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TRAPPED BETWEEN TWO WARS:
VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS IN WESTERN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

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CÔTE D'IVOIRE

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Violence Against Civilians in Western Côte d'Ivoire

ACRONYMS

BAE	Anti-riot brigade
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FANCI	National Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire
FESCI	Federation of students and schools in Côte d'Ivoire
FLGO	Great West Liberation Front
FPI	Popular Ivorian Front
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MINUCI	United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire
MJP	Movement for Justice and Peace
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MPIGO	Ivorian Popular Movement for the Great West
MPCI	Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire
MSF	Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
PDCI	Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire
RDR	Rally of Republicans
RTI	Ivorian Radio-Television
UDPCI	Union for Democracy and Peace in Côte d'Ivoire
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
ZAR	Refugee Assistance Zone

I. SUMMARY

Since September 19, 2002, Côte d'Ivoire has been gripped by an internal conflict that has paralyzed the economy, split the political leadership, and illuminated the stark polarization of Ivorian society along ethnic, political and religious lines. It is a conflict that has been characterized by relatively little in the way of active hostilities between combatants, but by widespread and egregious abuses against civilians. It is a conflict that while primarily internal, developed international dimensions with the involvement of Liberian forces in the west of the country by both the Ivorian rebel groups and the government of Côte d'Ivoire.

Few of the issues at the heart of the Ivorian war—anti-immigrant feeling in the face of an economic recession, competition for resources, and the manipulation of ethnic loyalties for political gain—are unique to Côte d'Ivoire. However, the manner in which successive ruling Ivorian politicians have addressed these issues has been at best, shortsighted, and at worst, has led to serious and sometimes systematic abuses against civilians. While civilians throughout the country—and the region—have suffered directly and indirectly from the eight-month-old civil war, residents of western Côte d'Ivoire have been the main targets of killings, rape and other acts of violence committed by a variety of perpetrators. These include several massacres by both the government and rebel forces. Liberian style abuses, including looting of civilian property, sexual violence against girls and women, and recruitment of children, have also been frequent, with Liberian recruits from both sides responsible for the abuses.

Government forces and government-recruited Liberian mercenaries have frequently and sometimes systematically executed, detained, and attacked perceived supporters of the rebel forces based on ethnic, national, religious and political affiliation. Civilian militias, tolerated if not encouraged by state security forces, have engaged in widespread targeting of the immigrant community, particularly village-based Burkinabé agricultural workers in the west. Government armed forces and their allies have summarily executed, arbitrarily arrested and detained, and "disappeared" hundreds of civilians in western Côte d'Ivoire, including but not limited to the following incidents and patterns of abuses:

In a cleaning operation conducted by the government's anti-riot squad (Brigade Anti-Emeute, BAE) in Daloa in October 2002, over fifty northern and immigrant civilians were executed by members of the BAE and members of other state security forces.

- In an attack on Monoko Zohi in November 2002 by the government armed forces, at least one hundred civilians, mainly West African immigrants, were killed and buried in mass graves.
- During the government occupation of Man in December 2002, dozens of opposition and suspected rebel supporters were executed in reprisal killings.
- Government forces carried out indiscriminate and targeted attacks on civilians, killing at least fifty civilians in the west through their use of helicopter gunships.
- Liberians from the Ivorian refugee camps and from the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) rebel faction have participated in dozens of killings, rapes, and other acts of violence against civilians in and around Toulepleu, Bangolo and Blolékin. At least sixty civilians were killed in the worst single incident documented in Bangolo in March 2003.
- Civilian militias encouraged by and sometimes working in complicity with government forces have attacked immigrant villages and harassed, assaulted and killed immigrant civilians in and around Duékoué, Daloa and Toulepleu.

For their part, rebel forces from the Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI), the Movement for Justice and Peace (MJP) and the Liberian-dominated Ivorian Popular Movement for the Great West (MPIGO) have also attacked and killed civilians and other non-combatants suspected of supporting the government or ruling political

party. Liberian and Sierra Leonean fighters allied to the MPIGO have also committed numerous abuses against civilians in the west, including killings, rape, and systematic looting of civilian property.

- MPCI forces executed over fifty gendarmes and members of their families in Bouaké in October 2002, and executed dozens of other government officials, government supporters, and members of civilian self-defense committees in other locations in the north and west.

- Members of the Ivorian rebel groups and Liberian recruits allied to the MPIGO group were responsible for the executions of dozens of Ivorian civilians in the west, including at least forty civilians killed in Dah village in March 2003.

- Liberian fighters linked to the government of Liberia and allied to the MPIGO rebel groups systematically looted the property of civilians around Danané, Zouan-Hounien and Toulepleu and committed numerous executions and other serious acts of violence against civilians while carrying out the looting.

Both government and rebel forces in the internal conflict in Côte d'Ivoire have actively engaged in the recruitment and use of child soldiers and frequently violated the rights of refugees and displaced attempting to flee areas of insecurity.

Although serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law have taken place in Abidjan and other areas of the country, this report focuses on the patterns of abuses against civilians by the main actors in the western region: the Ivorian government, the three rebel factions, the Liberian recruits on both sides, and the Ivorian civilian militias who have increasingly engaged in ethnically-motivated violence in support of the government. Most of the civilians in the west were forced to flee their homes and land due to the abuses perpetrated by Liberian fighters working with both the government and the rebel forces. Hundreds of civilians who remained in the region were subjected to violence and deprived of humanitarian assistance for most of the past six months. Once one of the most fertile areas in the country, the western region is now devastated, with serious malnutrition among its children, and the population will require sustained humanitarian and development assistance in order to restore it to its pre-war state.

Since the death of President Felix Houphouët-Boigny in 1993, successive presidents of Côte d'Ivoire have exploited ethnic divisions to oust rivals, used the state apparatus to repress opponents, and incited hatred and fear among populations who had lived in relative peace for years. This has been compounded by a climate of impunity for state security forces and state supported civilian militias. Over the past few years, but particularly over the past eight months, opposition leaders have been targeted, civil society groups have been attacked, and press freedom has been seriously jeopardized. It is crucial that the cycle of impunity in Côte d'Ivoire, which is one of the main causes of the recent conflict, is adequately confronted by both the Ivorian authorities and the international community. It is also vital that the judiciary and other institutions related to the rule of law are strengthened.

There is an urgent need to ensure that abuses by all sides in the Ivorian conflict are fully investigated and that those responsible are brought to justice. There is also an urgent need for community-based reconciliation, which must be led by political leaders from the entire spectrum. In addition, outstanding issues that have contributed to the conflict, such as land disputes, tensions over nationality and inclusion within the political process, must be addressed promptly. Adequate support for peace-building programs, including the civilian component of the United Nations observer mission, MINUCI, will be required to assure a comprehensive, effective, and above all, an objective and equitable response to these complex issues. The international and donor community must be willing to use all means possible to press for accountability and respect for human rights, including the use of sanctions and the conditioning of aid based on respect for human rights.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Government of Côte d'Ivoire:

- Issue clear instructions to all soldiers and other security force members to respect international humanitarian and human rights law. Take immediate steps, including instructions to commanders and disciplinary action, to ensure that attacks by members of the security forces and civilian militias on Ivorian civilians, Burkinabé residents, and Liberian refugees are ended, particularly in and around Daloa, Duékoué, Guiglo and other towns in the west.

- Publicly acknowledge and condemn the unlawful killings and other abuses committed by state security forces both since September 2002 and before against members of the opposition, northerners, foreigners, and others distinguished by their religion or ethnicity. Request an international commission of inquiry to investigate abuses by all sides in the conflict and make recommendations to avoid a repetition of the events that led to conflict and to bring to justice those responsible. The commission of inquiry should also make recommendations for awarding compensation to those West African immigrants who have been victims of abuses and loss of assets and do not wish to return to Côte d'Ivoire. The findings and recommendations should be made public.

- Thoroughly investigate all allegations of violations of international humanitarian law committed by members of security forces and civilian militia and prosecute, in compliance with international standards of due process, all those individuals against whom there is prima facie evidence of such abuses.

- Immediately cease recruitment into irregular forces of Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire.

- Take steps to end recruitment of all Liberian and Ivorian children and ensure that child soldiers recruited by the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) in Côte d'Ivoire are promptly disarmed, demobilized and provided adequate humanitarian assistance and other forms of support for their physical and psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration.

- Desist from using and supporting the youth wing of the Popular Ivorian Front (FPI), the Student Federation of Côte d'Ivoire (FESCI), other youth associations and self-defense committees for security functions legally reserved for the police and paramilitary gendarmes, including checkpoint supervision; investigate and prosecute where appropriate members of any such group against whom there are allegations of the use of violence.

- Support, cooperate with, and create a conducive environment for the proper functioning of the human rights monitoring component of the United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (MINUCI).

- Cooperate with any future international commission of inquiry into abuses, and ensure by security and other measures that mass grave sites and other evidence are preserved for use by national or international investigation.

- Ratify the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and other relevant international instruments.

To the "New Forces" (the MPCI, MJP and MPIGO rebel groups):

- Issue clear instructions to all combatants to respect international humanitarian law in all military operations, particularly as it relates to the protection of civilians and ensure that combatants and commanders receive training on international humanitarian law.

- Immediately refrain from committing abuses against civilians and enemy combatants and publicly acknowledge and condemn such abuses committed.

- End the recruitment of all Liberian and Ivorian children and ensure that child soldiers are promptly disarmed, demobilized and provided adequate humanitarian assistance and other forms of support for their physical and psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration.

- Support, cooperate with, and create a conducive environment for the proper functioning of the human rights monitoring component of MINUCI.

- Cooperate with any future international or national commission of inquiry into abuses, including through the preservation of mass grave sites and other evidence.

- Issue clear instructions to all combatants that they should allow the free return of all displaced people to areas in their control, in particular members of the Baoulé ethnic group who fled Bouaké and other locations in rebel-controlled territory.

To the Economic Community of West African States and the African Union:

- Request and provide funding for the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to conduct a thorough fact-finding investigation into recent violence, ongoing human rights abuses, and the role of external actors such as Liberia, Burkina Faso and Liberian rebel groups in supporting the parties to the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire. The investigation team should cooperate with any future international commission of inquiry with regard to recommending compensation to those West African immigrants who have been victims of abuses and loss of assets and do not wish to return to Côte d'Ivoire.

- Press for mechanisms to be established to ensure an end to impunity for the human rights and humanitarian law violations that have taken place in Côte d'Ivoire since October 2000.

To the United Nations Security Council:

- Extend and broaden the mandate of the U.N. Panel of Experts on Liberia to investigate regional financing and support to abusive Liberian armed groups involved in the Côte d'Ivoire conflict, and consider extending the sanctions regime against those governments against whom there is evidence of such support.

- Condemn the practice of recruitment of refugees from camps by governments and rebel groups in the region and request UNHCR to take urgent measures to improve protection, in collaboration with other U.N. and non-governmental humanitarian agencies.

- Condemn the practice of recruitment of children, urge that all child soldiers be immediately disarmed and demobilized and request UNICEF, in collaboration with the government of Côte d'Ivoire, to ensure adequate humanitarian assistance and other forms of support for their physical and psychological rehabilitation and social reintegration.

- Mandate the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions to request permission from the government of Côte d'Ivoire to conduct a fact-finding mission into recent events.

- Ensure that the human rights unit of MINUCI is adequately funded, has an extensive field presence, and submits reports on ongoing human rights abuses in Côte d'Ivoire to the Security Council through the Office of the Resident Representative in Côte d'Ivoire, according to the terms of Security Council Resolution 1479. These reports should be made public.

To France and ECOWAS:

- Ensure that troops in Operation Unicorn and the ECOWAS force respect international humanitarian law and implement their mandate to protect civilians in a robust manner throughout their areas of deployment.

To the United States, France, the European Union and other international donors:

- Call publicly and privately on the Ivorian government to investigate and prosecute where appropriate all allegations of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in connection with the conflict. Provide financial support for the establishment of an international commission of inquiry.

- Refuse all military or police assistance to the Ivorian government, with the exception of human rights training programs, until good faith investigations have taken place and accountability for reported abuses by the security forces has been established.

- Fund humanitarian and development programs addressing the urgent humanitarian needs in western Côte d'Ivoire, including programs focusing on health, education, agricultural assistance, demobilization and reintegration, and community reconciliation.

- Ensure and prioritize programs for the strengthening of the Ivorian judiciary and other institutions essential to the rule of law.

- Support financially and through public statements local civil society organizations in their efforts to promote and protect human rights and support freedom of the press in Côte d'Ivoire.

III. BACKGROUND

Côte d'Ivoire was largely stable for thirty years following its independence from France in 1960. Under the leadership of President Felix Houphouët-Boigny, an ethnic Baoulé and Catholic, over sixty ethnic groups coexisted with over three million immigrants from the West African sub-region, if not in harmony, at least without overtly exposing the fragility of the Ivorian state. Ethnic tensions were certainly present and were occasionally violently checked during Houphouët-Boigny's rule,[1] but an open-door policy on immigration helped to build a thriving agricultural economy. Côte d'Ivoire's special relationship with France, which backed Houphouët-Boigny throughout his rule and assured his regime's security, also contributed to the country's relative stability. Houphouët-Boigny's Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire *(Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire*, PDCI) monopolized political activity in the single-party state, but his PDCI governments nominally reflected the ethnic and religious make-up of the country. Côte d'Ivoire was the economic motor of a region that, while rich in resources, remained poor in governance and accountability.

The recent, apparently rapid unraveling of a country once known as the "Ivorian miracle" can be traced to factors stretching back several decades: political ambitions long checked under Houphouët-Boigny's autocratic single-party rule, an economic recession tied to dependence on coffee and cocoa exports, increasing competition for natural resources, an agricultural system heavily dependant on migrant labor, and weak state institutions. The conflict also has more immediate causes, specifically, a divisive political discourse based on ethnicity and the increasing impunity of state security forces in the face of clear-cut responsibility for violations of human rights. Regional factors including the proximity of the neighboring Liberian conflict, the easy circulation of arms and mercenaries, and the willingness of Burkina Faso to provide support to the nascent MPCI, have also served to draw Côte d'Ivoire into a complex regional quagmire.

Economic recession and immigration

By the 1990s, Côte d'Ivoire had become the world's leading producer of cocoa and was among the top five producers of coffee, mainly built on the large-scale immigration of agricultural workers from neighboring countries—in particular, Burkina Faso.[2] These statistics masked a troubled economic picture as Côte d'Ivoire struggled to emerge from serious economic recession in the 1980s. The impact of the economic recession and structural adjustment measures imposed by international financial institutions and donors affected not only the cocoa and coffee sector, where commodity prices dropped and subsidies to farmers were cut, but also general employment opportunities. Many educated urban youth returned to the villages seeking a future, but became unemployed villagers—"chômeurs villageois"—instead.[3]

The economic recession coincided with increasing competition for natural resources in several areas of the country: in the west and southwest—traditionally forest land—only 17 percent of the forest remained by 2000.[4] In the north, tension over land in the cotton belt had became a source of pressure, while in the west, the heart of

1 Some observers make a case that the roots of the Ivorian debate over ethnicity and identity extend at least to the 1930s, if not beyond. The question of the place of foreigners within Ivorian society is certainly not new, although Houphouët-Boigny's own liberal position on immigration and nationality dominated government policy for decades. There were several episodes of repression of "southern" Ivorians during his rule, notably in 1966 against the Agni and in 1970 against the Bété. See Tiemoko Coulibaly, "Lente décomposition au Côte d'Ivoire," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, November 2002 and Jean-Pierre Dozon, " La Côte d'Ivoire entre Démocratie, Nationalisme et Ethnonationalisme," *Politique Africaine: Côte d'Ivoire, la tentation ethnonationaliste*, No. 78, June 2000, pp. 45-62.

2 Although Côte d'Ivoire has been the main recipient country for immigrants from all over the region, Burkinabé constitute the majority of the West African nationals in Côte d'Ivoire. This is partly based on the fact that southern Burkina Faso and northern Ivory Coast shared several ethnic groups as well as administrative unity under the French colonial administration. During Houphouët-Boigny's era, immigration was encouraged and there were no legal obstacles to immigrant use of the land. His oft-cited policy was that "the land belonged to those who gave it value." The immigrant Burkinabé contributed to the development of the Ivorian "plantation bourgeoisie," which formed the backbone of Houphouët-Boigny's support base.

3 Jean Pierre Chaveau, "Question Foncière et Construction Nationale en Côte d'Ivoire," *Politique Africaine: Côte d'Ivoire, la tentation ethnonationaliste*, No. 78, June 2000, p. 112.

4 Country Information on Côte d'Ivoire, Food and Agriculture Organization website at www.fao.org/forestry/fo/country/index.jsp?geo_id=75&lang_id=1 (accessed June 25, 2003).

the cocoa and coffee plantations, the collapse of agricultural commodity prices and subsidies to cocoa farmers resulted in increasing friction between the immigrant plantation workers and the Ivorian villagers who had sold or rented them land.

In the midst of the economic crisis and facing diminished popular support in the lead-up to the 1990 elections, particularly from his traditional constituency in the agricultural sector, Houphouët-Boigny's government introduced residence cards for non-nationals in 1990 in a bid to gain more state revenue and increase PDCI votes. While the measure did shore up PDCI support in the short-term, assisting Houphouët-Boigny to win the election, the perception that immigrants had been granted illegitimate status through fraud was to contribute to considerable future problems. Many northern Ivorians and Burkinabé immigrants dated the start of institutionalized harassment and extortion by state security forces to the issuance of these residence cards in 1990.[5] For many northern Ivorians the card checks were particularly galling because the southerner-dominated state security forces did not distinguish between northern Ivorians and immigrant residents. In addition, many members of the security forces used the opportunity of card checks to regularly extort money from both groups.[6]

Ivoirité: ethnic discrimination for political gain

Ethnically, Côte d'Ivoire can be described as a crossroads, with most of the major ethnic groups migrating from neighboring countries over the centuries.[7] While there has been substantial mixing of these populations geographically, particularly in Abidjan, Daloa and other urban centers, the country remains roughly divided into regional blocs. The center and east are mainly occupied by the Baoulé and Agni, both part of the Akan migration from Ghana. The north is largely home to two main ethnic groups: the Malinké and Dioula (part of the northern Mande group) who migrated from Guinea and Mali, and the Senaphou and Lobi people (part of the Gur group) who migrated from Burkina Faso and Mali. The west is populated by the southern Mande group—largely the Dan or Yacouba and Gouro ethnic groups, who migrated from southern Guinea and Sierra Leone. Finally, the southwest is home to the Krou peoples, including the Bété and Wê (a sub-group of whom are known as the Gueré) who are believed to be among the earliest migrants from the southwestern coast.

The death of Houphouët-Boigny in 1993 marked the onset of overt political tension in Côte d'Ivoire and the end of the fragile ethnic balance he had maintained.[8] Candidates representing the key major ethnic groups, including Houphouët-Boigny's Baoulé successor, Henri Konan Bédié of the PDCI, Laurent Gbagbo the Bété leader of the Popular Ivorian Front (*Front Populaire Ivoirien*, FPI), and Alassane Dramane Ouattara of the Rally of Republicans (*Rassemblement des Républicains*, RDR) began vying for the presidency in the run-up to the 1995 elections. Bédié's 1995 campaign was based on an ethnic platform aimed at undermining support for Bédié's main rival: Ouattara, a former prime minister under Houphouët-Boigny and the candidate of the largest opposition party, the heavily northern-supported RDR. The RDR boycotted the election after Ouattara's candidacy was barred on the grounds that he held Burkinabé nationality and was not a native Ivorian, and Bédié won the election.[9]

Following Bédié's accession to the presidency, the relationship between the immigrant—mainly Burkinabé—community and the Ivorian government changed for two main reasons. First, it rapidly became clear that the new

5 Numerous individuals interviewed by Human Rights Watch noted this as the beginning of years of harassment and extortion by state security forces demanding bribes and sometimes destroying or confiscating their identity documents.

6 Some analysts go even further and point to the introduction of residence cards as the institutionalization of a division not only between citizens and foreigners, but also a social division between north and south. See Ousmane Dembele, "Côte d'Ivoire: La Fracture communautaire," *Politique Africaine: La Côte d'Ivoire en guerre*, No. 89, March 2003, p. 40.

7 One student of Côte d'Ivoire's post-colonial transition noted, "Although the country is the confluence of four African civilizations, it is the center of gravity of none. Ethnic groups have greater cultural and social affinities with tribes living outside the country than with one another." Aristide Zolberg, *One-Party Government in the Ivory Coast*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p.5.

8 For many Ivorians who experienced the PDCI's lengthy rule, the dominance of coastal, southern ethnic groups in Ivorian politics was a virtually unchallengable reality. The notion of an Ivorian president from the north or west was inconceivable until Ouattara—and Robert Guei—emerged as real political options in the 1990s following Houphouët-Boigny's death.

9 Laurent Gbagbo's FPI also boycotted the election.

president, Henri Konan Bédié's vision of the role and position of immigrants in Côte d'Ivoire differed radically from his predecessor, who had embraced an "ethnic coalition" strategy involving the Baoulé and the northerners.[10] Under Bédié, the introduction of the rural land reform law was one signal of a clear change of policy.[11] A second element was the way in which Bédié reacted to the creation of the opposition party led by former Prime Minister, northerner, Muslim and presidential rival Alassane Ouattara. The ensuing debate over Ouattara's nationality and eligibility for the presidency became a symbol of the deep-seated divisions over the issue of "ivoirité," the question of Ivorian identity and the role of immigrants in Ivorian society.

