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Events of 2015

Côte d'Ivoire has over 60 ethnic groups, with diverse histories and identities. Past decades have also seen a significant inflow of immigrants from neighbouring countries, many of them Muslims, drawn by the country's relative affluence. Today an estimated 35 per cent of the population are Muslim, based largely in the north of the country, while another 35 to 40 per cent are Christian and mostly reside in the south. The remainder of the population hold traditional beliefs. Ethnicity and religion have become increasingly intertwined in the country's political discourse due to the emergence, beginning in the mid-1990s, of the xenophobic concept of '*Ivrité*' – an ideology that gives precedence to 'native' over perceived 'foreign' citizens. In practice, to its adherents 'foreigners' have come to include not only immigrants but anyone from the predominantly Muslim ethnic Northern Mandé or Senoufo minority groups. This discourse has contributed greatly in recent years to a damaging polarization of the country along geographic, religious and ethnic lines.

October saw the first polls since 2010, when the refusal of then-incumbent president Laurent Gbagbo – a southern proponent of '*Ivrité*' – to recognize northern Muslim Alassane Ouattara's victory led to five months of political violence, at times waged along ethnic and religious lines. Gbagbo was eventually forced out, and January 2016 saw the opening of his trial, with that of his associate Charles Blé Goudé, before the International Criminal Court on charges of crimes against humanity.

The run-up to the October elections saw some clashes between government and opposition supporters, many of whom reportedly felt marginalized by the naming of northerners to many key posts and the failure of judicial prosecutions for crimes committed during the 2010–11 conflict to extend to supporters of the government as well as its opponents. The elections, largely peaceful and declared free and fair by observers, were nevertheless won in the first round by incumbent Ouattara.

In western Côte d'Ivoire, inter-communal tensions over land between 'native' landowners and those they perceive to be migrants or immigrants continued during the year. Up to 300,000 people still remained internally displaced in 2015, following the violence of 2010–11; some of them, mainly Gbagbo supporters of Guéré ethnicity, have found themselves dispossessed upon their return, as their land has been occupied by Ouattara supporters. The UN has worked with local

leaders to support traditional dispute resolution mechanisms. In addition to customary law, there is a statutory law applicable to rural land disputes, but observers have expressed concerns that it is complex and difficult to implement. In July 2015, the government issued a draft land policy meant to simplify application of the law and announced plans for public consultation on this important topic.

UNESCO is supporting Côte d'Ivoire's efforts to inventory its intangible cultural heritage. Elements of the culture of parts of the predominantly Muslim Senoufo minority – one of the groups stigmatized and disenfranchised under '*Ivorité*' –has received particular attention, figuring in both of Côte d'Ivoire's entries on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. One important minority cultural element is the cultural practices and expressions linked to the *balafon*, a musical instrument of Senoufo communities in Côte d'Ivoire along with neighbouring Burkina Faso and Mali. The other is the *Gbofe* performance, using traditional horns, of the Tagbana community, a southerly branch of the Senoufo group.

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