacks.

Although the Mission is within the city limits, all of the displaced interviewed by Refugees International were afraid to return to their homes, despite the desperate and overcrowded conditions in the Mission compound. They did not feel the government or the UN could currently guarantee their safety. One woman told RI that her family fled from the village of Yrozon 16 km away on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May. “We came on foot with the six children. If the children wanted to cry we put our hands over their mouths to stifle the sound. We went back a few days later with the UN peacekeepers to see the damage. The attackers took the doors off our house and looted our things. We’ve been back and forth to gather up what was left of our belongings, but we were robbed on the road again. When we left some of our neighbors stayed, but now all of them have arrived here. No one is left in our village. It is not a pleasure to stay here, but if there is no security in our village we cannot leave.”

On June 7<sup>th</sup> the Catholic Mission started a food distribution to all of the 7,500 people their volunteers had been able to register. Without the benefit of computers or technical expertise from international agencies, the volunteers had managed to implement their own system. “We stayed up all night making this list by hand. We only have one copy. It’s arranged by village, community, family head and numbers of persons per family. We have rice donated by the Prime Minister to Duékoué, which was given to us by the Mayor. We’re not able to assess the amount of rice based on the number of kilocalories people need per day, and we don’t have oil or beans to provide a nutritional balance. So we’re providing what we have at 150 grams of rice per person per day for a week. We asked the UN World Food Program if they could provide cooking oil, but they’re only able to provide complete rations, and there’s no system in place yet for that to happen.”

Although those at the Catholic Mission are still afraid to go home because of lack of security, the RI team did meet a few families back in the community of Guitrozon who had decided to return home after a few days in the Mission compound. One elderly couple, who had their grandson with them, told RI, “We spent four days at the mission but the conditions were overcrowded. There were too many sick people. For us, we’re old. It’s better to be here. If they kill you, it’s God that called you.” A group of men in Guitrozon, who returned to patrol the village unarmed, had been assured that the government had ordered a change of the FANCI troops protecting the town. The new troops had arrived that day. “We are asking that they protect the road at the North of the community that had been used by the attackers.”

One week after the massacre, the UN sent a special high level delegation to Duékoué and Guitrozon. In his press briefing of June 8, the Special Representative of the Secretary General announced plans

to increase the UN battalion in Duékoué, integrate French forces with the UN patrols, and increase patrols in Duékoué. A complete investigation into the massacre and events of June 1 has been ordered, and support for this from the UN human rights advisors will be provided to the local authorities. These are welcome measures to addressing the problem of security in Duékoué.

Through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UN has begun to provide a forum for local authorities, such as the mayor's office, UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and local and international humanitarian NGOs to organize much needed assistance to the estimated 10,000 persons displaced by the recent violence. To date, however, no single operational agency has been given the responsibility to ensure that the health, water and sanitation, nutrition, and protection needs of the displaced are met. No international agency has been given responsibility for managing humanitarian assistance to the displaced at the Catholic mission. This step is essential to ensure that basic needs are met quickly.

**Therefore, Refugees International recommends that:**

- The UN Humanitarian Coordinator assign an operational UN agency the responsibility for ensuring that the needs of the displaced in Duékoué are met in keeping with Sphere Standards and the Guiding Principles for the Internally Displaced.
- OCHA, the relevant UN agencies, and international humanitarian NGOs develop a contingency plan for responding to displacement in the Duékoué area.
- The UN peacekeeping mission, UNOCI, work to develop and implement a comprehensive security plan for the Duékoué, Giuglo, Man and Danané regions in western Cote d'Ivoire.
- OCHA, UN agencies, and the local government in Duékoué find a suitable alternative site for a temporary IDP camp. The Catholic Mission is not large enough and does not have the facilities for large numbers of displaced persons.
- UNOCI, FANCI and local government officials carry out thorough investigations of all recent ethnic violence and ensure that those apprehended are brought to justice.
- National and local government institutions, with the support of UN agencies and international and local non-governmental organizations, develop a forum for ethnic groups in the region to increase understanding and identify peaceful mechanisms for the settlement of disputes.
- UNOCI and FANCI ensure that local militias are disarmed, demobilized, and reintegrated in their communities as quickly as possible.

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*Advocates Sally Chin and Mamie Mutchler are in Côte d'Ivoire.*