During Bédié's six-year rule allegations of corruption and mismanagement multiplied, and he increasingly relied on ethnicity as a political tactic to garner support in an unfavorable economic climate.[12] In 1999, Gen. Robert Guei, a Yacouba from the west and Bédié's chief of staff, took power in a coup following a mutiny by soldiers. Initially applauded by most opposition groups as a welcome change from the longstanding PDCI rule and Bédié's corrupt regime, Guei's pledges to eliminate corruption and introduce an inclusive Ivorian government were soon overshadowed by his personal political ambitions and the repressive measures he used against both real and suspected opposition.[13] Throughout 2000—another election year—Ivorian politics became increasingly divided on ethnic and religious lines. Ouattara's candidacy remained in contention, and increasing friction between Guei and the RDR led to the RDR's withdrawal from the single ministerial post it was accorded by Guei's transitional government in May 2000.[14]

The presidential and parliamentary elections of 2000

The cumulative political, economic, religious and ethnic tensions of the 1990s erupted into violence during the presidential elections in October 2000.[15] The legitimacy of the elections was seriously compromised by the exclusion of fourteen of the nineteen presidential candidates, including Alassane Ouattara and the PDCI candidate, former president Bédié. General Guei fled the country on October 25, 2000 after massive popular protests and the loss of military support followed his attempt to entirely disregard the election results and seize power. Laurent Gbagbo was installed as president a day later, but the death toll continued to mount as RDR supporters -- calling for new elections -- clashed with FPI supporters and government security forces.

Under President Gbagbo's regime, ethnic and religious splits deepened as security forces and vigilante groups again clashed with supporters of the RDR in the lead up to the December parliamentary elections. Ouattara was again disqualified by a Supreme Court decision questioning his citizenship and the RDR subsequently boycotted the elections. A state of emergency was imposed following violent clashes in Abidjan in December 2000, but the parliamentary elections went ahead in all but twelve northern districts.

Over 200 people were killed and hundreds were wounded in the violence surrounding the October and December elections. Demonstrators were gunned down in the Abidjan streets by the state security forces; hundreds of opposition members, many of them northerners and RDR supporters targeted on the basis of ethnicity and

10 This strategy excluded the Bété and other western ethnic groups.

11 Bédié's PDCI was not alone in taking the position that indigenous Ivorians should reclaim the land from the immigrant population. For over a decade, Laurent Gbagbo's FPI has maintained a consistent stance pushing for land reform that would restore land to Ivorians, encourage Ivorian youth to return to the villages, and effectively reduce the role of long-time immigrant residents on Ivorian land. The FPI was also a key voice denouncing identity card fraud, which it claims was perpetrated on a vast scale in order to give non-Ivorians—mostly French-speaking immigrants from neighboring Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso—votes in support of Ouattara's RDR.

12 While the Baoulé always dominated PDCI governments, even under Houphouët-Boigny's tenure, the "Baoulization" of the government became so extreme under Bédié's regime that political opposition groups, including the RDR and FPI, formed an alliance. Called the Republican Front, this coalition later disintegrated due to internal friction.

13 A number of army soldiers who had brought Guei to power in the 1999 coup fled to Burkina Faso in 2000 after being detained and allegedly tortured by Guei's regime. Some of these individuals have since emerged as core members of the MPCI rebel movement.

14 Marc LePape, "Chronologie politique de la Côte d'Ivoire, du coup d'état aux elections," in *Côte d'Ivoire: L'année terrible 1999-2000*, p. 35.

15 See, "The New Racism: The Political Manipulation of Ethnicity in Côte d'Ivoire," *Human Rights Watch Report*, Vol. 13, No. 6(A), August 2001.

religion, were arbitrarily arrested, detained and tortured, and state security forces committed rape and other human rights violations in complicity with FPI supporters. In the worst single incident attributed to gendarmes from the Abobo base in Abidjan, the bodies of fifty-seven young men were discovered in Youpougon, on the outskirts of Abidjan, on October 27, 2003, a massacre that became known as the Charnier de Youpougon. A United Nations inquiry into the massacre concluded that the responsibility for the massacre rested squarely with members of the gendarmerie, yet those responsible for the killings and other election-related violence have yet to be properly investigated and brought to justice. The April 2001 trial of eight paramilitary gendarmes in connection to the Youpougon massacre led to their acquittal due to "lack of evidence".[16] Although the government of Côte d'Ivoire stated its intention to reopen the investigation in 2002, this initiative has been put on hold since the war began in September 2002.

In late-2001 and early-2002, President Gbagbo organized a reconciliation forum which included the representatives of all four key political parties: Gbagbo's FPI, Ouattara's RDR, Bédié of the PDCI and Guei's Union for Democracy and Peace in Côte d'Ivoire party (*Union pour la Démocratie et pour la Paix en Côte d'Ivoire*, UDPCI). Despite this largely symbolic gesture, political tension remained high in several parts of the country as local municipal elections approached in July 2002. In the west, where the political campaign inflamed the pre-existing tensions over land, young supporters of the FPI, PDCI and RDR clashed in Daloa in late-June 2002, resulting in at least four deaths and the burning of two mosques and a church.[17] The violence also spread to villages around Daloa, where groups of young Bété, Gueré, Burkinabé and northern Ivorian villagers burned each other's villages and homes and thousands were displaced to Daloa and Duekoué.

September 2002: from army "mutiny" to civil war

In August 2002, President Gbagbo announced a government of national reconciliation, with representation of the four principal political parties in his cabinet. General Guei, however, refused to accept the cabinet post reserved for his UDPCI party. Shortly thereafter, early in the morning of September 19, 2002, heavy shooting broke out in Abidjan while simultaneous attacks took place in the northern towns of Korhogo and Bouaké.

Initial speculation on the backing for the attempted coup centered on Guei. However General Guei, his wife, and Boga Doudou, the Minister of the Interior, were all killed on September 19 in Abidjan. It soon emerged that the uprising was initiated by soldiers who had been recruited into the army by Guei and feared demobilization under President Gbagbo, and that the "mutiny" was in fact an organized rebel movement, the Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire (Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire, MPCI) whose origin was rather less spontaneous than it first appeared.

The attempted coup was led by a number of junior military officers who had been at the forefront of the 1999 coup, but left President Guei's regime after he became increasingly hardline. Several of the officers were detained and tortured under Guei and had fled to Burkina Faso, where they certainly received training and possibly other forms of support in the two years between their exile from Côte d'Ivoire and their return on September 19, 2002. The total number of MPCI troops in the first weeks of the mutiny is estimated to have been no more than about eight hundred and recruitment of additional forces took place, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso. At least five hundred Maliens joined up in September 2002, lured by promises of 10,000 CFA (approximately $17) per day.[18] However, many returned in early-2003 after the money supply dwindled. The MPCI also recruited hundreds of "dozos," traditional hunters with family hunting rifles who are a common sight in rural Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and southern Burkina Faso. At least some of the dozos recruited by the MPCI were Burkinabé and Malien immigrants who were long-time residents of Côte d'Ivoire.

The government's initial response to the rebellion was to launch a security operation in the economic capital, Abidjan. This consisted of hundreds of security force members descending on low-income neighborhoods—the

16 The trial was held in the camp of the Agban gendarmerie. Given the setting and the lack of security guarantees, the fact that the two survivors and other witnesses to the events were reluctant to testify is hardly surprising.
17 Timothé Dro, "Daloa: Mosquee et Eglise incendiées," *Soir Info*, June 26, 2002.
18 Human Rights Watch interview, Mali, February 20, 2003.

"quartiers précaires" or shantytowns—occupied by thousands of immigrants and Ivorians. During these operations they allegedly searched for weapons and rebels, but more often would simply order all out all the residents and burn or demolish their homes. Allegedly conducted in order to secure Abidjan from suspected rebel infiltration, the raids displaced over 12,000 people—mostly foreign immigrants. They were accompanied by numerous serious human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests and detentions, "disappearances," rape, and summary executions. In addition, extortion by the security forces was widespread and commonplace.[19] Dozens of neighborhoods were affected through October 2002, when the government officially suspended the operation as a result of international protests. Unofficially however, the demolitions and abuses continued well into December 2002 and later.[20]

By the end of September 2002, the MPCI rebels, composed mainly of "Dioula"[21] or northerners of Malinké, Senaphou and other ethnicities, some Burkinabé and Malien recruits, and the "dozos," were in control of most of northern Côte d'Ivoire (approximately 50 percent of the country), including Bouaké, Korhogo and Odienné towns. The ease with which the MPCI captured this area was largely due to the fact that they encountered minimal opposition. While many questions remain unanswered regarding the origins of the Ivorian rebel movements, the MPCI group is the most organized, disciplined and ideologically straightforward. Its main stated aims were the redress of recent military reforms, new elections and the removal of President Gbagbo, whose presidency was perceived as illegitimate given the flawed elections that took place in 2000. However, it also represented other grievances, including the widely held feeling of many northern Ivorians that they were consistently politically excluded and systematically discriminated against over the past decade.[22] While the core of the MPCI was northern Ivorian—such as Senaphou and Malinké—its membership at both the troop and high political levels included most Ivorian ethnic groups, including Baoulé and Bété members.

A government offensive on Bouaké in early October saw heavy fighting in and around the city and the flight of thousands of civilians, but the MPCI retained control of the town. An MPCI advance in the west captured Vavoua on October 7, 2002, and Daloa on October 12, 2002. The MPCI advances in the north and west were accompanied by reports of summary executions of gendarmes and suspected government sympathizers. Daloa, a key town in the country's cocoa belt, and the transit point for much of the cocoa heading to the coastal port of San Pedro, was re-captured on October 14, 2002 by the government forces who then proceeded to comb the town for rebel supporters. Several days later, the government signed a cease-fire with the MPCI. French military forces already present in the country as part of a long-standing security agreement agreed to monitor the cease-fire line.

Peace negotiations took place at the end of October 2002 in Lomé, Togo. Both sides agreed to refrain from "the recruitment and use of mercenaries, enrollment of children, and violations of the accord on cessation of hostilities."[23] Member states of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) also pledged to deploy a peacekeeping force in Côte d'Ivoire. Despite the cease-fire, reports continued to rise of assassinations of

19 See, "Government Abuses in Response to Army Revolt," *Human Rights Watch Report*, Vol. 14, No.9(A), November 2002.

20 "Des centaines de soldats ont investi hier des bidonvilles," *le jour*, December 12, 2002, p.2.

21 The term "Djoula" or "Dioula" is actually a Senoufo word for trader. It also refers to a small ethnic group from the northeast, however it is most commonly used to refer to people of several ethnicities from northern Côte d'Ivoire, including Malinké and Senaphou, who are in fact not ethnic Dioula but may speak a colloquial form of the language. The pidgeon form of the Dioula language has become widely used by many Ivorians—whatever their origin—as the language of trade and commerce, particularly in the market culture of Côte d'Ivoire, which is dominated by northerners and immigrants. Some northerners view the use of the all-encompassing term as a pejorative. In this report, Human Rights Watch will use the term Dioula as it is commonly (mis)used by many Ivorians—to refer to Ivorians who, even if resident in the south, originated from the northern Mande and Gur ethnic groups, including members of the Malinké, Senaphou, and Bambara ethnicities. It does not however, include Burkinabé, whose nationals in Côte d'Ivoire are largely from the Mossi ethnic group.

22 One member of the MPCI's political wing told Human Rights Watch, "Linas-Marcoussis corrected many things. We were tired of living in fear, not being able to go out because they would tear up your identity card." Interviewed in Bouaké, March 31, 2003.

23 "Côte d'Ivoire: State, rebels agree to refrain from hostile acts," U.N. Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), November 1, 2003.

immigrants, RDR leaders and supporters, and suspected rebel sympathizers by "death squads" composed of members of the security forces and civilian vigilante groups in Abidjan.

The war moves west: November 28, 2002

In the end of November 2002, the capture of Man and Danané and an attack on Toulepleu, all sizeable towns in the west near the Liberian border, marked the appearance of two new rebel groups and a new military front. The new groups, the Movement for Justice and Peace (Mouvement pour la justice et la paix, MJP) and the Ivorian Popular Movement for the Great West (Mouvement Populaire Ivoirien du Grand Ouest, MPIGO), claimed to be Ivorians pursuing vengeance for General Guei's death.[24] However the MPIGO group was mainly composed of Liberian and Sierra Leonean fighters, including some former members of the Sierra Leonean rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and Liberian forces linked to Liberian President Charles Taylor. While the MPCI initially denied links with the two new groups,[25] there were signs that the western offensive on November 28 was coordinated among the three groups. Certainly the emergence of the two western groups and the opening of another military front came at an exceedingly opportune time for the MPCI, which had signed a cease-fire with the government and could not pursue further military gains without violating this agreement.[26]

The MPIGO group quickly moved south from Danané along the Liberian border, capturing Toulepleu on December 2. It then moved east towards Guiglo and captured Blolékin on December 7, 2003. Meanwhile, the government forces recaptured Man on November 30. In December 2002, both sides reinforced their troops with fresh recruits, including additional Liberians on the rebel side and a new force of Liberian troops fighting alongside the government. The French military force monitoring the initial cease-fire line, known as Operation Unicorn, also received additional troops until it numbered almost 2,500 by the end of December 2002. Fighting continued in late-December and resulted in a rebel counter-offensive re-capturing Man and Bangolo and a series of clashes between French forces and the western rebels around Duékoué as the rebels sought to push their offensive further south.

January 2003 brought further fighting and increasing reports of abuses against civilians in the west. French diplomacy produced a second cease-fire agreement between the government and western rebel groups on January 13, 2002, but peace talks convened by the French government in Linas-Marcoussis were plagued by reports of on-going fighting along the Liberian-Ivorian border.

The Paris negotiations produced the framework for a new government of reconciliation in which President Gbagbo retained the presidency while delegating most substantive powers to a new prime minister selected through consensus. In an annexe, the Linas-Marcoussis accords also tasked the new government of reconciliation with legislative reform of the laws on nationality, electoral procedure, and land inheritance. Human rights concerns featured prominently in the agreement, which required the immediate creation of a national human rights commission, the establishment of an international inquiry into grave breaches of human rights and international humanitarian law, and demanded an end to the impunity of those responsible for summary executions, in particular the death squads.

The signing of the Linas-Marcoussis peace accords by all the warring parties on January 25, 2002 was followed by four consecutive days of street demonstrations in Abidjan, mainly by the "young patriots," youth supporters of

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24 A recent report by the International Crisis Group notes that General Guei may have been preparing a coup with Charles Taylor's support well before the events of September 19, and that five hundred soldiers were trained in Liberia with support from high-level Liberian commanders and regional mercenaries. This may explain the origins and behavior of the MPIGO. *See* International Crisis Group, "Tackling Liberia: the Eye of the Regional Storm," April 30, 2003, pp. 15-16.

25 The question of whether the links between the groups pre-date September 19, 2002 remains unclear. While Guei's Yacouba followers and the founders of the MPCI shared the aim of removing President Gbagbo, some of the founders of the MPCI were probably equally anti-Guei given that they were tortured under his regime. Guei's death may in fact have created a partnership that might not have existed if he had lived.

26 The government's re-capture of Daloa on October 14 effectively ended any hopes held by the MPCI for a quick offensive through Daloa to San Pedro, a key strategic port. Opening a second front in the west, particularly with the aim of cutting off the transport route to San Pedro, was therefore crucial.

the FPI who protested the verbal allocation of two key ministries—Defense and Interior—to the rebel groups. President Gbagbo's return to Abidjan did little to subdue the protests. Instead, his public statement that the accords were "propositions" cast doubt on his commitment to the agreement. In early February the United Nations Security Council issued a statement of support for the accords and gave Chapter VII authorization to the French and West African troops to protect civilians in their zones of operation.[27] Following the protests in Abidjan, an impasse ensued on the political front throughout February and most of March 2003, despite numerous efforts to further the peace process. A summit in Accra in early March resulted in the preliminary distribution of cabinet posts in the new government of reconciliation, as fighting continued in the west of the country.

As talks continued over the next steps in the peace process, reports of massacres emerged from the west, where it became increasingly clear that both the government and rebel forces were using Liberian fighters in a proxy war. Throughout March and early April, MPCI-appointed members of the government refused to take their seats in Abidjan citing security concerns. Security in the Toulepleu area declined as Liberian fighters on both sides fought each other and launched attacks into neighboring Liberia. Thousands of civilians fled the west for the increasingly uncertain refuge of Liberia and Guinea.

International and local concern over the situation in the west mounted through April, culminating in a meeting between Liberian President Charles Taylor and President Gbagbo in Togo in late-April, and an agreement to monitor the border through a quadripartite force composed of Ivorian government and rebels forces, Liberian forces and French/ECOWAS forces.[28] A cease-fire was signed in early May as members of the government of reconciliation took their seats in Abidjan for the first time. A United Nations mission—MINUCI—composed of military liaison personnel and civilian human rights monitors was also approved by the United Nations Security Council in early May. By late-May, the security situation in the west was improving as many of the Liberian fighters left the area, but the humanitarian situation remained dire, with large numbers of civilians lacking access to clean water, food and health care. In early June French and ECOWAS forces moved in to secure the major towns in the west and monitor the cease-fire, and the curfew was lifted.

IV. THE "WAR IN THE MOUTH": THE ROLE OF POLITICAL RHETORIC AND THE MEDIA

> "Even before the war began, there were 'dialogues of war' among Ivorians. There was no war on the ground, but there was war in the mouth." *Ivorian refugee, Nonah refugee camp, Guinea*

Throughout over ten weeks of interviews with victims and witnesses to the violence in Côte d'Ivoire, Human Rights Watch was consistently told—by Ivorians, Burkinabé, long-time observers, victims—that the Ivorian media and the political discourse of key politicians played a crucial role in inflaming tensions, inciting fear and hatred, and galvanizing conflict, not only since September 19, 2002, but long before.

The role of the Ivorian media

Côte d'Ivoire is home to a plethora of media: at least a dozen daily newspapers have wide circulation in the capital and major towns around the country. Local and international radio programs have a wide audience, and both Ivorian and international television programs are available in Abidjan and in many large and small towns. Yet the variety of media available to Ivorians, probably unmatched in any other country in the region, has not guaranteed access to objective news coverage for two main reasons.

First is the politicization of the Ivorian media, particularly the print media, which almost entirely lacks independence, given its links to the main political parties. Each major political party has a newspaper that acts as

27 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1464, February 4, 2003. S/RES/1464/2003. Chapter VII authorization permitted the West African and French forces to "take the necessary steps" to guarantee the security and freedom of movement of their troops and to "ensure…the protection of civilians immediately threatened with physical violence…."

28 John Zodzi, "Ivory Coast, Liberia back force for chaotic border," Reuters, April 26, 2003.

its mouthpiece, voicing its policy and propaganda. Since most of these newspapers lack objectivity, their audience receives at best partial, and at worst, false and inflammatory impressions of events. Second, while the Ivorian literacy rate is above average for the region, it remains below 50 percent,[29] particularly in the rural areas, where radio remains the principal source of information.

When the "mutiny" began, the government moved quickly to ensure that Ivorians could no longer access independent media. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Radio France Internationale (RFI) programming on FM frequencies were cut within a week of September 19, 2002, thereby eliminating access for the vast majority of rural villagers to independent radio coverage of the conflict. Television soon followed—by October 7, 2002, the French channel TV5 was taken off the air. The combined blocks on both radio and television cut access to independent media programming for the majority of the Ivorian population.

The government simultaneously began a campaign to vilify the international press and their coverage of Côte d'Ivoire, not only by cutting audience access, but in some cases through intimidation of individual journalists. Local opposition media also suffered badly, with repeated attacks on the offices and persons of particular opposition papers.

The lack of objective coverage by local media worsened with the onset of the conflict in September 2002 and the increase in "patriotic" fervor.

Political discourse: before and after September 19, 2002

The Ivorian media and the political discourse of high-level politicians inflamed popular feeling, especially among the groups of rural and urban youth, both before and after the conflict began. A witness to the rural inter-communal violence over land in 2002 told Human Rights Watch, "[e]veryday, the radio incited people to disputes."[30]

After September 19, the situation worsened. Ivorian "patriots" were exhorted to mobilize. In late-October, civilians were encouraged by government statements to obstruct the access routes to Abidjan and form "vigilance committees" to "neutralize any assailant who attempted activities in Abidjan."[31] Television broadcasts and newspaper photographs of captured "assailants," bound, with weapons at their sides, were frequently shown. Displaying the captives, who were mainly northerners and immigrants, heightened popular feelings against these groups. Sometimes the images of immigrants were shown in conjunction with thinly veiled or outright accusations of foreign support to the rebels (generally assumed to be Burkina Faso). These statements appear to have contributed to heightened hostility and attacks on the immigrant community. A witness to the violence against the Burkinabé in villages around Duékoué said: "Television—when it says the Burkinabé are 'assailants'—that inflames the youths."[32]

Government statements were sometimes ambivalent, sometimes ominously clear. As the rebels' success grew and the weakness of the defending government forces became more apparent, the government's position hardened. As its forces lost Bouaké, Vavoua and then Daloa, public statements issued on the national television program and in the print media by members of the government sent alarming signals. Telephone hotline numbers were set up for the public to phone in their denunciations of suspected rebels and the official spokesperson for the Ivorian armed forces at that time, Lieutenant-Colonel Jules Yao Yao, stated on October 11 that "all those who assist the assailants or act alongside are considered as accomplices and will be treated pure and simply as military objectives."[33] Yao Yao continued, "It is the same for all the patriots who might be tempted by reprisals. They fall

29 Human Development Report 2002, United Nations Development Program website at http://hdr.undp/org/reports/global/2002/en/indicator/indicator.cfm?file=cty_f_CIV.html (accessed June 25, 2003).

