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State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2013 - Côte d'Ivoire

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Despite 2011's return to constitutional order, Côte d'Ivoire remained unstable in the face of a wave of attacks generally attributed to supporters of former President Laurent Gbagbo. While in power, and in particular during the 2010 electoral campaign, Gbagbo's use of xenophobic language and manipulation of ethnicity and citizenship exacerbated tensions between the south and the largely Muslim north.

Following his refusal to concede defeat at the polls, his supporters were accused of widespread human rights violations against those of his opponent Alassane Ouattara. By the time of Gbagbo's departure in 2011, serious violations based on perceived ethnicity or political affiliation had been attributed to both sides.

In 2012 security was unstable, with internal as well as cross-border attacks from Liberia and Ghana. In June, seven UN peacekeepers, patrolling in response to reports of an attack on civilians the night before, were killed, reportedly by pro-Gbagbo militias, in an ambush outside of the town of Tai.

In July soldiers, pro-Ouattara militias and ethnic Malinké civilians attacked the Nahibly camp for internally displaced people, leaving at least 11 dead and several score injured and forcing thousands more to flee. Many of the camp's inhabitants were ethnic Guérés and had supported Gbagbo; it was said to have been attacked in retaliation for deaths during an armed robbery in nearby Duékoué that the attackers believed had been carried out by camp residents.

In October staff of the International Federation for Human Rights and two of its member organizations in Côte d'Ivoire reported being present at the discovery of a mass grave that they believed to be of a further six victims of the July attack on the camp.

From August, police and security forces were increasingly targeted by Gbagbo supporters.

In response they cracked down on Gbagbo supporters and those from his ethnic group, reportedly committing violations such as arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment and torture.

At year's end, Gbagbo and his wife Simone faced charges before the International Criminal Court (ICC), and scores of their supporters had been brought before domestic courts on charges of committing abuses against Ouattara loyalists during the conflict. No judicial proceedings had been

instigated against Ouattara supporters, however, despite the fact that the report of the National Commission of Inquiry into the electoral violence referred to cases of serious human rights abuses by both sides. Some observers expressed concern that the ICC's decision to 'sequence' its enquiry into events in Côte d'Ivoire, investigating Gbagbo and his camp first rather than addressing abuses by both sides simultaneously, was being used domestically to justify the pursuit of one-sided justice in the national courts.

Health

The drought in neighbouring Sahel countries increased hardship by raising food prices; ongoing insecurity further disrupted livelihoods. Ouattara had set up nationwide free health care in 2011 to aid recovery from the earlier violence; in March the programme was scaled back to pregnant women, children under age five and malaria patients.

As one of UNAIDS' 22 priority countries, Côte d'Ivoire achieved a moderate decline in new HIV infections among children between 2009 and 2011 (MDG 6). It made some progress in child and maternal mortality, though reportedly not enough to reach the 2015 MDGs.

At its 52nd session, held in Côte d'Ivoire in October, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) reviewed Côte d'Ivoire's periodic country report. In its Concluding Observations, it recognized positive measures such as the establishment of a ministry for combating HIV, but expressed concern at lack of access to basic health services, particularly for women and girls.

The Concluding Observations also expressed concern at the failure to implement a 1998 law banning female genital mutilation (FGM) and sexual harassment. In the first application of that law, in July, nine women in the northern town of Katiola were convicted of carrying out FGM.

According to government and UN statistics, the practice is most prevalent in the north and west of the country, its frequency varying across religious and ethnic groups; it is also practised by immigrants from neighbouring countries with high FGM rates. According to UNICEF, nearly 88 per cent of women are affected in northern Côte d'Ivoire, and 73 per cent are affected in the west.

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