

Amnesty International Report 2004: Côte d'Ivoire

Covering events from January - December 2003

A National Reconciliation Government was established in April under the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement signed by all sides to the year-long internal conflict, but the political situation remained volatile throughout the year. In practice the country remained divided in two by a security zone controlled by French soldiers and troops of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Human rights abuses continued to be perpetrated by all parties to the conflict, resulting in tens of thousands of civilians fleeing Côte d'Ivoire or being internally displaced within the country. Several people in the capital, Abidjan, were abducted by armed individuals, some of them members of the security forces operating during the hours of curfew. In the west, along the border with Liberia, armed opposition groups raided towns and villages, killing civilians, raping women and forcibly recruiting people. All parties to the conflict forcibly recruited civilians, in particular Liberian refugees and including children under the age of 18. Government security forces and pro-government militias targeted Ivorian and foreign journalists against a background of xenophobia and "hate speech".

Background

After the uprising in September 2002 by armed groups resulted in the division of the country, the international community made several attempts at mediation to reach a peaceful solution to the crisis. In January, all parties to the conflict signed the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement in France. The Agreement, endorsed by the UN, the European Union and the African Union, provided for the constitution of a government of national reconciliation and the regrouping, disarming and demobilizing of the forces on the ground. The first steps towards its implementation were the nomination of a Prime Minister agreed by all parties, Seydou Diarra, and the formation in April of a National Reconciliation Government, which included representatives of the armed opposition groups, renamed *Forces nouvelles*, New Forces.

Although the situation along the Liberian border remained tense, with continuing clashes between elements of the armed opposition groups and French and ECOWAS troops, the war was officially declared over in July. In September, however, government ministers representing the *Forces nouvelles* withdrew from the government after disagreement with President Gbagbo over the appointment of the Security and Defence Ministers. Tensions increased and in November, members of the armed forces and progovernment militias who claimed loyalty to President Gbagbo asked for the departure of French troops, a demand the President refused. In December the ministers representing the *Forces nouvelles* announced their return to government. President Gbagbo announced an imminent disarmament operation and his willingness to go to Bouaké in central Côte d'Ivoire, the second largest city and the *Forces nouvelles* stronghold, to announce the official end of the war. In December the government approved laws on the eligibility of presidential candidates and on rural land ownership, and President Gbagbo declared that these laws would be put to a referendum.

Extrajudicial executions and 'disappearances'

Members of the security forces, including plainclothes officers, were responsible for several extrajudicial executions and "disappearances", notably in Abidjan. Pro-government militias, their actions supported or condoned by the security forces, carried out other abuses such as intimidating and beating opponents, foreign nationals and journalists. Many of these acts occurred during curfews, when only members of the security forces were allowed to move around the city. Many of the victims were foreigners or Ivorians bearing Muslim names and suspected of supporting the armed uprising. No investigations were carried out into these abuses and the perpetrators enjoyed complete impunity.

* On 19 February, Lamine Sangaré, an imam, was arrested by two gendarmes, paramilitary police officers, in Abobo, a neighbourhood of Abidjan. He refused to go with the gendarmes, who shot him dead.

* At the beginning of March, armed men in uniform, claiming to be part of the security forces, in the early hours arrested Cissé Korotomou and Diakité Mamadou, who were sleeping in their house in a neighbourhood of Abidjan. They accused them of harbouring "rebels", beat Diakité Mamadou with the butt of a gun and took both men to an unknown destination. Their families had no further news of them.

Abuses by armed opposition groups

Armed opposition groups committed human rights abuses, notably in the west where they terrorized the population, raping women and forcibly recruiting civilians, including children under the age of 18.

* On 24 January, in Soukourougban in central Côte d'Ivoire, armed members of the *Mouvement patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire* (MPCI), Patriotic Movement of Ivory Coast, burst into a funeral ceremony and forced the 26 people there to lie on the ground. They shot Daubge Adama as he arrived for the funeral, forced three people to bury his body, then killed them too.

* Between 9 and 11 February, members of the two armed opposition groups that were formed in the west in November 2002 – the *Mouvement populaire ivoirien du grand ouest* (MPIGO), Western Côte d'Ivoire Popular Movement, and the *Mouvement pour la justice et la paix* (MJP), Justice and Peace Movement – attacked Gohouo-Zagnan, a village near Bangolo. They shot dead about 20 civilians and abducted several women, including Glao Célestine and Tahou Bah Dumas. By the end of the year their whereabouts and fate remained unknown.

Refugees and the internally displaced

From the beginning of the crisis in September 2002, hundreds of thousands of civilians – foreign and Ivorian nationals – were forced to seek safety in neighbouring countries or within Côte d'Ivoire. Liberian refugees who had lived in Côte d'Ivoire since armed conflict broke out in Liberia in 1989 were targeted by both government and opposition forces in Côte d'Ivoire. In April, thousands who had fled back to Liberia were forced to return to Côte d'Ivoire after violent clashes in eastern Liberia between Liberian government and opposition forces. Many

refugees were victims of torture, extrajudicial executions and forcible recruitment by Ivorian government and opposition forces.

* During a visit to Côte d'Ivoire in March, AI delegates heard testimony of forced recruitment, including of children aged under 18, organized by members of the security forces in the refugee camp at Nicla, near the village of Guiglo in the west, and in Abidjan.

Journalists targeted

Several Ivorian and foreign journalists were harassed and attacked by the security forces and progovernment militias, who accused them of being partial. In most cases, those responsible were not held to account for acts of intimidation and assault.

* In January, *Reuters* correspondent Anne Boher was arrested in the town of San Pedro and detained overnight by the security forces. She was released without charge the next day.

* In March a French television crew was verbally abused and physically assaulted by uniformed and plainclothes security officers while covering a press conference held by President Gbagbo in the Presidency compound.

* On 21 October, Jean Hélène, a *Radio France Internationale* correspondent, was shot dead by a police officer while awaiting the release of opposition party activists outside a police station in central Abidjan. The officer was arrested and an inquiry opened. At the end of the year the trial was postponed.

Impunity

Despite commitments by all parties to the conflict to accept an international inquiry into human rights abuses since the September 2002 uprising, impunity remained the rule and fuelled further human rights abuses. The Linas-Marcoussis Agreement stated that those responsible for human rights violations "must be brought to justice before an international criminal jurisdiction". In February the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reminded parties to the conflict that grave human rights violations were punishable as international crimes. In August parliament passed an amnesty law that covered acts of rebellion against the government but that did not apply to serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law. Despite this provision, no inquiry was opened into any of the serious and numerous allegations of abuses committed by all the parties to the conflict.

UN Security Council

The UN Security Council was involved throughout the year in the resolution of the crisis. In February it endorsed both the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement and the peace-keeping operation launched by ECOWAS and France, and authorized recourse to force by the peacekeeping troops for a duration of six months. In May it established a political mission to facilitate implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI). Following a request by ECOWAS, in November the UN Security Council discussed deploying a UN peace-keeping mission and decided to extend the MINUCI mandate for three months.

AI country visits

In March AI delegates visited Côte d'Ivoire, met President Gbagbo and government officials, and carried out research.