30 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 16, 2003.

31 Armed forces spokesperson Jules Yao Yao, statement transcribed from Radio Télévision Ivoirienne (RTI), "Appel à plus de vigilance dans la région d'Abidjan," *Notre Voie*, October 18, 2002.

32 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 2, 2003.

33 "Tous ceux qui assistent et agissent aux côtés des assaillants seront des objectifs militaires," *Notre Voie*, October 11, 2003, p.2.

beneath the force of the law." Despite this latter qualification, Human Rights Watch's research indicates that many abuses were committed by civilian "patriots" or members of self-defense committees, sometimes in collaboration with the state security forces, and these cases were neither investigated nor prosecuted (see below, chapter IX).

V. ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS AND OTHER NON-COMBATANTS BY GOVERNMENT FORCES

Since the outbreak of the conflict on September 19, 2002, civilians have been the victims of widespread and systematic violations of international human rights and humanitarian law by the Ivorian armed forces (Forces Armées Nationales de Côte d'Ivoire, FANCI), members of the state security forces such as the gendarmes and police and individuals working in collaboration with government forces.[34] These violations include systematic and indiscriminate attacks on civilians, summary executions of civilians and other non-combatants, arbitrary arrests and detentions, "disappearances," torture, corporal punishment and other violent acts against civilians, rape, destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, and pillage. The perpetrators of abuses include 1) the government forces; 2) mercenaries working with and recruited by the Ivorian government, including Liberian fighters from the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) rebel group; and 3) state-supported civilian militias.

In all three patterns of abuse documented by Human Rights Watch, civilian victims were targeted based on ethnic, religious, national or suspected political affiliation. In many cases, the victims' names alone were considered grounds for arbitrary arrests, detentions, torture and executions, based on the identification of the name as a potential northerner or immigrant or political opposition member. Victims have also been targeted on the basis of religious affiliation, for instance, Muslims have often been assumed to be supporting the rebel forces, imams have been killed, and mosques have been attacked. Members of certain professions have also been victims of abuses: drivers and owners of transport businesses have been targeted by government forces, apparently due to suspicions of their involvement in transport and supply of arms and funding to the rebels. Another motive for the targeting of transporters and businesspeople may have been the dominance of "Dioula" northerners and immigrants in this field.

Some of the targeting of political opposition and suspected rebel sympathizers was done with premeditation and planning. Numerous witnesses told Human Rights Watch of the existence of lists of names that circulated among units of the government armed forces in Daloa, Guiglo, Vavoua, and other locations. In several cases, witnesses escaped after being warned of the existence of the lists by friendly government contacts. In most cases these lists appear to have been created with assistance from local villagers and townspeople sympathetic to the government. In some cases however, the names on the lists may have originated in Abidjan.

Widespread and systematic killings of civilians by the government armed forces and irregular forces affiliated to the government took place during offensives and counteroffensives on towns like Vavoua, Man and Toulepleu. They also took place during "cleaning" operations conducted by paramilitary groups such as the anti-riot squad (Brigade Anti-Emeute, BAE) in towns re-taken from the rebels, such as in Daloa in October 2002. These operations on the ground were sometimes accompanied by indiscriminate or targeted helicopter attacks in which civilians were the principal victims.

34 The Ivorian national armed forces (FANCI) include the army, air force and navy. The national forces of law and order include the gendarmes, who have the mandate for law and order in a district, and the police, who maintain law and order in towns. Other units, such as the Republican Guard and the anti-riot police (Brigade Anti-Emeutes, BAE) function more or less as paramilitary units attached to different forces. In peacetime, these different units wear distinctive uniforms, headgear, and insignia. However, Human Rights Watch was repeatedly told that since the beginning of the war, many of the gendarmes and police also donned military fatigues and it was increasingly difficult to distinguish between the various units. Many people would refer to the armed men they witnessed as generic uniformed men or "corps-habillés."

Summary executions of civilians

The attacks on civilians—particularly the killings in places like Daloa, Monoko-Zohi, and Man—appear to have been carried out with the aim of systematically eliminating all individuals suspected of supporting the rebels. The targeting of specific individuals was often undertaken with the assistance of part of the local civilian population, mostly Bété or Gueré youth groups or civilian militias. Human Rights Watch received numerous accounts describing how civilians pointed out potential supporters of the rebels to the government armed forces. Based on lists of names and on this physical identification of homes by civilians, members of the government forces would then arbitrarily arrest and execute the individuals. Human Rights Watch gathered information on over 250 cases of summary executions by the Ivorian armed forces in a variety of towns in the west and verified over forty such cases. This figure does not include the dozens of individuals who were last seen in government custody and have "disappeared" or the dozens of cases of individuals who were killed in remote settlements in rural areas, and is therefore very likely a serious underestimation of the total number of victims. It also does not include the estimated hundreds of victims of assassinations in Abidjan and other areas in the southwest.

The first such large-scale series of summary executions by government forces documented by Human Rights Watch took place in Daloa in October 2002, after the government regained control of the town.

The "cleaning" of Daloa: October 15-20, 2002

Daloa town lies in the Haut-Sassandra region, originally a largely Bété area where substantial numbers of northerners and immigrants have settled in both the town and the rural villages over the years. Ethnically, the town and region of Daloa have changed enormously in the past decades due to internal migration and immigration. While the Bété retain a substantial presence in the area and a strong affiliation for the ruling FPI party, the population of northern Ivorians and Burkinabé immigrants has grown significantly. In March 2001, the RDR won the municipal elections, giving the town its first RDR mayor and providing a serious shock to the Bété and others who supported the ruling FPI party. Daloa is among the largest towns in the country and a key transit point for crop harvests, given its location on the edge of the cocoa, coffee and cotton belts, and its road connections to San Pedro, Yamassoukrou and Abidjan.

The MPCI rebels moved south from Vavoua and arrived in Daloa on October 11. Clashes with loyalist forces took place in the Lobia II quarter for several hours on the evening of October 11, resulting in the rebels capturing Daloa on October 12 and occupying the various military camps. Loyalist reinforcements, including Angolan mercenaries, arrived in the afternoon on October 13, and fighting recommenced, continuing until dawn, when the government forces re-captured Daloa. One individual, who was involved in the collection of the corpses following the fighting noted, "we counted about sixteen bodies, of which eight were collected from the military camp after the fighting and others were found around the camps of the gendarmerie."[35] These bodies were combatants from both sides.

So-called cleaning-up operations began in the town, initiated by the forces of the Brigade Anti-Emeute (BAE)—the paramilitary, anti-riot squads—who arrived in Daloa on October 14, 2002. On October 15, an article in the government newspaper *Notre Voie* stated that "the assailants found refuge in the quarters of the Dioula, who are favorable to them." The article continued, "certain guns abandoned by the aggressors were collected by young RDR members who, since the beginning of the Daloa attack, have done nothing but support the actions of the terrorists, applauding them in their passage through their quarters."[36]

Whatever the truth of the last allegation, between October 14 – 20, after the loyalists had regained control of the town, more civilians died as a result of summary executions by government forces than in any of the fighting of the preceding days. According to credible sources, the "ratissage" or combing operation of the BAE resulted in the killings of at least fifty-six people. Among these, forty-two were identified, many of them rich immigrant

35 Human Rights Watch interview, Daloa, April 1, 2003.
36 Vincent Deh,"Daloa: L'armée riposte fort," *Notre Voie*, October 15, 2002, p. 3

businessmen, RDR supporters, or known to be involved in transport.[37] The consul of Mali in Daloa—Bakary Touré—was among the victims. At least ten people were arbitrarily arrested and detained by the state security forces and their whereabouts are unknown. Additional bodies of unidentified individuals were buried in mass graves in Daloa. Of the victims identified by families or local authorities, 90 percent were immigrants from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Guinea or Ivorians of northern ethnicities.

Witnesses to the events described a similar scenario in most cases. The victims were arbitrarily arrested and taken from their homes by armed men in military uniform who arrived in blue military trucks or four-by-four pickup trucks, generally around or after the time of the curfew. In a number of the incidents, the trucks were marked with the letters BAE. After a day or more, the bullet-ridden bodies of the victims were found along roads in or leading out of Daloa. Sometimes the victims were first taken to the military camps before being summarily executed. Several witnesses from Daloa and other places where such killings took place stated that the loyalist military had lists of names of individuals, and that these people were specifically targeted. Human Rights Watch was told by one witness to the Daloa events that a BAE member had told the witness of the existence of "a blacklist with names of people who coordinated the rebels' actions."[38]

One such case was a prominent Burkinabé businessman named Tahirou Tinta. Tinta was in telephone contact with a relative several times in the days preceding and on the day of his arbitrary arrest on October 19, 2002. The morning of October 19, Tinta told his relative that he had been warned by a friend in the authorities that his name was on a list that had come from Abidjan, and that the names of other Burkinabé businessmen were also on the list. Tinta said he had been advised by this person not to sleep in the same place each night and never to go out alone.[39]

The relative told Human Rights Watch that Tinta and other Muslim northerners and immigrants became increasingly worried about threats to their security after the loyalist forces re-captured Daloa and articles appeared in the government newspaper accusing Dioula of supporting the rebels (see above). Their concern deepened on October 17 when the home, vehicles and stores of some Muslim businessmen in Daloa were ransacked and looted by groups of mainly Bété youths acting together with the gendarmes.[40] Human Rights Watch was told, "the BAE came with a tank and smashed the door of the Malien consul. They beat one of his visitors, then the young Bétés and the municipal police came and looted and burned his cars, then they went to the stores and started taking merchandise."[41]

The evening of October 19, at least eight armed men in uniform, described to Human Rights Watch as gendarmes, came to Tinta's house in two four-by-four pickup trucks. Some stayed outside the house while others came in and demanded money. They took Tinta from the house that evening, along with a substantial sum of money. His body was found the next day, with gunshot wounds, on the side of a road in Daloa.[42]

According to a witness who helped collect and bury the bodies, between October 15 – 20 at least two bodies were found each day.[43] On October 20, the BAE's mopping–up activity culminated with an operation in the largely Dioula Orly II quarter, which they encircled with four-by-fours and tanks. Approximately fifty armed men then entered the quarter and checked identity cards. Based on reports gathered by Human Rights Watch, a large number of people, mostly young men bearing northern or immigrant names, were then shot on the spot and their homes were looted. According to the local Red Cross, twenty-two bodies were found following this operation,

37 Human Rights Watch documented incidents of killings, arbitrary detentions and harassment of transport operators in Daloa, Man, Duékoué and Abidjan. Members of the transport industry appear to have been singled out because they were suspected of moving weapons and other supplies for the rebels.
38 Human Rights Watch interview, Daloa, April 1, 2003.
39 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 21, 2003.
40 AFP, "Plusieurs magasins pillés à Daloa," *le jour*, October 18, 2003, p.5.
41 Human Rights Watch interview, Daloa, April 1, 2003.
42 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 21, 2003.
43 Human Rights Watch interview, Daloa, April 1, 2003.

which were buried in a mass grave.[44] Hundreds of panicked northerners fled the quarter, and many sought refuge in the Grand Mosque of Daloa.

The following day, young northerners and Muslims in Daloa demonstrated to protest the events. Muslim leaders and neighboring governments whose nationals had been killed also lodged protests with the government in Abidjan.

In reaction to press reports and growing accusations against the armed forces on the Daloa killings, the spokesperson of the armed forces admitted that cleaning up operations were still taking place, despite the government re-capture of the town and a cease-fire signed between the government and rebels on October 17. However, armed forces spokesperson Jules Yao Yao denied that civilians had been intentionally targeted by the armed forces. He said, "Every day bodies of people who died in combat are discovered amid the searches. These are not people intentionally killed by the armed forces, but individuals killed in combat. Elsewhere, based on the definition of assailant given by the head of state, the cleaning operations involve individuals who lodged or actively helped the assailants."[45] In a clear and damning statement of policy, the government spokesman continued, "The enemy, for the regular forces....is foremost armed men and then the civilian population who actively support them."[46]

The government continued to deny that state security forces were responsible for the killings, but announced an investigation on October 25.[47] Notably, the killings in Daloa stopped after the attacks were publicized, condemned locally and internationally, and the BAE forces left Daloa. However, the pattern of reprisal attacks against civilians exhibited by the BAE and other state security forces in Daloa was replicated in other locations.

The massacre at Monoko-Zohi: November 28, 2002

On November 27, the day before the rebel groups launched their offensives on Danané and Man, the government forces sent troops northwest from Daloa, across the cease-fire line into rebel-controlled territory, probably in an attempt to attack Vavoua. On November 28 and 29 the government forces attacked Monoko-Zohi, a tiny village about seventy kilometers from Daloa. Monoko-Zohi and other villages in the district, such as Pélézi, Fiekon Borombo and Dania, had a mixed ethnic population of indigenous Ivorians, mainly of Niédéboua ethnicity, and foreign immigrants, largely Burkinabé, who were the main cultivators of the area's cocoa and coffee plantations. There were pre-existing tensions between these two groups of villagers due to conflicts over land (see below, chapter IX). A Burkinabé farmer interviewed by Human Rights Watch described the collaboration between some of the indigenous Niédéboua villagers and the loyalist forces in the neighboring Pélézi village:

> Pélézi is mixed, there were lots of foreigners—Burkinabé, Maliens, Guineans, Nigerians, and then the Ivorians--the Niédébouas and Baoulés—living there before the war. After September 19, there was a lot of tension with the Niédéboua villagers. The Niédéboua quarter was on one side of the village and the foreigner's quarter on the other side. The Niédéboua said, "[w]e are going to chase you out and take our land.' My Niédéboua friend told me that the Niédéboua had secret meetings after the rebels came in October. They weren't happy that the rebels had come, they said "[t]he president of Burkina Faso was responsible for sending the rebels to CI." They said that if the loyalist forces came, they would chase all the foreigners away. They made a list with the names of the foreigners, I was told this by some of the younger Niédéboua. It wasn't just the Burkinabé, even the Baoulé were seen as foreigners in Pélézi.[48]

44 Edgar Kouassi, "Daloa vit des jours sombres," *Le Patriote*, October 22, 2002, p.2.
45 "Les assaillants font mouvement vers Daloa," *24 heures*, October 23, 2003. This article was a transcription of the spokesperson's comments the previous day.
46 Ibid.
47 United States Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Côte d'Ivoire: 2002, March 2003, p.4.
48 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 9, 2003.

A week after the government attack, French forces visited Monoko-Zohi after receiving alarming reports from civilians displaced from the area. The French troops confirmed the existence of a mass grave reportedly containing approximately 120 bodies of mainly immigrant workers who had been living in the area.[49]

According to a BBC report based on a visit to Monoko Zohi and interviews with eyewitnesses on December 9, "[s]ix trucks full of men wearing Ivorian military uniforms, and with Ivorian Government license plates drove into the village, just inside rebel-held territory, and began firing in the air. Many of the villagers fled. Many of those who did not are now buried in the grave. Accusing the villagers of feeding rebels, soldiers went house-to-house in the hamlet with a list of names, survivors alleged."[50] An eyewitness interviewed by the BBC stated that "soldiers shot some victims where they found them, and gathered others for execution together.... Some had their throats slit."[51]

The government subsequently denied that its forces were responsible for the killings, noting that the Dania area was under the control of the rebel forces at the time of the massacre. The MPCI refuted this, claiming that government was not acknowledging its attacks in the area, and claiming that the Monoko-Zohi mass grave was only discovered after an MPCI patrol visited the village on December 4.[52]

While the events in Monoko-Zohi require further investigation, particularly with forensic expertise, many factors point to government responsibility for the massacre. The modus operandi of the killings, which corresponds with that used by government forces in other locations, the accounts given to international journalists by eyewitnesses at the site shortly after the events, and Human Rights Watch's own interviews with individuals who were in villages in the area, confirm the presence of government forces in the area and their collaboration with local villagers hostile to the immigrant population. These factors consistently point to the government's armed forces as the perpetrators of the killings.

Government forces recapture Man: December 1-18, 2002

A mixture of rebel forces captured Man on November 28. The government counter-attacked and succeeded in recapturing Man on November 30. The loyalist forces then held Man for at least two weeks, until the town was re-taken by the rebels on December 19, 2002.

Prior to the rebel capture of Man on November 28 and during the eighteen-day period in which government forces resumed control of the town, there were credible accounts of killings and "disappearances" of civilians by the government forces. An anonymous medical source in Man stated on December 9 that "about 150 bodies had been cleared from the streets of Man since it was retaken by government soldiers.... The victims included several people who had been executed."[53] However, this figure likely included the bodies of both rebel and government combatants killed in fighting as well as the bodies of civilians unintentionally killed in crossfire.

Further investigation, including forensic analysis of several mass grave sites in Man, will be required to establish the identities and methods used to kill the individuals whose bodies are in the sites. Nonetheless, Human Rights Watch has documented several incidents in Man where civilians were summarily executed by government forces during the period of loyalist control of the town and fears these may be only a fraction of the real number. A twenty-year-old Ivorian youth described the loyalist re-capture of Man and the summary execution of his neighbor, a transporter named Yacouba Sylla, to Human Rights Watch.

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49 Jean-Claude Kondo, "Un charnier découvert dans une zone rebelle," *le jour*, December 7, 2002, p.2.

50 Joan Baxter, "Eyewitness: Ivory Coast mass grave," British Broadcasting Corporation, December 9, 2002 at www.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa (accessed January 26, 2003).

51 Ibid.

52 MPCI declaration on Monoko-Zohi, December 6, 2002, at www.supportmpci.org/comm_archives.htm (accessed May 15, 2003).

53 "Fighting in west Ivory Coast kills at least 150: medical source," Agence France Presse, December 9, 2002, at www.reliefweb.int (accessed January 26, 2003)

> There were mercenaries working with Gbagbo—Angolans and South Africans—who were the advance troops, they arrived before the loyalists came into Man. People were able to move around the town, the curfew was 19:00 and the mercenaries were okay. The Angolans had yellow uniforms very different from the Ivorian army uniforms. They didn't speak French, when you said something, they didn't understand. The South Africans were mostly white…they gave people bread and wore khaki and tricots.
>
> Then the loyalist troops came, things changed. They imposed a curfew of 16:00 and forbid people to move around. I stayed in after that….When you get up in the morning, you go outside and you would see bodies on the road. I heard of many killings in the other quartiers, but those I know are the ones from my quartier, like my neighbor, Yacouba Sylla. He was a Dioula, an Ivorian originally from Odienné. He was working in transport—he had five trucks. At this time, when the loyalists came to Man, he was the only person in his house, because the rest of his family had escaped. Sylla stayed because of his transport business.
>
> There were four gendarmes who came to Sylla's courtyard. They came in a four-by-four, in uniform, and they carried machine guns. They knocked on the door, and when Sylla arrived, they began to beat him. They said, 'You the Dioula, you support the rebels.' Sylla protested that he was innocent, but they beat him. They shot him twice, then searched the house for guns but they didn't find anything. The family had already fled. In the morning, when I left my house, his body was lying in the street. With some other people from the quartier, we brought the body to the hospital morgue and called one of Sylla's sons, in Biankouma. He was too afraid to come to Man to take care of the body, he asked us to ask the local Muslim community to help. I left Man soon after that, so I don't know what happened to the body. [54]

The majority of civilians targeted by government forces in Man were thought to be Yacouba and Dioula youths suspected of sympathies towards the rebels. In practice, this often translated into targeting members of the RDR or the UDPCI, the western-based party that supported General Guei. Individuals working in the transport industry were also suspect, as shown above, according to the logic used by the armed forces. Suspicions could fall on an individual simply because he carried an amulet or a certain kind of ring and was therefore thought to be a combatant who needed magical protection or a "dozo," one of the traditional hunters recruited by the MPCI. As in other places controlled by government forces, a number of the victims were identified from lists of names compiled by local authorities and civilians.

Another witness interviewed by Human Rights Watch described this period of government control:

> There were many killings under the loyalists. If the loyalists found you with an amulet ring, then they would kill you because they suspected it was a protection from fighting. They made a mass grave—there were so many deaths…. Matthias, the president of the UDPCI-youth, he was taken by the loyalists and we never saw him again. There were many killings, and the family had no rights to ask about what happened. When we talk about the loyalists, it's the gendarmes and police, but also the Angolans and South Africans. It was the gendarmes from Abidjan who did the killings though. The local gendarmes were mostly killed in the fighting when the rebels took the town….There were many bodies in the streets, some decomposing. The loyalists also left many bodies in the cemetery. [They] would take bodies in military trucks to the cemetery to bury them, or just leave them there. [55]

As these killings were taking place, the Ivorian army spokesperson stated, "the cleaning operation and the consolidation of republican forces is on-going in the town and vicinity of Man. Life has returned to normal in that area."[56] Ten days later, the rebels re-captured Man.

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54 Human Rights Watch interview, Mali, February 19, 2003.

55 Human Rights Watch interview, Mali, February 19, 2003.

56 Statement transcribed from Radio Côte d'Ivoire in *le jour*, December 7-8, 2002, p.2. The statement concluded by announcing a new set of security measures aimed at Abidjan under the curfew hours. The measures included, for instance, a warning that the armed forces would fire without warning on any suspect individuals, a use of force that clearly violates international standards.

Summary executions by government forces in other locations in the west

Human Rights Watch also documented summary executions of civilians, particularly members of the RDR, by government armed forces in other western towns under government control, including Bangolo, Duékoué and Guiglo.

In Bangolo in mid-December, the summary execution of a teacher—and RDR member—was witnessed by at least three people.

> Two gendarmes came to the house around 14:00. [They] were armed with machine guns and dressed in military uniform. [They] asked his wife if her husband was there. When she said yes, they asked him to come out, then they looked at his identity card and said they were taking him to the gendarmerie. Then one of them said 'it's not worth it,' and shot him in the right arm, then again in the left arm, then in the stomach. He fell. Then they said, 'No one can touch the body, if anyone touches the body they'll die. A rebel does not deserve burial.' For two days the body was in the street, no one dared touch it. Finally his wife paid 15,000 CFA to some Guerés to pick up the body on a stretcher and take it away. They threw it off a bridge on the road to Man.[57]

Human Rights Watch also heard allegations that in Guiglo, the municipal authorities "made a blacklist of one hundred forty people" with the names of leaders and members of the UPDCI and RDR, and that "the objective was to kill all the people on the list."[58]

As described below in Chapter IX, a number of Burkinabé were also victims of summary executions by government forces in Duékoué and other locations.

Indiscriminate and targeted helicopter attacks

Human Rights Watch documented two series of helicopter gunship attacks on villages and towns in the Vavoua and Zouan-Hounien regions in early December and mid-April, part of the loyalist offensives on both areas. These attacks were sometimes characterized by the indiscriminate and in some cases direct targeting of civilians. For instance, dozens of civilians were killed when helicopter gunships attacked market places, a medical clinic, and neighborhoods known to have concentrations of foreign nationals accused of supporting the rebels. The MI-24 helicopters used in these attacks were reportedly piloted by mercenaries.[59]

Indiscriminate helicopter attacks on the Vavoua and Pélézi area: December 2002

The first aerial attack on Vavoua town was the only one of the attacks documented by Human Rights Watch which appeared to target a military objective. In this attack, the fact that the rebels' military barracks were situated in the city hall, in the middle of the town, contributed to civilian casualties. A forty-nine-year-old Burkinabé market woman from Vavoua described this attack to Human Rights Watch:

> In late-November, it was a Wednesday, a helicopter came from the loyalists at about 6 p.m. I was in the market when the helicopter came from the direction of Daloa and started dropping bombs on the town. I started running, but I fell down and cut my knees. I went into a store and hid there until things quieted down. The plane dropped bombs on the city hall. The rebels had taken the city hall and sous-prefecture, that was where they had their military camps. The city hall was encircled by a wall, with trucks and weapons in the courtyard. The rebels shot at the helicopter, they managed to get one shot at it before it returned to Daloa.

57 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 16, 2003.
58 Interviewed in Guinea, January 2003, on file with Human Rights Watch.
59 James Astill, "British mercenaries find new ferocity in Ivory Coast," *The Guardian*, February 22, 2003.

> Three people were killed in the bombing, they were about ten meters from the city hall. One of the people killed was a Nigerian, I didn't know the others. That was the first time the helicopter came to Vavoua, but I heard that it also went to small villages like Pélézi and Monoko Zohi.[60]

Eyewitness descriptions of other helicopter attacks on other villages indicated that these attacks were clearly indiscriminate in their targeting of civilians. Three attacks on Pélézi, Dania, and Mahapleu resulted in the deaths of at least nineteen civilians, and these attacks represent only a fraction of the total civilian casualties from helicopter attacks. An attack on Mahapleu, which took place in late-December as the rebel and loyalists forces were fighting for control of Man, was a clear example of the type of indiscriminate bombing taking place.

Mahapleu is a small town on the main road fifty-three kilometers east of Man in the direction of Danané. Many people who fled Danané and Man towards the borders with Guinea and Liberia passed Mahapleu on their way out. A twenty-eight-year-old Ivorian driver who had witnessed the helicopter attacks on Danané, was searching for his family in Mahapleu on the day of the attack.

> It was a Wednesday, which is market day in Mahapleu. It was about 1 p.m.... We were walking west...when we heard the helicopter coming from the direction of Man. It flew very low towards the market. The market is just along the big road to Man, and many people in the market came out to look.... We ran in the other direction. It was about sixty or eighty meters from the market when it fired. It fired twice in the direction of the market, with rockets that came out sideways. One of them hit the road and broke the road up into pieces. Some people died from that, from being hit by pieces of the road, rather than from the bomb. Then the helicopter flew into Mahapleu town. It went into the town and bombed the mosque and destroyed it.
>
> There were rebels in the village, but they were at the checkpoints outside, along the road, not in the market.... I helped bury the dead from the helicopter attack. We buried five people that day. There were two young Mossi men, two Dioula: a young man and a girl about thirteen-years-old, and one Yacouba woman who ran a maquis in the market. The next day, three more were found dead, under the stalls in the market. They must have been injured and died while trying to get away. I saw the bodies but I didn't help to bury them. Two were young girls. One had been hit in the back of the head and the other in the stomach. They were covered in blood and so swollen it was hard to tell their ages. The third was a boy, maybe twelve or thirteen years old. I left and spent the night at an encampment in the bush...there was another woman there who had been hurt in the helicopter attack, she died in the bush that night.[61]

There are also indications that in some of the aerial attacks, there may have been deliberate targeting of areas where foreigners were known to reside. For instance, in Pélézi, where there was already friction between the indigenous Niédéboua and the immigrant population, the Niédéboua were allegedly warned by the loyalist forces of the impending aerial attack in a letter. A forty-six-year-old Burkinabé farmer who had a close friend among the Niédéboua described the first aerial attack on Pélézi as follows:

> The loyalist forces gave the Niédéboua villagers a letter, saying that they would bomb the village. My Niédéboua friend and his family left Pélézi after that. The first bombing came at the end of November. An airplane came about 11 or 12 a.m. and circled above Pélézi three times. The rebels fired at it. Later that day a large helicopter came at about 5 p.m. It circled, the rebels fired at it, then it dropped bombs on the foreign quartier and shot around the Socampart store, near the market. It did not touch the Niédéboua quartier. The helicopter dropped nine bombs which left craters about one metre wide and deep.
>
> Five people were killed, others were injured. It was evening so many people were at home. Three Baoulé children (two girls and one boy, all under fifteen-years-old) were killed when one of the bombs dropped in the courtyard of their home. Their bodies were completely destroyed by the bomb. A Burkinabé man

60 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 8, 2003.
61 Human Rights Watch interview, Guinea, March 1, 2003.

named Salam died from a second bomb dropped about one hundred meters from the one that killed the children. A Nigerian woman died from her injuries two days later, in Vavoua, from a third bomb dropped in the vicinity.

Everyone went to the bush that night. The rebels came and told people to come back when it was over. Then there was another bombing, about one week later. This time it was a plane, it flew much quicker than the helicopter. The plane came at about the same time of day, between 5 and 6 p.m. It also dropped bombs and fired shots. Again, the Niédéboua quartier was not affected. The second bombing hit the Blanco bar, in the middle of the village. The rebels were about twenty meters from the Blanco bar, at the roundabout in the middle of the village.[62]

Government forces launched another helicopter gunship attack at the end of December, targeting a fish market and local boats crossing the lake in Menakro, a lakeside village in central Côte d'Ivoire fifty kilometers north of the cease-fire line. This attack prompted a swift response from the French, whose military forces confirmed that at least eleven civilians were killed in the attack. A French military source said, "People were shot at like rabbits."[63] The government claimed that the attack was aimed at rebel troops who were present in the boats and village, but President Gbagbo agreed to ground the helicopter gunships and stop using mercenaries after the French government strongly condemned the incident.[64]

Targeted helicopter attacks on the Zouan-Hounien area: April 2003

Despite the government's commitment to ground the helicopters in December 2002, the helicopters were used again in January and when government forces launched a new offensive on rebel positions along the Liberian border in April 2003. Helicopter attacks targeted Danané, Vavoua, Mahapleu, Bin Houyé and Zouan-Hounien between April 6 and April 16, 2003. This was not the first time they had been used along the border area—Danané, Toulepleu and Bin Houyé were all bombed since January—but this time international agencies on the ground had access to civilian victims from the attacks. While some of the bombings no doubt targeted military objectives, others were clearly indiscriminate or targeted civilians.

Initial helicopter attacks on Zouan-Hounien—aimed at military objectives—had taken place on April 6. Most of the civilian population fled after these attacks, leaving only a small community sheltering in the Catholic Mission, which included a medical center for the treatment of Burullic ulcer patients.

Following the aerial attack, Liberian and Gueré militias entered the town but soon left, taking most of the remaining Gueré civilians with them. On April 13, rebel forces re-captured the town. Fearing further aerial attacks, the remaining Muslim and northern civilian community took shelter at the Catholic Mission. On April 14, the government helicopters returned and proceeded to launch an intensive fifteen-minute assault on the compound of the Catholic mission, including some fifty rockets, despite the fact that the medical center was clearly visible. Civilians fleeing the attack were shot down by the helicopter according to witnesses. At least four civilians were killed and more than twenty were injured in the assault, mostly sick children who had been receiving treatment in the center. The following day, the remaining patients and staff from the mission fled the area on foot.[65] The attack on Zouan-Hounien constituted a serious violation of international humanitarian law, as it was a deliberate attack on civilians in a hospital where no military objective was present.

A further fifty civilians were wounded in the helicopter attacks on Danané and Mahapleu on April 16, according to the medical humanitarian organization Médecins sans Frontières, which treated some of the wounded. Nine

62 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 9, 2003.
63 Christophe Ayad & Jean-Dominique Merchet, "La Côte-d'Ivoire s'embrase, la France s'embourbe," *Liberation*, January 3, 2003, at www.liberation.fr (accessed January 9, 2003).
64 French government spokesperson, press briefing, Paris, January 2, 2003, at www.diplomatie.fr/actual/declarations/pp/20030102.html (accessed May 16, 2003).
65 Inza Kigbafory, "Comment le MI-24 a bombardé un centre anti-ulcère de Burili," L'Inter, April 22, 2003, at www.presseci.com/linter/archive/1487.html (accessed May 20, 2003) and confidential communication on file with Human Rights Watch.

children, thirteen women and some elderly people were among the victims treated by the NGO at the Man hospital following the attacks on those areas.[66]

Despite overwhelming evidence of its deployment of the Mi-24 helicopters, the Ivorian government denied the attacks. The follow-up committee for the peace accords, which included diplomatic representatives of the U.S. and French governments and other officials, visited Danané on April 9 to evaluate the situation. Following the visit, it issued a statement expressing concern over the situation in the west and calling for the Ivorian government to ground its helicopters.[67] Following this incident, further helicopter attacks have not been reported, but the government continued to scale up its equipment through May 2003, including through the purchase of Romanian Puma helicopters.[68]

Arbitrary arrests and detentions

Government forces were responsible for scores of arbitrary arrests, detentions and "disappearances" in towns and areas under their control. Some of those arbitrarily arrested and detained were released and others were later found dead. However Human Rights Watch fears that some of those detained have been "disappeared" given that a number of people who were last seen in government custody have yet to be accounted for.

It is impossible to provide a definitive number of the "disappeared," given the massive displacement and flight of foreign nationals that has taken place in the west. Hopefully a number of the people who are unaccounted for will be identified through family tracing in the displaced and refugee camps. Nonetheless, forensics investigation may be required to establish the fate of some of those who were last seen in the custody of government forces.

Witnesses from Vavua described the pattern of arbitrary arrests and detentions to Human Rights Watch. One such account went as follows:

> There was no military camp in Vavua before the crisis, but some loyalist forces came to Vavua, after the rebels took Korhogo, towards the end of September. Maybe about 1,000 came to Vavua. They made checkpoints at all the entrances to the town. They would beat Burkinabe, take them away and then you wouldn't see them again. The military were all Ivorian. The loyalists usually didn't harass the townspeople, but they did stop men who came to the town from outside, those who came in to buy petrol or other goods. They would stop them and ask them for identity cards, and if you were Burkinabé or Malien, they would beat you and take you out of town. I don't know exactly what happened to them.
>
> I saw the loyalist soldiers take one man I knew: he was an older man in his sixties, a Malien named Mr. Koné, who was a guard at a store called Des Edines. It was 10 a.m., and I was in the commercial quarter with my friends, when I saw the man in a "karego" [military truck] with at least six soldiers, all wearing green, with automatic weapons. There were two civilians in the vehicle but I only recognized Mr. Koné. He was kneeling with his hands tied behind his back, and the soldiers were holding guns at his neck. The vehicle went in the direction of Seguela.[69]

In other government-held towns, the armed forces rounded up groups of northern and immigrant individuals, sometimes at night after the curfew, and then detained them without charges. In one case documented by Human Rights Watch, members of the state security forces in Duékoué lied to family members who inquired about a detainee's whereabouts in early 2003. The victim described his arbitrary arrest and temporary "disappearance" to Human Rights Watch.

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66 "Scores of wounded civilians in western part of Ivory Coast after military attack," press release, Médecins sans Frontières, April 17, 2003, at www.msf.org (accessed May 19, 2003).

67 Laurent Banguet, "Fresh fighting in Ivory Coast, despite unity govt's 'steps towards peace'", Agence France Presse, April 19, 2003.

68 "Deux hélicoptères Puma roumains pour le président ivoirien," Agence France Presse, May 15, 2003.

69 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 8, 2003.

At 3:00 a.m, a group of about fifteen gendarmes and military knocked and told me to open the door. I refused, and they said they would shoot the door if I didn't open it. I opened and they came in and searched the whole place, then took 655,000 CFA from me....They took me to the police station, but when my family came to the station the next day, they said I wasn't there. I was in the 'botte.' A man in the 'botte' doesn't know what's happening outside. The botte is small if you're ten people. We were twenty-one people in there....I was there for five days. My boss came to ask if I was there, they refused and said I wasn't there. My boss offered money to free me, he offered 200,000 CFA....The commander said he was taking us to be killed in Daloa. He said that he called Daloa to give the names to the BAE at the prefecture.

On the way to Daloa, we encountered French forces. The French asked why they were taking us and they said we were assailants.... We were brought back to Duékoué, spent three more days there and then freed. They never say why they bring you. Even when you're freed, they don't say why they brought you there, even after a week.[70]

Treatment of wounded and captured rebels

Human Rights Watch was not able to verify the numbers of and treatment accorded to wounded and captured rebel fighters and sympathizers by the government. However, the very paucity of wounded and captured fighters is troubling. As a general rule, the numbers of captured and wounded in situations of conflict far exceed the number of individuals killed outright. However, there have been far fewer captured and wounded fighters on either side than might have been expected in the Ivorian conflict.[71]

An article published in mid-December in one of the local newspapers was hardly reassuring on this issue. The last paragraph of the article described the treatment of six captured rebels, individuals who should have been accorded humane treatment in accordance with international humanitarian law. Instead, "[S]ix rebels were captured on the frontline at Blolékin. Undressed and naked as earthworms, they were well tied up like game in a hunt. Thrown down on the meeting place of the FANCIs, each loyalist was able to inflict a correction in the measure of the crimes they had committed against the people of Côte d'Ivoire." In case the readers had any uncertainty, the first paragraph clarified their fate by stating that all six had been killed after torture.[72]

On a more positive note, when wounded fighters or fighters who are otherwise "hors de combat"[73] have been detained, both sides have permitted humanitarian agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit detention sites.

VI. ATTACKS ON CIVILIANS AND OTHER NON-COMBATANTS BY THE IVORIAN REBEL GROUPS

"At the beginning the rebels were proper... They were more correct than the loyalists."[74]

Abuses in MPCI-controlled territory

Human Rights Watch collected dozens of testimonies from civilians who lived in MPCI-controlled zones, including some who were unsympathetic to the rebels' cause, which consistently confirmed that in the first few months the Ivorian rebels, in particular the MPCI, generally respected civilians in the towns they captured in the north. The MPCI conducted meetings with the civilian population in each town, explained their aims, and told civilians that they were not there to attack them. In Man, for instance, the rebels told civilians after the fighting was over, "Come out, we have liberated Man for you, do not be afraid of us," and they "broke into the storehouse

70 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 3, 2003.
71 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, April 7, 2003.
72 Edouard Gonto, "Six rebelles tués, Des refugiés libériens en renfort aux FANCI," *Soir Info*, December 16, 2003, p.2.
73 Literally "out of combat," the term refers to individuals who are not actively participating in hostilities and can include combatants who are detained, wounded, sick or have surrendered their arms.
74 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 24, 2003.

where the loyalist military had stored their food, which they had just been supplied. The rebels took the tins of sardines and gave them out to the people."[75]

There are several credible motives for this pattern of behavior. One reason is that the MPCI's occupation of towns and villages between September and November were mostly in the north, where the vast majority of the population shared the ethnicity and religious affiliation of the rebels, and had experienced discrimination under the southern-dominated security forces. The MPCI therefore viewed itself as a liberation movement and wanted to maintain its reputation as such among both the local and international community. A second plausible reason was that initially the MPCI had some financial resources and was able to pay for much of the food and other material consumed by their troops. Many northerners and foreign immigrants who lived in or passed through MPCI-held areas in this period noted that the MPCI were sympathetic to civilians and offered food, medicine and other aid to civilians in need. Numerous international aid workers and journalists, many of them experienced in other African conflicts where civilians are routinely targeted by rebel groups, remarked on the positive behavior of the MPCI troops towards civilians in the first months.

The key exception to this initial good behavior was the treatment of government officials, members of the FPI, and others perceived as supporting the government. It must also be noted that the population of Ivorians of southern ethnicities residing in rebel-controlled areas, who were generally perceived to be pro-government, was far smaller than the number of northerners residing in the government-controlled zone, which may have also reduced the scale of the abuses. A retired Dioula official told Human Rights Watch, "What happens in Abidjan is the same as what happens on the other side, it's reciprocal. The only difference is that there were fewer southerners in the north than there are northerners and foreigners in Abidjan. Otherwise it would be the same."[76]

In addition to government officials and perceived supporters, a number of thieves and looters—including some rebel fighters—were executed by the MPCI rebel group in various towns in the north. The rebels freed all the prisoners in the towns they captured, and some joined the rebel forces, while others resorted to looting once free. The MPCI claimed it was unable to expend the resources to administer the prisons, therefore many of the individuals accused of theft were executed rather than detained.

Abuses by all three rebel groups in the west

With the beginning of the western offensive and the introduction of not only the MPCI, but also the MJP and MPIGO troops into western towns and villages, abuses against civilians became far more systematic. Reprisal killings against civilians, particularly members of civilian self defense committees, increased dramatically following the re-capture of Man by the MPCI and MJP rebels in late-December. As the MPIGO rebel group moved into the Gueré areas around Toulepleu and Bangolo, which were generally pro-government and had substantial self-defense committee activity, there were also increasing accounts of reprisal killings. In addition, Human Rights Watch was told that as time passed and the salaries and provisions available to the Ivorian rebels dwindled, MPCI rebel troop behavior deteriorated even in the northern zone, with increasing incidents of looting and rape reported in MPCI-controlled territory by May 2003.

Abuses also clearly proliferated with the increased use of Liberian and Sierra Leonean fighters, particularly within the MPIGO rebel group. While the following sections focus on the abuses committed by members of the Ivorian rebel groups, the numerous abuses committed by the Liberian forces working with mainly the MPIGO rebel group are addressed separately in a later chapter (see below, chapter VIII).

Attacks on government officials and government supporters

From the start of the conflict on September 19, members of the MPCI were responsible for a number of attacks on gendarmes, police, and other members of the government armed forces who were "hors de combat" or non-

75 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 8, 2003.
76 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 9, 2003.

combatants at the time of the attacks.[77] The massacre of gendarmes in Bouaké is the worst such incident to come to light, but there may well have been others. In Bouaké, over fifty detained gendarmes and members of their families were systematically executed in early October by the MPCI forces.[78] According to Amnesty International's report on the massacre, the killings were apparently in reprisal for government attacks on northerners, and during the events there were several references made to the Youpougon massacre of October 2000.[79]

Human Rights Watch was told that initially "[o]nly the police and gendarmes were chased because it was they who harassed the northerners and foreigners with bribes and extortion prior to the war and in Abidjan. Therefore the rebels retaliated against them....The rebels announced in all the towns with megaphones that no one should help the police and gendarmes to leave."[80]

Human Rights Watch documented a number of cases of abuses against government officials and supporters in various northern and western towns controlled by the MPCI prior to November and by all three rebel groups after November 2003. Based on this research, it is does not appear that these attacks were part of a deliberate policy of ethnic targeting, however, further investigation is necessary to establish this beyond a doubt. Generally, targeting appeared to have been based on function rather than on ethnicity, and in some cases appears to have been based on the individuals' behavior in their functions prior to the war. For instance, in at least two cases the rebels initially detained but later released government officials unharmed after questioning local residents about whether the official had been "kind."[81]

Targeting of FPI members

Members of the rebel groups sometimes targeted people who had been politically active as members of the ruling FPI party. Many civilians in the north and west are RDR and UDPCI members and were openly sympathetic to the aims of the MPCI and the smaller groups. FPI members often fled the north and west, or hid among local communities when the rebels took control. The targeting of FPI members appears to have been partly linked to pre-existing political tension, as there had been considerable election-related violence between rival political parties prior to the war, and to suspicions that FPI members would support the government. An Ivorian Yacouba couple described their fears as members of the FPI, and the difficulties of disassociating political and ethnic affiliation in the charged environment.

> We are Yacouba and members of the FPI. We were active in the electoral campaign for Laurent Gbagbo. The people of my village, who are mostly Yacouba, asked us 'Why do you support Gbagbo? He's a Bété.' They didn't understand that one could be Yacouba and support Gbagbo. When General Guei died, the FPI supporters were accused of having killed him.... The youths came and destroyed the FPI office and our house....Most FPI members went to Man....We stayed a month, then returned to the village and stayed with friends....Then the war began in Bouaké. Then Danané, Sanguiné, Man, Biankouma. The rebels came to us around December 15. They were Yacouba, in civilian clothes and uniforms, with red bandanas on their heads. There were also [other ethnicities]..... They said they came to avenge the death of General Guei....They told the village chief not to mistreat the FPI people. Then they asked the head of the village to give them young men for recruitment. The village chief gave them, he had to. My name was on the list. The men left and I hid. That night, the rebels came in a truck. I heard them say to the village chief, 'Where are the FPI youths, we've come to kill them.' I left through the window. I saw the rebels threaten the youth leader with a gun, saying, 'show us where the FPI are, or we will kill you.'[82]

77 All parties to the conflict, including the rebel groups, are obliged to respect the fundamental guarantees established by international humanitarian law. The obligation to respect the provisions of Common Article 3 and Protocol II apply as much to the rebel groups as to the government. See chapter X on Côte d'Ivoire's legal obligations.

78 Amnesty International, "Côte d'Ivoire: Une Suite de Crimes Impunis," February 27, 2003.

79 Ibid.

80 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 9, 2003.

81 Human Rights Watch interviews, Abidjan, March 24, 2003 and Guinea, March 2003.

82 Interviewed in Guinea, January 1, 2003, on file with Human Rights Watch.

Torture and mutilation of gendarmes and other government officials

The rebels attacked Danané, a strategic town less than thirty kilometers from the Liberian border, between 8 and 9 a.m. on November 28, 2002. There was shooting for several hours until the rebels had captured the town. According to civilian accounts, civilian deaths in Danané appear to have been generally the result of stray bullets and shrapnel from the government's helicopter attacks in mid-afternoon.[83]

In the following days, the rebels continued to search for gendarmes and other members of the government forces, as well as members of the FPI party, who were suspected of supporting the government. Not all of these gendarmes were killed in combat. It is clear that some were killed after being wounded and tortured. An Ivorian Yacouba man who fled Danané was horrified by what he witnessed:

> When I was leaving Danané, there were bodies thrown in the water. [The rebels] had killed four gendarmes, we are not used to seeing bodies on the side of the road. One man, they had cut his tendons at the back of his foot and thrown him in the water. One gendarme they killed, they put his eyes out with a knife and broke his head....I also saw two thieves being beaten in front of the [bank]. It's horrible when you see these things.
>
> The rebels were mixed—Liberian Yacouba and Gio and native Ivorians. Even some of the Liberian refugees joined the rebels. The Liberians had their cocaine in white bottles, when they do that, they can do anything. The rebels said they had come to avenge Guei and that they would kill Gbagbo and eat him. They used to sing, 'We will kill Gbagbo and drink water from his brain.'[84]

Government officials in the region were of mixed ethnicity, including from the indigenous Yacouba ethnicity. Still, fears of reprisals led even some Yacouba officials to leave. A young Ivorian woman described her family's flight from a village in the west shortly after the rebels arrived in early December.

> We saw the rebels arrive in a jeep and a four-by-four. They had soldiers and youths who did not seem to be there by choice. They asked where to find the customs office and the gendarmerie. They were after the forces of law and order. The youth...supported and helped the rebels triumphantly. They showed them where the corps-habillees were, their houses, the town hall. After ransacking the town hall, they organized a meeting with the population. 'Don't panic, we're here to help you. We're not after the people, only the administration and the corps-habillées.' That night there was a curfew at 8 p.m. All the government officials had fled the days before. [The rebels] were looking for people who hid the weapons and ammunition of the escaped gendarmes. Some people were taken hostage and tortured. They shot them in the hand. They went to the house of the head of the military brigade, who lived near us. They turned on the lights, turned on the taps, broke the doors and totally ransacked the inside of the house. We were afraid and went to hide. [My father] didn't feel too threatened because he's Yacouba, but my mother couldn't bear the tension. The next day, December 2, we took everything we could and fled....[85]

Summary executions in and around Man: December 2002

Man was captured by a mixed force of largely MPCI and MJP rebels on November 28, 2002, but they did not hold it for long. A government offensive attacked Man on the heels of a French operation to evacuate foreign Western nationals. Government forces proceeded to hold Man for more than two weeks, until the rebels re-took the town on December 19, 2002. Following the government occupation of Man, the rebels' attitudes towards any suspected government sympathizers hardened considerably and many of the reports of abuses in the town date from this period.

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83 According to Human Rights Watch research, this air attack appears to have focused on military objectives such as Danané's military camp on the western side of the town, which was occupied by the rebel forces by midday. There were civilian casualties, but these were probably unintentional victims who happened to be in or around military objectives during the attacks.

84 Human Rights Watch interview, Guinea, March 1, 2003.

85 Interviewed in Guinea, January 29, 2003, on file with Human Rights Watch.

Human Rights Watch was told that "when [the rebels] came the first time, they did not do any damage. They were almost kind. They explained to the people that they didn't bear a grudge against the villagers, only against Gbagbo, and they had come to liberate the country. But this time when they came back on December 19, they totally changed. They were nastier and it was clear that that they came to commit crimes."[86] The most credible explanation for what was a marked change in the behavior of the rebels is that during the government occupation of Man, the government forces executed numerous civilians, often with the assistance of local civilians, particularly self-defense committee members. Once the rebels recaptured the town, they learned of these abuses and specifically targeted those civilians, many of them self-defense committee members, who had collaborated with the government forces in targeting civilians.

Many civilians in Man had fled to the churches for refuge during the days of heavy fighting that preceded the rebel's re-entry into the town. Displaced civilians at one of Man's churches, the Bethany center, witnessed the summary execution of two government officials there in late-December.

> The rebels were mixed—Mandingoes [Liberians], Sierra Leoneans, Senaphous—all speaking their own languages, some speaking French or English. Many wore uniform. Some of them are wearing the uniforms of the corps-habillés, which they took from the bodies of the gendarmes they killed. When the rebels arrived, they said they would not hurt civilians, still, some went and tried to steal things, and sometimes these thieves would be killed by the other fighters.
>
> While we were in the Bethany church, the rebels came all the time. They would come in groups of fifteen or so, they would shout and ask 'Hey, are there any Angolans, and gendarmes, or corps-habillés here?' The people in the church would say 'No, no one like that here.' The rebels wouldn't bother you if you were a civilian. One day the rebels came and took away two men from the church. One of these men was a former director of primary education.... Someone else in the crowd at the church must have ...gone out and informed the rebels that there were two corps-habillés in the church. The rebels came that night, they encircled the church, and they went straight to the room where the man was sleeping. They even knew which room number he was in. They took the two men out of the room and shot them both behind a flowerbed, in the courtyard of the church. I was sleeping when the rebels came, but one of my friends woke me up and told me, 'The rebels have taken two men and [*passes his forefinger across his throat*].'
>
> The next morning, everyone in the church went to see what had happened—the bodies of the two men were there on the ground, we saw them, shot in the chest from the front. After that, everyone was afraid to stay in the church and most people fled.[87]

Sexual violence

Human Rights Watch documented several cases of rape committed by the rebel forces and believes that the actual incidence of rape was far higher given that rape tends to be underreported by victims due to the social stigma attached to the crime. In some instances, it is unclear which rebel group was responsible, but it is likely that members of all three rebel groups committed rape and other forms of sexual violence. For instance, when the rebels returned to the Man area in late-December, a number of young women were taken "as wives" by the rebels, probably by members of the MPCI and MJP groups. A family member of some of the victims told Human Rights Watch:

> Among the people taken from my village were seven women from my family: my nieces, my cousins, and my little sister. They were taken between the 24th and 26th of December. The youngest were forced to be the wives of the rebels, the others had to cook. They stayed with the rebels for ten days. Then the rebels told them they were free to go because another group of rebels, those of MPIGO, would come to replace them.[88]

86 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 2, 2003.
87 Human Rights Watch interview, Guinea, March 1, 2003.
88 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 2, 2003.

The incidence of rape appears to have increased when the three rebel groups moved into the traditionally pro-government Gueré territory around Toulepleu and Bangolo, where the rapes were sometimes, although not necessarily always, based on ethnic affiliation.

A Burkinabé woman told Human Rights Watch about the rape of her twelve-year-old niece by four Yacouba-speaking members of the rebel forces. The attack took place in a small village off the road between Bangolo and Duékoué—a largely Gueré area. Her aunt said, "They raped my niece, she was twelve years old—a little girl who didn't even have breasts—she was crying and crying but still they took her. She couldn't even walk afterwards."[89]

Human Rights Watch was also told of one case in which a group of young women and girls were held in sexual slavery by the Ivorian rebels. In this case, five girls and young women aged fourteen to twenty were taken from encampments around Toulepleu to a military camp on the border—from its location and the description, probably one run by the MPIGO group. The women described a small camp where approximately thirty Ivorian soldiers lived and Liberians came and went every day after receiving orders. The girls and women were held there for at least one week. During the days they washed clothes and cooked, and they were raped every night. They were threatened at gunpoint that they would be killed if they tried to escape. While the Liberian fighters clearly worked with the Ivorian rebels and even took instructions from them, they apparently lived elsewhere.[90]

VII. THE ROLE OF LIBERIAN FORCES IN THE WEST

Government forces fighting in the west consisted of a large number of irregular forces: mercenaries from other African and European countries, Liberian fighters, many of them loosely linked to abusive Liberian rebel groups such as the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), Liberian refugees recruited locally and internationally from refugee camps, and Ivorian Gueré civilians, many of whom were traditionally pro-government and FPI and were recruited from an existing network of village self-defense committees and youth groups transformed into militias.

The rebel forces also collaborated with a number of irregular forces, the bulk of whom were Liberian and Sierra Leonean fighters, some of them linked to abusive Liberian government militias run by President Taylor.[91] Some of the fighters were known veterans of the brutal wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone forces, such as indicted war criminal Sam "Mosquito" Bockarie, who was killed in May 2003 after spending several months in western Côte d'Ivoire. Others were more recent recruits from Liberia, including hundreds of child soldiers. As the war in the west intensified, the rebel groups also recruited significant numbers of local civilians, some by force. Others were drawn by the lure of loot or vengeance for the increasing cycle of ethnic abuses.

This array of irregular forces working with both sides, many of whom were recruited with the promise of payment but were then given more or less of a license to loot the civilian population, was responsible for a wide range of abuses against the civilian population.

Use of foreign mercenaries by the Ivorian government

According to numerous eyewitness testimonies, foreign mercenaries, including nationals from African and European countries, were used as supplemental forces by the government of Côte Ivoire as early as October 2002.[92] Their use in offensives on Man, Toulepleu and other locations has been documented by Human Rights

89 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 3, 2003.

90 Human Rights Watch telephone interview, New York, June 4, 2003.

91 Human Rights Watch interview, Freetown, March 11, 2003.

92 Under international humanitarian law, mercenaries are defined as "any person who: (a) is specially recruited locally or abroad in order to fight in an armed conflict; (b) does, in fact, take a direct part in hostilities; (c) is motivated to take part in the hostilities essentially by the desire for private gain and, in fact, is promised, by or on behalf of a Party to the conflict, material compensation substantially in excess of that promised or paid to combatants of similar ranks and functions in the

Watch and many international media reports from Côte d'Ivoire. Their continuing use, particularly for highly technical positions such as piloting the Mi-24 helicopter gunships, has been reported through April 2003, despite several public statements by President Gbagbo in which he committed to cease using mercenary forces.[93]

The likely involvement of these mercenaries in several incidents constituting grave breaches of international humanitarian law, including the helicopter attacks on Mahapleu, the Vavoua area, and Zouan-Hounien is a matter of considerable concern and requires further investigation.

Recruitment of Liberian fighters by the Ivorian rebel groups

> "In the beginning when the rebels arrived everyone was happy because the loyalists in Toulepleu were always bothering us. People danced in the streets, we said that the rebels who had come would save the world. Later we saw it wasn't true. Later, we were not happy. We realized the Liberians were not nice." *Twenty-two-year-old Dioula woman from Bin Houye*[94]

The MPCI was clearly an Ivorian movement with a domestic agenda, albeit with some support from Burkina Faso. The nature and aims of the two smaller rebel groups, particularly the MPIGO group, are far less straightforward, but it is clear that there were substantial differences between the MPCI and the two smaller groups, not only in terms of their records of abuses against civilians, but also in terms of their aims. The MJP appears to have been mixed Ivorian and Liberian, but largely coalesced around the supporters of Gen. Guei. MPIGO, the least Ivorian of the groups, had a nominal Ivorian leadership but was almost entirely composed of Liberian and Sierra Leonean mercenaries whose main interest in the war was economic. As time passed, the Liberian forces gained ascendancy within the group and challenged the nominal Ivorian leadership, causing serious rifts with the MPCI.

There were reportedly at least one thousand Liberian Gio fighters constituting the bulk of MPIGO's force when it attacked Toulepleu at the end of November 2002,[95] a signal that a new and alarming phase of the Ivorian conflict had begun. While both the government and rebel forces later relied on Liberian mercenaries for their military campaigns in the west, all the information available to Human Rights Watch indicates that the Ivorian rebel groups were the first to introduce Liberian fighters into the Ivorian conflict.

After being initially repulsed by the loyalist forces, the MPIGO Liberians gained control of Toulepleu by December 2, 2002. Most of the civilian population fled the town. Capturing Toulepleu was significant because the town is in Gueré territory just south of an ethnic line dividing the Ivorian Yacouba and the Gueré. It also lies along the border between the Liberian counties of Nimba and Grand Gedeh, each of which has its version of the Yacouba and Gueré[96] ethnic groups: the Gio and Krahn, respectively.

According to information gathered by Human Rights Watch, the Liberian Gio forces in Toulepleu initially concentrated on looting everything possible, but were not systematically physically abusive to the civilian

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armed forces of that Party; (d)is neither a national of a Party to the conflict nor a resident of territory controlled by a Party to the conflict; (e) is not a member of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict; and (f) has not been sent by a State which is not a Party to the conflict on official duty as a member of its armed forces." Article 47, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977.

93 In an ironic turn of events, some of the South African, Angolan and Ukrianian mercenaries were reportedly granted Ivorian nationality within a few hours in order to evade the government's commitment not to use foreign mercenaries. See Francois Soudan, "Le Choix de Gbagbo," *Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent*, February 9-15, 2003, p.13.

94 Interviewed in Guinea in March, 2003, on file with Human Rights Watch.

95 Confidential report on file with Human Rights Watch.

96 The Gueré are part of a larger ethnic group called the Wê, which includes the Gueré, the Wobé, and the Gnaboua, all of whom have traditional ties to the Bété ethnic group. The Gueré "homeland" extends from Toulepleu east to the Sassandra river, north towards Bangolo, and south to Tai. Areas occupied by the Wê people extend further north east of the Gueré area. In this report, the term Gueré is used specifically to refer to the Gueré ethnic group, rather than the Wê people and area.

population. Acts of violence did occur, however, particularly in connection with the looting (see below, chapter VIII). The government attacked the town with helicopter gunships on December 2, targeting the transformers and knocking out the electricity, which displaced many people, but after a week, even some of the Gueré townspeople returned. For the Liberians, looting was the main activity, but "once the rebels had pillaged the houses, we could live in peace with them," as one civilian summed it up.[97] The Liberian rebels in Toulepleu were initially all Gio from Nimba county, but were later joined by a contingent of Yacouba from Danané and two more contingents, including some Krahn from Grand Gedeh.[98] The Sierra Leonean forces were part of the MPIGO force.[99]

By mid-December, there was a schism between the MPCI and the Liberian-backed MPIGO, which appears to have been related to the way the Liberians and Sierra Leoneans treated the civilian population. The problem apparently started in Danané, where the MPCI asked the Dioula population to help them by contributing money. The Dioula community apparently did so, pooling together a contribution to the MPCI. This angered the MPIGO, who began searching the Dioulas and killed two Dioula civilians, one after he refused to let MPIGO fighters rape his wife, the other for his money.[100] Apparently the MPCI tried to stop the MPIGO from stealing from and harassing the civilian population, at which point the MPIGO threatened to kill all the Dioula if the MPCI attacked them. Human Rights Watch learned that a deal was struck whereby the MPCI installed itself in Man and used that town as a regional base, leaving Danané and the western strip of towns along the border to the MPIGO.

The uneasy deal struck between the two rebel allies more or less held until early March 2003.[101] By April, there was increasing friction between Felix Doh, the nominal Ivorian leader of MPIGO, and the Liberian and Sierra Leonean forces within the group. The friction may have been due to Doh's efforts to curb the abuses of the mercenary fighters, or to internal power disputes between Doh and the Liberian and Sierra Leonean leaders. Regardless of the exact cause, this friction culminated in the death of Doh, reportedly at the hands of Sierra Leonean ex-RUF leader Sam Bockarie, at the end of April. Even prior to this event, however, the decision to let the MPIGO and their Liberians control the border strip had devastating consequences in the west, particularly after the government recruited its own Liberian mercenaries, turning the war into an extension of the Liberian conflict, with many terrible implications for civilians.

With help from its Liberian recruits, the government's forces regained control of Blolékin, located between Toulepleu and Guiglo, by December 12. By early-January 2003, loyalist forces had regrouped with a full contingent of Liberian recruits. The government's forces attacked Toulepleu, capturing the town on January 12, 2003.[102] That day, four local Ivorian Red Cross volunteers disappeared in Toulepleu; their bodies were recovered weeks later.[103]

In the following weeks, the rebels launched several counterattacks, and many villages around the town were burned and destroyed. By pitting Liberians against Liberians and reviving the Liberian ethnic feud between the Krahn and Gio on Ivorian soil, the government intensified the situation.[104] It is very likely at this point that the

97 Interviewed in Guinea, February, 2003, on file with Human Rights Watch.
98 The Krahn forces working with the rebels appear to have been guns for hire. Some of the Krahn fighters told a Western resident of the town that they joined the rebels because "they had nothing better to do and wanted to fight because that was all they knew, having grown up in war and refugee camps." Human Rights Watch telephone interview, May 22, 2003.
99 Ibid.
100 Interviewed in Guinea, March 2003, on file with Human Rights Watch.
101 Ibid.
102 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 25, 2003.
103 "Mort de 4 voluntaires: la Croix-Rouge maintient ses activités dans l'ouest ivoirien," Agence France Presse, March 19, 2003. Responsibility for the deaths of the humanitarian workers remains unclear.
104 Former Liberian president Samuel Doe was a Krahn from Grand Gedeh county who conspired with Thomas Quiwonkpa, a Gio army sergeant from Nimba county, in the 1980 coup that toppled the Tolbert regime. The two men later became rivals for power. Quiwonkpa returned to Monrovia as the head of the National Patriotic Forces of Liberia (NPFL) in a 1985 coup attempt, but failed and was killed by Doe's forces. Doe then reacted against supporters of Quiwonkpa, particularly the Gio from Nimba county, who suffered terrible reprisals by the Doe government, as did many other Doe opponents. Doe also cultivated an alliance with members of the Mandingo ethnic group. This background was among the reasons why Charles Taylor received substantial support from Nimba county, particularly from among the Gio and Mano people, and why

conflict changed dramatically in terms of the treatment of civilians as the Krahn-Gio feud fuelled an ethnic conflict between the Gueré and Yacouba in the west.

Recruitment of government-backed Liberian rebel fighters

The government also relied on Liberians to shore up its efforts, and recruited two pools of Liberian combatants. Firstly, it appears that in December the government recruited hundreds of Liberian Krahn fighters from the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) faction, who were reportedly preparing an Ivorian-based front for their war against Taylor even prior to the onset of the Ivorian conflict in September 2002.[105] As infighting increased within the LURD, these Krahn fighters coalesced in a new splinter Liberian faction called the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), whose links with the Ivorian government has been documented in several recent reports.[106] The second group of Liberian fighters recruited by the Ivorian government were refugees, mainly recruited from Nicla refugee camp near Guiglo, but also from refugee transit centers in Abidjan. Reports of refugee recruitment later emerged from as far afield as Ghana.[107]

Some of the Liberian recruits fighting with both the Ivorian government and rebel forces included former child soldiers[108] and other veterans of the first brutal Liberian war and the war in Sierra Leone. Human rights groups have documented an atrocious catalogue of abuses against civilians committed by the Liberian government and rebel groups not only in the first war in the 1990s, but also more recently in Monrovia and in Lofa, Liberia's northern county.[109] The recruitment of Liberian mercenaries, including child soldiers, from groups with a well-established history of serious violations, was grossly irresponsible on the part on the part of the Ivorian government and an invitation to further atrocities, this time against Ivorian civilians and immigrants.

The first reports of the government using Liberian fighters dates to the counterattack on Blolékin in the second week of December 2002, after MPIGO's advances in the west. Formalization of contacts between the Ivorian government and key Krahn members of LURD apparently took place in Abidjan in late-December 2002 and early January 2003.[110] The precise terms and brokers of the deal struck between the Ivorian government and members of the Liberian rebel group remain unclear. However, it is certain that many were recruited with the promise of salaries and arms and an agreement that once successful in their mission on Ivorian soil, they could retain their weapons and return to Liberia. For instance, in February 2003, "child soldiers [were] told that if they liberate the area around Bin Houyé, then they will be allowed to keep their guns and return to Liberia to fight Taylor."[111]

Despite government denials, there were key Ivorian individuals, including some members of the government armed forces, who acted as nominal commanders of the Liberian contingent, and intermediaries brought supplies of petrol and bottled water from Guiglo and Duékoué to positions in the west such as Péhé and Toulepleu. Tensions rose when the recruits did not receive their promised payment from the government. Human Rights Watch was informed that some of the Liberians who were recruited with the lure of salaries turned to looting and

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Taylor's forces have persecuted the Krahn and Mandingo. See also Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, (Hurst & Company: London,) 1999, pp. 52-74.

105 Document on file with Human Rights Watch, May 30, 2003.

106 International Crisis Group, "Tackling Liberia: the Eye of the Regional Storm," April 30, 2003, pp.20-24; Report of the U.N. Panel of Experts, S/2003/498.

107A.C. Ohene, "Swoop on Bududuram," *Ghanaian Chronicle*, February 24, 2003. http://allafrica.com/stories/200302250402.html

108 In this report, the word "child" refers to anyone under the age of eighteen. Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) defines a child as "every human being under the age of eighteen years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." CRC, G.A. Res. 44/25, U.N. doc A/RES/44/25, ratified by Côte Ivoire on February 4, 1991.

109 See, "Back to the Brink: War Crimes by Liberian Government and Rebels," *Human Rights Watch Report*, Vol.14, No.4 (A), May 2002, and "Liberian Refugees in Guinea: Refoulement, Militarization of Camps, and Other Protection Concerns," *Human Rights Watch Report*, Vol.14, No.8 (A), November 2002.

110 Report of the U.N. Panel of Experts on Liberia, S/2003/498.

111 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 26, 2003.

other abuses when the Ivorian government did not deliver on its promises (see below, chapter VIII). An observer in the area told Human Rights Watch:

> Mercenaries are recruited in Tobli [Liberia]. When they come, they don't come along the main road, they arrive in Péhé. When they arrive in Péhé they discover that what they have been told about Gbagbo paying them is not true and they take it out on the population. They speak the same language, Gueré, as the local population, same ethnicity, but after some days and after drugs and drinking, they take it out on the local population.[112]

One disgruntled Liberian recruit at a checkpoint told a civilian passerby, "Oh, you're from Abidjan, well the government brought us to defend your families, but we have not been given five francs. Gbagbo is not paying us, so we need your car and money."[113]

The government-backed Liberian forces, later called the Grand West Liberation Front (Front de Liberation du Grand Ouest, FLGO) by Ivorians and the "LIMA forces" by the French military,[114] were nominally led by an Ivorian sergeant named Jean Marie Touly.[115] However, whether through policy or a lack of control, the Liberians became the de facto authorities in "their" areas, and they acted in collaboration with Gueré self-defense committee members who called themselves the Great West Liberation Fighters (Combatants pour Liberation de Grand-Ouest).[116] There were apparently tensions between the regular armed forces, the FANCI, and the Liberian recruits, possibly due in part to the way the Liberians treated the Ivorian civilians. However another plausible explanation for the tension was that the decision to recruit Liberian rebel fighters was made by the Ministry of Defense, not the FANCI, and the FANCI lacked direct command over the Liberians.[117] On this point, it must be noted that President Gbagbo himself assumed personal responsibility for the defense portfolio as of October 12, when he fired Defense Minister Moise Lida Kouassi.[118]

Gueré civilians from the Toulepleu area even complained to government officials in Abidjan about the way the government-allied Liberian fighters were treating civilians and were told "to be very careful, not to say that it was the mercenaries who did these things, instead to say it was the rebels." By mid-February, however, it was clear that government-backed Liberian mercenaries, not the rebels, were in charge along the road to and in Toulepleu.[119]

Recruitment of Liberian refugees by government forces

More than 72,000 Liberian refugees were in western Côte d'Ivoire as of September 2003. Only one official refugee camp existed—Nicla peace camp—located just a few kilometers from Guiglo town, which held approximately 4,000 refugees. The vast majority lived in a so-called refugee assistance zone (Zone d'Accueil Refugié, ZAR) that included several towns in the west, such as Danané, Man, and Guiglo. Many of the Krahn refugees, originally from bordering Grand Gedeh county in Liberia, were comfortable in the Gueré territory around Toulepleu, Guiglo and Duékoué, given their historic, cultural and linguistic cross-border links to the Gueré. Most Liberian ethnic groups were represented in the ZAR, though, including individuals who had fled abuses by the Doe regime, Taylor's regime and Liberian rebel groups.

Even before the western conflict began on November 28, Liberian refugees were vulnerable to harassment and intimidation from the Ivorian armed forces and civilian communities. After the government made statements

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112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
114 Lima is the radio alphabet code for the letter "L," so the LIMA name resulted from the fact that the combatants were Liberian.
115 Tidiane Dioh, "Dialogue de sourds," *Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent*, February 2-8, 2003, p. 67.
116 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 27, 2003.
117 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 28, 2003.
118 Ofeibea Quist-Arcton, "Ivory Coast Rebels Seize Key Cocoa Town As Mediation Hopes Increase," October 14, 2002 at www.allAfrica.com.
119 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 26, 2003.

accusing the MPCI rebels of being "foreign terrorists" and using English-speaking mercenaries, hostility to any foreigners was clearly on the rise. As early as October 2002, there were reports that refugees in transit sites in Abidjan were receiving disturbing visits from police and other armed men who threatened the refugees at night, during the curfew hours.[120] Days after the beginning of the conflict in the west, rumors of the involvement of English-speaking Liberian fighters were circulating, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) began warning that the Liberian refugee population in Côte d'Ivoire was vulnerable to abuses.[121]

MPIGO advanced on Toulepleu on November 30 and captured the town on December 2. As they continued to advance, capturing Blolékin on December 7, many feared that Guiglo, only 60 km east of Blolékin, would be the next target. Residents of Guiglo evacuated the town, including most of the humanitarian agency staff working in the Nicla refugee camp, about 12 kilometers from Guiglo. The first reports of Ivorian government recruitment in the refugee camp date to this period and attribute responsibility for the recruitment to the FANCIs in collaboration with local refugee contacts in Nicla.[122] A Liberian refugee who was in the camp in this period said that on December 3, "the Ivorian soldiers came and started to beat all the people. They said that Liberians are guilty of supporting the rebels."[123]

As fighting intensified in December and January 2003, and the role of Liberian combatants on both sides increased, so too did the recruitment of the refugees. The UNHCR's calls for relocation and protection of the refugees became desperate, but went unanswered by the government. As early as mid-December, a report from Guiglo in a local newspaper provided a revealing description of the situation. The headline was "Six rebels killed, Liberian refugees reinforce FANCIs," and the article described how the Liberian refugees volunteered at Guiglo as part of a strategy to "fight fire with fire."[124]

While some refugees did volunteer out of boredom or were tempted by the thousands of CFA promised to recruits, others appear to have felt forced to join due to the increasing physical threats to their security. By late-December the vast majority of the Liberian refugee population faced not only the generalized hostility of indigenous Ivorian communities towards any foreigners, but also specific antagonism as Liberians, given that they were blamed for the proxy war being fought by Liberian forces in western Côte d'Ivoire. Refugees in Abidjan and in the southwest around Tabou faced increasing threats as the rebel groups launched a new offensive towards San Pedro from Liberia, attacking Grabo in January 2003.

In the absence of protection from the government in Côte d'Ivoire and offers for resettlement to another country, many refugees were forced to choose between two untenable options: return to Liberia or survival in an increasingly violent environment.

In a measure reflective of their desperation, thousands of refugees did return to Liberia in February 2003, despite having to pass through hostile checkpoints manned by Ivorian militias.[125] Many of these returnees then became trapped in Liberia's spiraling insecurity, prompting some to later return to hostile areas they had fled.[126]

Other refugees sought refuge in the UNHCR offices in the south and demonstrated at its office in Abidjan, calling for evacuation, a highly reasonable request given the persecution they faced in Côte d'Ivoire. Despite UNHCR's pleas, no offers of resettlement were forthcoming from either regional or western states, a serious failure for refugee protection. The dilemma was summed up by one Liberian refugee who fled the west and succeeded in reaching Guinea, "[w]hat I don't understand is why HCR didn't help us, if they're only there to feed us, what

120 Confidential report on file with Human Rights Watch.
121 UNHCR Briefing Notes, December 17, 2002 at www.reliefweb.int (accessed May 20, 2003).
122 Confidential report on file with Human Rights Watch.
123 Interviewed in Guinea, January 2003, on file with Human Rights Watch.
124 Edouard Gonto, "Six rebelles tués, Des refugiés libériens en renfort aux FANCI," *Soir Info*, December 16, 2003, p.2.
125UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs,"Situation in Côte d'Ivoire to deteriorate further if peace proves elusive," February 12, 2003, at www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/0/ (accessed May 20, 2003).
126 "15,000 réfugiés libériens ont fui en Côte d'Ivoire," Agence France Presse, May 23, 2003.

good does that do? We need security. The government kills us because we know the rebels, [the rebels] accuse us of supporting the government and the HCR abandons us, so it's worthless."[127]

Given this background, it is hardly surprising that by late-March 2003, humanitarian agencies estimated that up to half of the Nicla camp population, including children as young as fourteen, were "involved directly or indirectly in the LIMA forces...." According to information received by Human Rights Watch, "recruitment is...induced by the government forces who have visited Nicla and held meetings with the youth to encourage them to join the LIMA forces 'for their own security'."[128]

VIII. ABUSES OF CIVILIANS BY LIBERIAN FORCES IN THE WEST

As mentioned above, Liberian fighters and other irregular forces employed by the government and the MPIGO and MJP rebel forces were responsible for a wide range of acts which violated international humanitarian law in western Côte d'Ivoire, particularly in the triangular area of operation between Danané, Toulepleu and Guiglo. These abuses included killings, rape and other forms of sexual violence, forced labor, systematic looting of civilian property, recruitment of child soldiers, attacks on humanitarian workers, destruction and removal of foodstuffs, and contamination of drinking water sources, a catalogue that echoes the abuses next door in Liberia.

Looting: the initial incentive

As soon as Liberian forces arrived in the west a pattern developed. Initially they began by systematically looting the property of those who had fled the area and sending much of the loot back to Liberia. When that resource had been exhausted, they moved on to the remaining civilian population. Then, when all available loot began to diminish, they used physical violence to threaten those who still had or were suspected of having remaining assets. A resident of Zouan-Hounien told Human Rights Watch, "The rebels came November 28. At the beginning they left people alone.... Then the Liberians came, and for the population things really worsened.... The population had to deal with the looting. First they started with the houses of those who had fled, the government officials, then they started attacking Guerés, then foreigners, and now even the Yacouba. For them, whether you're Christian, Muslim or a cow, they'll kill you."[129]

This pattern of stages of increasing abuses was echoed in scores of accounts gathered by Human Rights Watch. The incentive to loot was such that Liberian fighters within the same units even killed each other over particular items. Liberian fighters on both sides also extorted huge sums from desperate civilians trying to flee the conflict zone. Civilians trying to leave Toulepleu in late-January were forced to pay the government-backed Liberian forces between 95,000 and 200,000 CFA.[130] Human Rights Watch was told that a similar pattern developed in other areas of the west, for instance in the rebel-controlled area around Zouan-Hounien and Danané, where the Liberians forced civilians to pay 25,000 CFA or more to leave.[131] People who refused to pay were trapped. If civilians refused to give money, or if the fighters discovered money after the person denied having any, there were often violent consequences.

Abuses linked to resources: forced labor

The promise of Ivorian riches was perhaps the main attraction for many coming from Liberia, where a devastated country and civilian population had already been stripped of most resources. Ivorian resources in the west were not limited to goods such as money, food, vehicles and other personal property, however, although the Liberians sent hundreds of tons of these items across the border. The west also held two key assets that were attractive to the Liberians: cocoa and gold.

127 Interview in Guinea, February 2003, on file with Human Rights Watch.
128 Confidential document on file with Human Rights Watch.
129 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 24, 2003.
130 Human Rights Watch interviews in Guinea, March 1, 2003, and Guiglo, April 4, 2003.
131 Human Rights Watch interview, Nyangoloko, February 7, 2003.

The Iti gold mine, located fifteen kilometers from the town of Zouan-Hounien, quickly became a target for looting. A resident told Human Rights Watch, "the rebels are forcing people to work there. Some stocks are left, but when those are gone, then what?"[132] Following the pattern established in Liberia, many young male civilians were forced to work for the Liberians, portering large quantities of personal goods, gold, and other resources across the border into Liberia. Young men were also forced to carry arms through the forest areas along the border. One young Ivorian who fled Danané for Guinea was captured by the Liberians near Mapleu. He was told by the Liberians, 'You're Ivorian, you must stay back there.' They hit him with a gun and stole his bag and money, then forced him to carry arms from Mapleu to various checkpoints for two days.[133]

The cocoa and coffee harvest, which usually takes place between October and January, was also ripe for the taking, and a portion was shuttled out of the country, apparently through Guinea, Mali and Ghana. While details of this operation remain unclear, this may have been a coordinated effort by all three rebel groups. Apparently over fifty thousand tons of cocoa were sent out of the country in a matter of weeks.[134] The triangle west of Zouan Hounien over the Cavally river and south of Zou town is one of the richest in Côte d'Ivoire. The crop was brought out, first on the backs of young men forced to carry it to Zouan Hounien. From there, trucks were organized to take it across the Ivorian border, partly to Guinea, a logical choice given Liberia's lack of road infrastructure and markets.[135]

Sexual violence by Liberian fighters on both sides

Rape and sexual slavery also occurred on a regular basis by Liberian fighters on both sides. In some cases it appears that rape was used specifically as a weapon of war, with the aim of terrorizing and humiliating the civilian population. Human Rights Watch was told that around rebel-occupied Zouan-Hounien, "there's so much rape, it's normal, we don't even talk about it. The rebels rape in front of the husband, make him watch, and then force him to thank them on his knees."[136] In areas occupied by the government-allied Liberian forces, there were also regular incidents of rape and sexual slavery by the MODEL Liberian fighters, who, "take your wives and rape them in front of you."[137] Older women were often forced to cook and do other chores by the Liberians on both sides.[138]

Recruitment of child soldiers by both sides

As in the Liberian conflict, children, particularly Liberian boys, were frequently used as fighters by the Liberian forces. Some of the child soldiers were Liberian children who may have been recruited from internally displaced camps in Liberia and refugee camps in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Western observers of conditions in the rebel areas told Human Rights Watch that among every Liberian unit of five or six fighters linked to the MPIGO there would usually be at least one child soldier, often as young as ten to twelve-years-old, armed with machine guns. Among the fighters were also likely former members of Charles Taylor's "Small Boy Units,"[139] as some of them described starting young in Liberia, fighting in Sierra Leone, then going back to Liberia, and having a contract to continue fighting in Togo.[140]

132 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 24, 2003.
133 Human Rights Watch interview, Guinea, March 2003.
134 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 28, 2003.
135 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 28, 2003.
136 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 24, 2003.
137 Human Rights Watch interview, Guiglo, April 4, 2003.
138 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 2, 2003.
139 The "Small Boy Units" were initially composed of war orphans recruited by Taylor's rebel forces in the first Liberian war. Many of these recruits became known for their fierce fighting behavior and their loyalty to Taylor. See *Human Rights Watch/Africa,* "Easy Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia,"*A Human Rights Watch Report,* 1994. This pattern of recruiting children was later duplicated in the Sierra Leone war and has continued in Liberia, with fresh reports of the recruitment of children from displaced persons camps near Monrovia emerging as recently as May 2003.
140 Human Rights Watch interview, March 24, 2003.

As the conflict continued in the west, a growing number of Ivorian children were recruited.[141] A number of young Yacouba reportedly joined the rebels after the ethnic reprisal attacks started, and were reportedly receiving training in a camp near Bin Houyé as of March 2003. The government-allied Liberians also apparently requested that the chiefs of the Gueré villages around Toulepleu give them children for training.[142]

Killings of civilians

Liberian fighters allied to both the government and the rebel groups also killed numerous civilians, often in order to acquire money and loot. In some cases, civilians were targeted based on ethnic affiliation, especially where the Liberians worked in coordination with Ivorian Yacouba and Gueré militias.

Human Rights Watch documented a number of cases of violence accompanying looting activity. These incidents sometimes reflected extraordinary cruelty and wanton brutality, such as the following description of a Dioula family who was attacked in Toulepleu by looting Liberian fighters from the MPIGO faction in the first days of their occupation of the town. A seventy-year-old grandmother, two of her middle-aged daughters and her six-year-old grandson were killed in this attack. A third daughter was shot in the face. Another daughter survived and fled to Guinea.

> The rebels had said they wouldn't hurt civilians, so we were surprised when they came and broke the door down and asked for money.... My grandmother was coming out of the shower when the rebels came. One of them told her to "Get back," and she said, "Get out with your noise of shooting." He shot her. When they came in the house, my older sister said we were not FPI.... [She went to get money] but she was trembling so much that she was slow. When she gave him the money, he said it was not enough and shot her in the chest. My younger sister was shot in the legs, but she lost so much blood that she died.[143]

Some of the abuses have also been characterized by the use of knives and machetes as well as automatic weapons. Victims were sometimes mutilated in ways that echoed the abuses of the Liberian war, with body parts cut off and eaten for ritualistic purposes.[144] Human Rights Watch received numerous accounts of abuses by both sides, in towns, villages and encampments throughout their western triangle of operation. The Liberian forces would enter the villages and tie up the chief, then demand food and money. If the villagers did not respond adequately, then they would kill some of the villagers.[145]

Some of the abuses have occurred as part of a pattern of inter-ethnic clashes, as, once begun, the cycle of atrocities by Liberian fighters and their respective Gueré and Yacouba allies spiraled into a series of reprisals and counter-reprisals. "The Krahn-Gio enmity in Liberia has crossed the border," Human Rights Watch was told. "While Houphouët-Boigny lived, he stopped it, but now this war has revived the old feud, the Doe-Quiwonkpah feud."[146]

There have no doubt been numerous victims whose killings have not been documented because they took place deep in the bush, and in small remote encampments. For instance, Human Rights Watch heard several credible accounts of dozens of villages raided and burned in the fighting around Toulepleu, but was not able to verify them. Compiling accurate figures on the total number of victims is therefore an impossible task at present.

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141 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 28, 2003.
142 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 2, 2003.
143 Human Rights Watch interview, Guinea, March 1, 2003.
144 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 3, 2003.
145 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 21, 2003.
146 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 26, 2003. Quiwonkpah was a Liberian Gio who rose up against Doe, who then repressed the movement with a vengeance, killing hundreds of mainly Gios, mostly in Nimba county. When Charles Taylor initiated his movement in Nimba, he received massive support as a result of these events. See also footnote 104 above.

The road to Toulepleu: creating a humanitarian crisis

With its new force of Liberian recruits, the government launched an offensive and regained control of Toulepleu in late-January 2003.[147] By February, the northern loop of the road from Blolékin to Toulepleu, and much of the area around Toulepleu, was under the control of Liberian fighters allied to the government. According to local observers, the presence of the Ivorian armed forces was minimal, ending at Blolékin, and even the Ivorian army acknowledged that the Liberians were the ones in control in the far western area around Toulepleu.[148]

The Liberian fighters—in collaboration with local Gueré militia members—manned a series of checkpoints from Gueya, a village east of Blolékin through Péhé, the last town before Toulepleu, to Toulepleu itself. After Blolékin, the Liberian fighters and their Gueré partners were the de facto authorities along the road, called "the Road of Death" by some in Abidjan.[149] An eyewitness described his harrowing journey along the road to Human Rights Watch.

> At Gueya there was maybe one man who was older, maybe eighteen. He was called Nene. Most were young kids, even girls. The mercenaries are children of nine to twelve years, they can't even control the weight of their guns and they start firing at anything. I saw people shot in front of me.... From Blolékin to Péhé I walked. From Blolékin to Péhé it is all mercenary checkpoints and bodies, all along the way it was mercenary checkpoints and bodies along the road, new bodies and old bodies, maybe three to four weeks old. They force you to work, to bury the bodies.... At Doké, a chief of the mercenaries gives orders for people to bury the bodies. If you have luck they let you go, if not they make you bury the corpses. They use a Caterpillar bulldozer to dig holes, it gets filled with bodies, then they use the Caterpillar to cover the hole.... Me, I only had to bury bodies once, I was lucky. Others, they spend days burying. Me, I had some money so they let me go. For me the day it happened.... they asked me for 5,000. I only had 2,000 and they said, 'since you don't have money you have to work.' I said 'Okay' and they said 'Go over there and bury bodies over there.'
>
> I picked up the bodies, they were all rotten and full of water. I put them in a hole and when we asked about covering them, I was told the Caterpillar would cover the hole. There were women, old people, and children's bodies along the road.... The majority of the bodies are rebels who were killed. The villagers refused to bury them. There are also the bodies of children who walked and died, and sick people. Some of the children die because of the water they drink, which comes from places where there have been bodies. Adults, they can drink this and it takes longer to make them sick.... All the wells, the mercenaries put the bodies of the rebels in the wells and the well water is the only water for drinking. I saw the bodies in the wells. This water, when you drink it you have to filter it [*he holds out his shirt to show how they pour the water through clothing*] then you boil it. It always continues to smell. One of the women I was walking with, I was carrying her child on my shoulders. Finally we left it to die. I was crying but I left it. We saw other sick ones who couldn't walk anymore.
>
> Toulepleu itself is secure, the mercenaries surround it, the problem is water and food. The mercenaries don't want people to leave because then WFP won't come and give out food.... They said people can't leave because they don't want the region to be empty.[150]

In Péhé, the last town before Toulepleu, many displaced civilians gathered who had fled the rebel attacks on their villages. People were forced to pay the Liberians in order to eat, and "if you're unlucky you pay and then the food is finished and you get nothing. The people coming from Toulepleu have to pay at checkpoints to go get wood and go to their fields."[151] This practice was very likely at least partly responsible—along with the disease

147 "'Ils parlent anglais et tuent': les déplacés fuient les 'combattants libériens'," Agence France Presse, January 24, 2003.
148 Confidential document on file with Human Rights Watch.
149 A photograph of members of the FLGO militia, composed of MODEL and Gueré militia fighters, shows them sitting in a car with this name—the Road of Death—painted on the side. The photograph was published in *Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent*, February 2-8, 2003, p.67.
150 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 26, 2003.
151 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 27, 2003.

provoked by the polluted water—for the levels of malnutrition witnessed by humanitarian aid workers among displaced who fled the area.[152] One group of civilians who fled the area told Human Rights Watch, "[m]any children died along the way and here, maybe two to four children a day."[153]

The strategy of preventing civilians from fleeing and retaining the civilian population in a vulnerable state in order to obtain humanitarian assistance, is a classic tactic used by the warring parties in Liberia and elsewhere, and one that violates international humanitarian law.[154] By the time humanitarian agencies were able to access the area around Toulepleu in June 2003, much of the civilian population had suffered over five months of deprivation of health care, clean water and adequate food. Cases of malnutrition among children were rife in an area once considered a breadbasket for the country.

Ravaging the villages around Toulepleu: February 2003

After the MPIGO rebels were driven out of Toulepleu on January 12, the rebel-allied Liberian forces took the war to the small villages around the road, and the encampments among the plantations. Hundreds of displaced villagers, both Gueré and Burkinabé, fled the villages around Toulepleu and the area north of the road, and came to the government-controlled towns of Guiglo and Duékoué. A displaced Gueré from Glopleu described the attacks that devastated the region.

> There are many bodies rotting in the villages.... We were forced to leave because the rebels ate everything. They ate all the cattle, burned the huts and the granaries, killed the elderly who couldn't walk, burned people and used fire to burn scars on the bodies of their victims, and sometimes they write MPIGO or MPCI on the bodies with fire or with a knife.... It's definitely the Liberians who are the worst. The MPCI are a bit better, but the MJP and the MPIGO are very bad. They don't like the Gueré. They first came in December, but did not attack people.
>
> In January they came the second time.... It was at this time, after their second attack, that everything started. They started attacking people.... The rebels demanded money. If you said you didn't have any, they searched the whole house. If they found something, they would kill you because you lied. Sometimes they killed for no reason. Doué Kaoué, a sixty-year-old man, was shot February 18. He was sitting in his courtyard when they shot him.[155]

Another displaced villager said, "we went from encampment to encampment. The rebels came in the camps to loot and burn the houses. They killed people and forbade others from burying them. The skeletons are in our villages."[156]

Although many of the killings by the rebels' Liberian forces were wanton acts of violence, some of them were specifically targeted at Gueré. This was partly due to the fact that many of the Gueré had organized in civilian militias or self-defense committees and some were armed and resisted the attacks (see below, chapter IX). It was also due to the increasingly ethnic nature of the conflict. Once the government's Liberian Krahn fighters became involved in the fighting, often in coordination with the Ivorian Gueré self-defense committees, it was a only a short step towards an ethnic war of Krahn/Gueré against Gio/Yacouba.

Abuses evolve into ethnic conflict

By February 2003, as Gueré and Yacouba civilian militias became increasingly involved in the conflict in the west, working with the government and rebels respectively, abuses took on an increasingly ethnic and horrific

152 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, April 6, 2003.
153 Human Rights Watch interview, Guiglo, April 4, 2003.
154 Objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, crops, and drinking water installations, are entitled to protection. The rationale behind this provision is that it is prohibited to deliberately starve civilians as a method of combat. Article 14, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), 8 June 1977.
155 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 3, 2003.
156 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 3, 2003.

form, as Liberian mercenaries from both sides began deliberately slaughtering civilians based on ethnicity, without any pretense of targeting perceived opposition supporters. Based on the information gathered by Human Rights Watch, it appears that the development of an ethnic-based conflict in the west was motivated by two key factors. One was the introduction of the Liberian fighters on both sides, which rekindled a historic ethnic enmity. The second was the part played by Gueré civilian militias, who took on an increasingly visible role in the western war and participated in abuses against civilians in the west (see below, chapter IX). Human Rights Watch was told by several witnesses that the Liberian fighters allied to the government were led to some of the small remote encampments by local Gueré civilians who knew the area. In at least one case documented by Human Rights Watch, a Gueré civilian also helped the Liberians allied to the rebels by showing them the small Gueré encampments and villages deep in the bush.

The massacre at Bangolo: March 7, 2003

In the single largest known atrocity committed by the government's Liberian mercenaries, at least sixty civilians, including men, women and children, were killed in Bangolo, a town located between Man and Duékoué, in early March, 2003. The massacre came to light after French troops from Operation Unicorn were alerted about clashes taking place in Bangolo town on March 7, and displaced civilians began fleeing the area. In the evening of March 7, the French forces disarmed and detained a large group of armed, government-allied Liberian combatants leaving the area on their way to their base in Guiglo, accompanied by a group of Gueré civilians. A reconnaissance flight flew over the town on March 8 and revealed at least sixty bodies on the ground outside, with more believed to be inside the houses.[157]

The Liberian fighters were English-speaking and also spoke Gueré (or the Liberian equivalent—Krahn). They were interviewed in detention and confirmed that they had been in the area for the past seven days, were working for the government, and had committed the massacre. Apparently they gained entrance to the town by pretending they were Dioula and saying that they wanted a meeting, but once there, proceeded to systématically kill the inhabitants and loot their homes.[158] The Dioula quarter in Bangolo was specifically targeted. Many of the victims suffered mutilations and had their throats slit, according to press reports.[159] An international observer who saw some of the bodies in Bangolo confirmed to Human Rights Watch that summary executions had taken place. Of the four bodies he saw, in at least one case the victim's hands were tied behind the back and there were bullet wounds to the head at close range.[160]

In the face of clear evidence of the LIMA force's responsibility for the massacre and assertions that they were working for the Ivorian government and based in Guiglo, the government denied any link with the militia, stating, "no 'supplemental Liberians' are fighting with the FANCIs."[161] Instead, the government claimed that the massacre was committed by rebel forces and that the Liberian fighters were not, in fact, Liberians, but rather, Ivorian Guerés who had organized in self-defense committees. The claim that Ivorian Guerés were organized in self-defense committees was certainly true, but the fact that most of the detained combatants were Liberian and were working for the government, was established beyond a doubt. A recent report by the U.N. Panel of Experts on Liberia even noted that the weapons, ammunition and radio communication equipment used by the LIMA forces matched those used by the FANCIs.[162]

Days later, the massacre at Bangolo was echoed by another massacre in nearby Dah, clearly a reprisal action for the Bangolo events. This time, the rebel forces were responsible, and the circle of ethnic violence was complete. For civilians in the west, these were days of terror.

157 Confidential document on file with Human Rights Watch.
158 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 27, 2003.
159 Laurent Banguet, "Desolation and carnage in an Ivory Coast town," Agence France Presse, March 12, 2003.
160 Human Rights Watch telephone interview, May 16, 2003.
161 "Massacre de Bangolo: le gouvernment accusé à tort par l'armée francaise," Agence France Presse, March 17, 2003.
162 Rapport du Panel des experts des Nations Unies sur le Libéria, 24 avril, 2003, S/2003/498.

The massacre at Dah: March 22, 2003

Dah, a small village in the Gueré area, just a few kilometers west of the road from Bangolo to Duékoué, was attacked by rebel forces on the night of March 22. This occurred just a few weeks after the Bangolo massacre and was most likely a reprisal attack. A civilian displaced by the fighting described events that night to Human Rights Watch:

> It happened Saturday, March 22. After the news at 10 p.m. there was an electricity cut. I had a premonition. I said to myself that maybe the rebels would attack. Towards midnight, my wife heard a noise outside. She woke me up. I quietly opened the window and I saw people running outside in every direction. I heard a shot a few hundred meters from my courtyard. We ran all night. The next morning around 6 a.m. we returned to the village and it was then we discovered the horror. Bodies were sprawled all over the village. Among the bodies, my aunt Fatima, who was about seventy years old, my thirty-five-year-old nephew Zapele, my sixty-year-old uncle. All were killed by bullets.
>
> It was mainly the Caien quarter that they ravaged the most. They did not target any particular type of person. Even the Burkinabé fled with us and they were also dead. They burned the houses, sometimes with people in them. They burned the house of a woman, the widow of Mwa Jean, while she was in the house with her two children. She managed to get out of the house, one of her children got out, severely burned, but the other one died. Many burned in their houses. They came in vehicles. They left their vehicles in an encampment about five hundred meters from the village. Three of them stayed to guard the vehicles.
>
> The attackers were above all Liberians. While shooting on someone, they yelled terrible cries.... They spoke either in English or in Yacouba. We heard they had killed in other villages. It's mostly Liberians and Yacouba who kill. We heard they have poisoned the salt, the bouillion cubes, even the cigarettes. All these things come from the Yacouba.[163]

The description of the poisoning of food in this account, while unlikely, signaled the shift of community perceptions to a very dangerous level: the demonization of the opposing ethnic group. These perceptions were certainly fueled by the Ivorian press, which presented events in the west as a rebel "genocide" against the Wê (Gueré), but generally omitted the fact that abuses were being committed on both sides, and had evolved as a result of the involvement on both sides of Liberian fighters long known for their abuses against civilians. Another factor contributing to the rise of the ethnic conflict is the role played by the Gueré pro-government civilian self-defense committees in the western villages. Members of these militias participated in numerous abuses against civilians, particularly Burkinabé, both before and after the start of the internal conflict.

IX. THE ROLE OF CIVILIAN MILITIAS IN THE WEST

The conflict in Côte d'Ivoire has unveiled major schisms in Ivorian society. The tensions between north and south, between the largely Muslim Dioula and the largely Christian southerners, and between native Ivorians and immigrants are the most evident symptoms of the crisis shaking the fabric of the society. In the west, where hundreds of villages have been gripped by increased tensions between the indigenous Ivorian groups and immigrant communities, this development has had particularly brutal repercussions for the large Burkinabé community.

The rise of youth groups and civilian militias

The economic and political turbulence of the past decade has bred a generation of educated but unemployed and disenchanted youth. They were seen demonstrating—and sometimes rioting—in the streets of Abidjan in October and December 2000. For thousands of youths, membership in the university student association in Abidjan was a critical step in political involvement. The student movement became increasingly politicized during the Bédié

163 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 3, 2003.

years, often with clear links to the main opposition parties of that period, such as the RDR and the FPI.[164] For others, membership in the youth wings of political parties was a defining moment.

With the onset of the war, these youth groups took a new prominence. Figures like Charles Blé Goudé and Guillaume Soro, both former leaders of the national university student network (FESCI), both charismatic, populist figures to their constituencies, command a vital constituency of young, educated and angry youth. Soro quickly became internationally known as the spokesperson for the MPCI during the conflict, and was later appointed as Minister of Communications in the new government of reconciliation. Blé Goudé played a crucial role in mobilizing the "young patriots" in Abidjan during the war, reportedly with full backing of the Gbagbo administration. The demonstrations against the Linas-Marcoussis accords, which paralyzed Abidjan for four days and resulted in attacks on several French buildings, with little or no response from the government armed forces, was one clear example of the power held by the youth mobilizers and their links with state security forces. As one observer in Abidjan remarked on Blé Goudé, "[Gbagbo] made the demonstrations, he made Blé Goudé. That creature is out of the box, how do you stuff it back in?"[165] The role of the FESCI student movement and the student leaders in Abidjan in inciting violence has grown clearer over the past eight months. One of the Abidjan-based leaders of the "young patriots," Eugene Djué, recently said, "Since the beginning of the war, we have organized, we were trained by our military friends and we have the most fearful weapon of war: the determination to win and the will to defend our country." In the same interview he claimed to head "some 55,000 young patriots grouped in self-defense committees."[166]

The transition from student groups and youth associations into self-defense committees required little effort and probably used the existing FPI political party and youth association network. Certainly hundreds of self-defense committees of "young patriots" quickly became operational throughout the country with the onset of the conflict. They controlled hundreds of checkpoints in and around towns and villages under government control, checking identity cards and taking over other duties traditionally accorded to the forces of law and order. In many cases they equipped themselves with clubs, batons and other types of weapons and subjected civilians traveling along the roads to harassment, extortion and assault. In at least one case reported by the local press, a group of the "young patriots," who were armed with twelve caliber guns, even killed a police officer in a village near Gagnoa, the home area of President Gbagbo. In that case, the journalist's description of the vigilante groups was apt: "under the complicit eye of power, these forces, which have sprouted like mushrooms, particularly in the west, reign as the real masters."[167]

While there has been some insight into the role of the "young patriots" and their leaders in Abidjan, understanding the role played by these groups in the rural areas, even prior to the war, is critical in the context of the western conflict.

Urban and rural violence in the west before the war

There was considerable violence before the war in the western towns and villages, particularly in and around Daloa, Duékoué, Vavua and Blolékin, which are the Bété and Gueré heartlands. Much of the violence began in June 2002 or during the October 2000 elections, and it took two forms: in the towns, such as Abidjan and Daloa, it was represented by political violence between mobs of young FPI and RDR supporters. In the villages around Daloa, Duékoué and Blolékin, it took the form of targeting of the immigrant population, mainly the Burkinabé. Each theatre of conflict was intertwined with a specific issue: in the towns, it was the issue of political power. In the villages, it was land.

164 See Yacouba Konate, "Les enfants de la balle: De la FESCI aux mouvements de patriotes," *Politique Africaine: La Côte d'Ivoire en guerre*, No. 89, March 2003, pp. 49-70.

165 Human Rights Watch interview, Abidjan, March 26, 2003.

166 "La multiplication des milices patriotiques inquiète le gouvernment ivoirien," Agence France Presse, April 27, 2003.

167 Jean-Roche Kouamé, "Des 'patriotes' battent un agent de police à mort,' *le jour*, February 28, 2003.

Political violence in Daloa town in the election campaign: June 2002

The municipal elections of March 2001 brought the RDR into power in Daloa town. This resulted in a split administration, where the elected mayor of the town was RDR, but the government-appointed prefect of the district was FPI. The RDR win was perceived by the local Bété population, who are largely FPI supporters, as a victory for outsiders or foreigners. In Duékoué, a bastion of the Gueré population, the mayor and other local authorities were FPI, but a substantial part of the rural population was Burkinabé and other immigrants from the sub-region.

During the election campaign, this tension exploded, echoing the election violence in 2000. In Daloa itself, young FPI and RDR members clashed on June 25, 2002 as the political parties started campaigning prior to the elections on July 7, 2002. It appears to have begun when a group of young Bété FPI supporters began harassing Dioula merchants near the RDR office, where RDR members were preparing their campaign.[168] Apparently the local gendarmes and police either did not intervene or were too late to prevent the escalation of the violence. At least four people were killed, seven were injured from gunshot wounds, and two mosques and a church were burned.[169] In Daloa itself, a curfew was imposed throughout early July, and the situation calmed down somewhat, but tension was just below the surface when the conflict ignited on September 19, 2002.

The pattern of violence in Daloa in June 2002, in which groups of FPI supporters acted either together with paramilitary groups from the state security forces or were tolerated by the forces of law and order, clearly echoed the types of violence that took place in Abidjan during the October and December elections of 2000. It also established a pattern for the type of violence that took place after the conflict began in September 2002, in which FPI supporters organized into self-defense committees and acting in complicity with state security forces, assaulted and executed foreigners and RDR supporters in several towns in the west.

Village violence in June 2002: the targeting of the Burkinabé

Burkinabé are the majority of the immigrant population in the west and southwest of Côte d'Ivoire, alongside significant communities of Baoulé internal migrants. Many villages were created and almost entirely populated by Burkinabé, who were mostly responsible for the clearing of the forest and the extension of the vast Ivorian cocoa plantations. For more than thirty years, land ownership and use remained largely unregulated by the Ivorian state, with local villagers, migrants, and traditional authorities pursuing local agreements based on traditional customary law. For most, this consisted of a homemade contract reflecting the purchase of the land, and the creation of a long-term relationship between the immigrant buyer and the seller, his "tuteur" or Ivorian "father" or "patron."[170]

Amidst the dismal economic situation of the 1980s and 1990s, the return of many educated Ivorian youth from the towns created considerable tension between indigenous villagers and the largely Burkinabé plantation owners and workers, but also between generations of Ivorians within the same family. In the past few years, President Gbagbo's FPI party has specifically called for urban youth to "return to the land" in an effort to address rising urban problems such as unemployment, crime and over-population. Many of the educated Ivoiran youth who did indeed return to their rural villages of origin felt disenfranchised in multiple ways, first by an economic climate characterized by a lack of opportunity, second by a state system which provided few options, and third by their own families, who had sold the land to immigrants decades earlier.

In the already politically charged atmosphere of the late 1990s, the introduction of the rural land reform law in 1998 by the government of Henri Konan Bédié became one of the catalysts for intercommunal strife. The law provided that only Ivorians could own land. This was a stunning blow to the thousands of resident Burkinabé and other West Africans who had spent years, and sometimes decades, clearing and cultivating the land. Non-Ivorians who had bought land through customary law could maintain full usage rights throughout their lifetime, however,

168 "Elections des conseils généraux Daloa: La campagne tourne à l'affrontement entre le FPI et le RDR," *Le Patriote*, June 26, 2002, at www.lepatriote.net/lepatriote2.asp

169 Timothé Dro, "Mosquée et Eglise incendiées," *Soir Info*, June 26, 2002, p.5.

170 The term "tuteur" is used to describe the traditional relationship between the original owner of the land and the person who buys or uses the land. This relationship, which passed from generation to generation, required immigrants to make regular contributions—of money or in kind—to their tuteurs.

within three years of the buyer's death, the land would revert to the state without compensation.[171] Against the backdrop of growing dissatisfaction with the Bédié regime and increasing political friction, the political and media discourse accompanying the law provoked outright violence, including deaths, between the indigenous ethnic groups and the largely Burkinabé immigrant community.[172] A Burkinabé farmer who lived in the Vavoua area for fifty years said, "[The war began] first of all because of the social exclusion and hatred of foreigners. It started bit by bit, before Gbagbo, but it's an explosion now. Before the war, I heard the young people saying things about how the Burkinabé should leave, how they had stolen land.... The old ones, the ones who sold the land to the Burkinabé, they didn't say these things."[173]

Tensions over the law surfaced throughout the west, but particularly in the rural areas around Daloa and Duékoué, where the Bété and Gueré are considered the indigenous population and are generally supportive of the Laurent Gbagbo's FPI. While linked to the political violence in the towns, the rural violence that took place in June 2002 had a different target. The increasingly militancy of the rural Gueré, Bété, and Niédéboua youths translated into associations, youth groups, and political party membership. Resentment of the Burkinabé settlers in the plantations intermingled with anti-RDR sentiment and led to mutual attacks of Bété or Gueré against Dioula and Burkinabé, with dozens of deaths and wounded, and scores of villages burned in June and July 2002. Some of the Gueré youths specifically linked the violence to the electoral campaign. Human Rights Watch was told, "During Gbagbo's electoral campaign, he said would chase the foreigners away. The youths talked of that, of Gbagbo's electoral promises."[174]

Human Rights Watch documented at least eight deaths and more than sixty wounded from the villages north of Duékoué in June and July 2002, and considers this figure a gross underestimation of the actual toll from the violence. Over six thousand people, mainly Burkinabé families, but also northern Ivorians, Guerés and Bétés, fled their encampments in the plantations. Many came into Duékoué and Daloa in July 2002.[175]

Many people interviewed by Human Rights Watch blamed the pronouncements of high-level politicians, carried and inflamed by the local media, for feeding both the rural and the urban violence, and exacerbating the situation. In late-June 2002, a meeting of traditional leaders in Abidjan warned political parties and their leaders of the dangers of the increasingly contentious political discourse.[176] However, few serious attempts were made to reduce the tension. Indeed, after the July 2002 elections, President Gbagbo congratulated the nation for the "largely successful and peaceful elections."[177] Local authorities did not address the real causes of the violence—the increasingly uncontrolled militancy of youth groups inflamed by their leaders and the lack of reaction by the forces of law and order. Instead, in a telling move, the traditional chiefs from several villages around Daloa signed a series of recommendations which included, as point one, a call for the exclusion of any non-indigenous candidates (including Ivorians from other regions) in any future elections in Daloa.[178]

State-tolerated violence by civilian self-defense committees

Against this volatile background, the outbreak of the civil war in September 2002 provoked a new wave of violence in the villages of the west. As the rebels moved into the west, the allegations made by some journalists

171 Law no. 98-750 of December 23, 1998 set out the law on rural land ownership. This was followed by Decrees no. 99-594 and no. 99-595 of October 13, 1999, which provided implementing legislation for the law, including procedures for application and registration of land ownership.

172 Clashes between Burkinabé and local Krou villagers around Tabou led to a number of deaths and the flight of over 12,000 Burkinabé in November 1999. The primary cause of these clashes was friction over land.

173 Human Rights Watch interview, Banfora, February 7, 2003.

174 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 2, 2003.

175 Many of the Burkinabé sought refuge in the Catholic church in Duékoué, a pattern that was to be repeated several times in the coming months.

176 Simplice Allard, "Les rois et les chefs traditionnels appellent les acteurs politiques au calme et à la retenue," *L'Inter*, June 29, 2002, at www.presseci.com/linter/archive/1243.html (accessed June 28, 2003).

177 Charles Trabi, "Gbagbo se réjouit du triomphe de la loi sur le désordre,"*L'Inter,* July 13, 2002, at www.presseci.com/linter/archive/2365.html (accessed June 28, 2003).

178 Minutes of a meeting of traditional chiefs of Daloa, held August 30, 2003, on file with Human Rights Watch.

and government figures about Burkina Faso's support to the MPCI and the television images of captured Burkinabé "rebels" had immediate repercussions in the villages around Daloa and Duékoué, which were highly populated by Burkinabé settlers. The fact that government officials at various levels encouraged civilians to mobilize into self-defense committees and protect access routes into towns from the rebels exacerbated the situation.[179] The transition from the existing youth groups and associations into self-defense committees was an obvious step.

The MPCI rebels captured Vavoua on October 7, 2002. This event brought the war into the west for the first time and prompted fears among the local population of further advances. Reports that the MPCI had killed a number of gendarmes in Bouaké, combined with the fact that the television and print media continued to show images of Burkinabé and northerners as "captured assailants," caused groups of young Gueré militants, armed with machetes, hunting rifles and other weapons, to storm Burkinabé villages and encampments north of Duekoué. According to witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch, each village had its bands of young Gueré militants who were part of an organized network of self-defense committees and youth groups with links to Abidjan. Iruzon,[180] a village north of Duekoué was the epicenter of the problem, which spread to Blodi, Diahouin, Tuazeo and other villages between Duékoué and Kouiblie in the first week of October.

One young Burkinabé described the October events as "the Burkinabé hunt" and told Human Rights Watch about the escalation of events in Blodi, a village near Iruzon.

> When the rebels started in Vavoua, people said the Burkinabé were with the rebels. The young Guerés started to attack. The mayor came and told them to put up checkpoints to defend the village. Then, at the checkpoints they started to harass the Burkinabé, asking for money and if someone doesn't have money then they take your bike. This continued until they were organized with weapons. On October 8 they went and attacked a encampment and killed three young Burkinabé. After this, they started to burn everything so we had to leave. At night they would come and search our houses for weapons. Sometimes people had hunting rifles—this made things worse. They said that the president of Burkina Faso was responsible for the war.[181]

Thousands of Burkinabé fled without any of their possessions, sometimes even losing children in their panicked flight. Their homes were burned and destroyed, their livestock and crops were looted. Many fled to Duékoué. Displaced Burkinabé told Human Rights Watch that in many instances, the Gueré militias deliberately destroyed their documents, including the local receipts of their land purchases and the state documents attesting to their official usage of the land. Several Burkinabé said, "When the Guerés started attacking the houses, they destroyed the papers. They ripped up our identity cards and papers for the fields."[182] In addition to the destruction of documents, homes and villages, Human Rights Watch documented several killings of Burkinabé by Gueré youths, who stopped them at the checkpoints erected around each village and at the road junctions.[183]

Burkinabé were also targeted in other locations of the country, such as the south-west and in Abidjan. Older Burkinabé are physically identifiable and thus easily targeted due to the patterns of facial scarring used by the Mossi ethnic group. The custom of facial scarification has been decreasing over the past decades. A number of younger Burkinabé who escaped violence and lacked these facial scars told Human Rights Watch that they had been able to pass as members of other ethnic groups while in government controlled territory and believed that they would have been killed had they had the traditional facial scars.

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179 Statement by Jules Yao Yao, armed forces spokesperson, transcribed from RTI and reported in *Notre Voie*, October 18, 2002.

180 Iruzon is the home village of Matthias Doué, a Gueré and the Chief of Staff for President Gbagbo.

181 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 2, 2003.

182 Human Rights Watch interviews, Duékoué, April 2, 2003.

183 Human Rights Watch interviews, Duékoué, April 2, 2003.

While there are unconfirmed reports that some Burkinabé armed and joined the rebel forces, and some may have been responsible for attacks on Gueré civilians, Human Rights Watch research indicates that the vast majority of attacks on civilians were initiated by Gueré militias against Burkinabé civilians.

Reaction from the Gueré communities in the villages to the militia youths differed, often by generation and by village. In some villages, Gueré chiefs did little to quell the militancy of their youth, but there were several instances where the local authorities, including village chiefs and sometimes the gendarmes from Duékoué, attempted to intervene, with little effect. In one village, where an older Gueré chief insisted on protecting the Burkinabé, the Gueré youth of the village refused to listen to him.[184] In late-October, when the cocoa and coffee crops were ready for harvesting, most of the Burkinabé had been chased out of the surrounding villages and were sheltering in Duékoué. A delegation of Gueré chiefs—all elders—requested the Burkinabé to return. However, as one observer noted, those who requested the return of the Burkinabé "were all old, not a single young one....[and] the youths mocked the elders and said the Burkinabé would not return."[185] While some Burkinabé did return to the villages, many left their wives and children in Duékoué.

After the western rebels launched their offensives in the west in December, a number of these villages and others around Toulepleu and Bangolo were captured by the rebels, causing a new wave of displacement, as the Guerés fled the rebels and sought refuge in the government-held towns. This led to new abuses, as members of all three rebel groups retaliated against some of the Gueré members of the self-defense committees who had been responsible for killing and harassing the Burkinabé and other suspected "assailants." The displacement of the Gueré villagers to Duékoué then widened the cycle of abuses, as Gueré youths began terrorizing the displaced Burkinabé in the government-held towns with total impunity, particularly following rebel attacks on government-held locations.

Abuses by government forces in collaboration with civilian militias

Numerous witnesses described serious abuses committed by Ivorian armed forces working in complicity or in coordination with the Gueré youth groups and with other groups of government-supporting civilians. For instance, in many of the attacks on civilians by paramilitary groups in Daloa, Duékoué, Guiglo, and Monoko-Zohi, local villager from ethnic groups linked to the government helped provide lists of names of foreigners, RDR members, northerners and other alleged rebel supporters to the security forces. Self-defense committees also manned checkpoints with the acquiescence—if not the encouragement—of the state security forces. One person said, "the young Guerés are the worst, they are working with the military. If they see a Burkinabé they recognize, then they beat you and beat you with a brick. Once they say you're an 'assailant,' you're finished."[186] Attacks on the displaced Burkinabé in Duékoué and other government-controlled towns heightened after each rebel attack. Government forces sometimes executed Burkinabé and other suspected assailants in the middle of the town, in front of many eye-witnesses. Gueré civilian militias sometimes burned their bodies after they were executed.

Human Rights Watch documented at least ten such killings, including one incident in Duékoué on December 20, 2002, in which a group of young Gueré participated with the armed forces in the summary executions of two Burkinabé men.

> I was waiting to cross the street to get home, and they killed two Burkinabé in front of me, on the street. There were young Gueré men going around looking for foreigners, and they captured two young Burkinabé men from houses in Duékoué. The two captured men had scars on the side of their noses, showing they were Mossi.[187] They were on the street I was going to cross; so I hid and watched.
>
> The young Guerés belonged to the FPI; everyone was FPI in Duékoué. They claimed that foreigners had come to attack president Gbagbo. The Gueré men who held the two Burkinabé called to the military, who

184 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 2, 2003.
185 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 4, 2003.
186 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 2, 2003.
187 The Mossi are one of the largest ethnic groups in Burkina Faso and dominate the Burkinabé community in Côte d'Ivoire.

were constantly patrolling the town in their four-by-four. They gave out war cries as they patrolled, such as 'haut les coeurs' in French.

> A military vehicle stopped at the request of the crowd, who told the military that they had captured two foreigners. Two military got down from the four-by-four and motioned for the crowd to get away from the two foreigners. The two men kept begging for their lives, saying 'Forgive me, I'm not a rebel.' The soldiers told the two men to run. When they started to run, the military shot them both in the back and in the back of their heads, which broke their heads and caused their brains to fly out in pieces. I was traumatized. I couldn't sleep. I saw it again and again.[188]

The direct targeting of Burkinabé by government forces supported by civilian militias increased as the conflict's ethnic dimension intensified in the west. The increasing manipulation of this ethnic conflict through government statements and press reports in the media focusing on the so-called genocide against the Wê (Gueré), only worsened the situation, inciting more violence. By early April 2003, any semblance of the rule of law was gone from certain government-controlled towns such as Duékoué, and the rule of civilian militias was at its peak.

Mob violence in total impunity in Duékoué: March-April 2003

The collaboration of government forces and civilian militias created a climate of fear and total impunity in Duékoué in April 2003, when Human Rights Watch visited the town. Being accused of being an 'assailant' could be a death sentence not only for Burkinabé, but for any individual from an ethnic group viewed as allied to the rebels, and indeed, any hapless individual caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Local authorities completely abdicated their responsibility for maintaining law and order. Instead, they permitted mob violence and civilian militias to act with impunity, and state security forces made little or no attempt to control them, much less hold them accountable.

Two incidents reported to Human Rights Watch by credible sources demonstrated this trend of mob violence completely tolerated by local authorities. In one case in early March, 2003:

> A Yacouba man went to the mayor's office [in Duékoué] to request a laissez-passé. He was accused by someone in the crowd of being an 'assailant.' The crowd threw themselves on him and beat him with bricks, shoes and other items. After being taken, badly injured, to the local hospital, some of the members of the crowd came to the hospital, dragged him outside, killed him and burned his body, and left it in the courtyard. Finally the surgeon from the hospital requested that the body be buried because the nurses in the hospital were refusing to work there.[189]

In another incident in early March, a young Gueré was beaten to death by a crowd twenty-five meters from a gendarmerie post after another Gueré man accused him of being an 'assailant.'[190]

Reprisal killings of self-defense committee members

In reaction to the increasingly active role in the conflict played by the Gueré self-defense committees, the rebel forces increasingly targeted Gueré self-defense committee members after capturing areas previously held by the government, particularly in and around Man and Bangolo. Human Rights Watch documented several cases where self-defense committee members were specifically targeted, probably in reprisal for their collaboration with government forces in abuses against Dioula and Burkinabé civilians.

In one such case the rebel forces targeted local villagers in the Man vicinity.

> They came through Siabli towards 4 a.m. on the way to Man. The next morning we found the bodies of three villagers from Siabli. They had been tied up, including their hands, then tied to a vehicle with a

188 Human Rights Watch interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, February 8, 2003.
189 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 4, 2003.
190 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 4, 2003.

rope, then dragged behind the vehicle, which drove at full speed for three kilometers. Then the rebels slit the throat of one of them, decapitated another and shot the third. One of the three was called 'Antonio,' he belonged to a village self-defense committee. Later we found three more bodies, two youths from the village and a woman who was not from the village.[191]

X. LEGAL OBLIGATIONS AND LOCAL RESPONSES TO ABUSES AGAINST CIVILIANS

Côte d'Ivoire's legal obligations

Initially described as a mutiny, then as a coup attempt, within a matter of days the conflict reached the threshold of an internal conflict.[192] Despite the introduction of the Liberian fighters, the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire remained an internal conflict, albeit one with some international dimensions given the indirect involvement of neighboring Liberia and Burkina Faso.

All parties involved in the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire are obliged to respect fundamental principles of international humanitarian law. This body of law demands that all parties to the conflict distinguish at all times between civilians and combatants, and between civilian property and military objectives. Acts or threats of violence intended to spread terror among the civilian population, in particular murder, physical or mental torture, rape, mutilation, pillage, and collective punishment, are prohibited. The destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for food production, crops, drinking water installations and supplies, is also prohibited.[193]

Côte d'Ivoire has incorporated many of the key principles of international humanitarian law within its national legislation. The core provisions of international human rights and humanitarian law, including the prohibition of genocide and crimes against the civilian population, have been incorporated into the Ivorian Penal Code.[194] Article 138 of the Penal Code specifically prohibits reprisal killings, and both the government and rebel forces must be held accountable for the reprisal killings committed by each side. The government and rebel forces, including their respective Liberian mercenaries and civilian militia forces, must also be held accountable for the numerous counts of rape, murder, and pillaging of the civilian population described in the above chapters, all of which are prohibited under both national and international law.

Côte d'Ivoire has also signed and ratified key international human rights treaties. A number of fundamental provisions of these treaties, such as the right to life, the right to be free from torture and the right to be free from ethnic discrimination were violated by the government forces. Many of the fundamental rights embodied in these treaties are non-derogable, meaning that the government and its security forces are obliged to respect them regardless of the armed conflict.

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191 Human Rights Watch interview, Duékoué, April 2, 2003.

192 Under international humanitarian law, an internal conflict is defined as a conflict that takes place between the national armed forces and "dissident armed forces or other organized armed groups which, under responsible command, exercise such control over a part of its territory as to enable them to carry out sustained and concerted military operations and to implement this Protocol." Article 1.1, Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), 8 June 1977.

193 Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 (Geneva Conventions). Côte d'Ivoire has signed and ratified the Geneva Conventions; the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977; and Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), 8 June 1977. Côte d'Ivoire ratified the Additional Protocols of 1977 on September 20, 1989. The Protocols were published by Decree No. 88-1102 of November 25, 1988.

194Law No. 81-640. Article 138 of the Penal Code is based on the fundamental guarantees incorporated in the Geneva Conventions, and deals with crimes against the civilian population.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Côte d'Ivoire is a party, states: "No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life."[195] The Human Rights Committee, the body that monitors compliance with the Covenant, has said that the deprivation of life by state authorities is a matter of the utmost gravity. A state must strictly control and limit the circumstances in which the authorities might deprive persons of their lives. The summary executions of dozens of civilians by the state security forces were clearly a gross violation of these legal obligations.

In addition, Côte d'Ivoire violated basic principles of international law when the government imposed an order stating that "any suspicious individuals would be shot without warning" during the curfew hours.[196] The U.N. Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials provides guidance on the use of force and firearms by those enforcing the law, including soldiers. In situations of law enforcement such as the control of civilian crowds or the enforcement of a curfew, where the lawful use of force and firearms is unavoidable, law enforcement officials must exercise restraint and act in proportion to the seriousness of the offence and the legitimate objective to be achieved; they must minimize injury, and respect and preserve human life. The Basic Principles further provide that the intentional lethal use of firearms may only be made "when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life." Exceptional circumstances such as internal instability or other public emergency may not be invoked to justify a departure from these basic principles. A blanket order such as the one described above did not meet the required standards of proportionality.

The response of the government of Côte d'Ivoire[197]

Throughout much of the conflict in western Côte d'Ivoire, the government has acted in abnegation of its responsibility to protect civilians in territory under its control from violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Instead, government security forces have frequently and sometimes systematically conducted campaigns of violence against civilians, generally based on ethnic, religious, national and political affiliation. The government has consistently denied responsibility for attacks on civilians. Instead, they have attempted to divert responsibility for violations of humanitarian law that have been brought to public attention onto their opponents, onto the French forces, onto the media, in short, onto any possible alternatives.

In addition to denying responsibility, the government's use of the media and political discourse, both before and since the events of September 19, 2002, has been inflammatory and has encouraged attacks by civilian militias against civilians. Calling on civilians to act as self-defense committees and man checkpoints encouraged vigilantism and was a virtual license to violence.

In October 2002, the government stated that it would investigate the events in Daloa, but there has been no official inquiry or report published on the findings to date. In May, the government announced anew that an inquiry would be undertaken into the events in the west. To date, Human Rights Watch is not aware of any individuals who have been arrested or convicted of any of the deaths of civilians since September 19, 2002.

The government has consistently denied using Liberian refugees and other fighters from the MODEL faction despite overwhelming evidence of their presence in the west and their link to the Ivorian state. Even when Liberian "LIMA" forces were detained by the French military, the Gbagbo government refused to acknowledge their deployment and responsibility for the Bangolo massacre. Instead, the "young patriots" mobilized a march to Daloa under the leadership of Charles Blé Goudé and decried the detention of the so-called young Guerés, resulting in the escape of a number of the detainees. In the weeks following the Bangolo events, popular concern over the "genocide" against the Wê was fueled and manipulated by government statements.

195 Article 6.1. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification, accession by United Nations General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI) on December 16, 1966. Entered into force on March 23, 1976 in accordance with article 49. Côte d'Ivoire ratified ICCPR on March 26, 1992.

196 Statement of Jules Yao Yao, armed forces spokesperson, transcribed in *le jour*, December 7-8, 2002, p.2.

197 All references to the government are to the government of President Laurent Gbagbo, which was still in place as the main authority through April 2003, when members of the new government of reconciliation began taking their places.

Even after a cease-fire in the west was signed by the government and rebel groups in early May and a meeting with Liberian President Taylor took place in which both heads of state committed to refrain from supporting insurgents, there were continuing suspicions about ongoing support to Liberian rebel factions. In mid-May, George Dweh, the vice-president of the LURD faction, told journalists that he was in Abidjan on the government's invitation and was planning to meet President Gbagbo. A government communiqué denied the allegation.[198] Worryingly, recruitment in Nicla camp continued to be reported as of late-May, weeks after government and rebel forces signed a cease-fire in the west, and days after the head of the U.N. refugee agency, Ruud Lubbers, visited the camp and raised concerns over recruitment with President Gbagbo.[199]

A welcome sign of the new direction taken by the recently implemented government of reconciliation was the declaration of prime minister Seydou Diarra at the end of May, who stated that Côte d'Ivoire would ratify the treaty for the International Criminal Court and launch an inquiry into abuses with support from the U.N. Security Council.[200] The latter step would provide a welcome start to the lengthy process needed to account for and punish the abuses of the war.

The response of the rebel groups

The Ivorian rebel groups, in particular the MPIGO group, are responsible for serious abuses, including rape, murder, and other acts of violence against civilians and other non-combatants in violation of Common Article 3 and Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions. Although many of the worst atrocities against civilians were committed by Liberian and Sierra Leonean fighters working with the MPIGO group, all of the rebel forces have committed abuses and should be held accountable for these acts.

The MPCI clearly recognized the role played by the Liberian and Sierra Leonean contingents. In early April, Human Rights Watch was told by MPCI Secretary-General Guillaume Soro that the MPCI "was trying to get the Liberians out" and that they had told the prime minister Seydou Diarra that "if the French did not do anything in the west, then they would take matters in their own hands."[201]

Details are unclear, but it is possible that around this time the MPCI may have decided to cooperate with the Special Court for Sierra Leone in order to turn over war criminal Sam "Mosquito" Bockarie, who was indicted by the Special Court in March 2002. It is unclear whether MPIGO leader Felix Doh was supportive or resistant to this idea. Doh was killed, allegedly by the Liberian and Sierra Leonean fighters under Bockarie, at the end of April, but rumors also circulated that the MPCI might have been responsible for his death.[202] Sam Bockarie himself was killed several days later, apparently by Liberian government troops who stopped him while he was trying to re-enter Liberia. It is believed that President Taylor was behind the deaths of Bockarie, members of his family, and other potential witnesses against his own record of responsibility for abuses in the Sierra Leonean war.[203]

While the MPCI rebels acknowledged the problem posed and abuses resulting from the introduction of Liberian fighters, they initially denied links with the western rebel groups and have not publicly acknowledged responsibility for introducing any Liberian contingents. Even after all three groups were formally incorporated into the "New Forces" (Forces Nouvelles), the precise chain of command between the MPIGO rebels and their Liberian recruits remained unclear, although a chain of command certainly existed, at least in the initial period.

198 "Dirigeant du LURD à Abidjan: le gouvernement dément toute rencontre officielle," Agence France Presse, May 15, 2003.

199Silvia Aloisi, "Refugee camp nurtures recruits for Ivorian war," Reuters, May 18, 2003, at www.Reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf./ByCountry/CôtedIvoire (accessed May 20, 2003).

200 Integrated Regional Information Network, "Côte d'Ivoire: Government to inquire into human rights abuses," May 29, 2003, at www.reliefweb.int (accessed May 31, 2003).

201 Human Rights Watch interview, Bouaké, March 31, 2003.

202 "Ivorian leader 'found dead'," BBC News, April 28, 2003, at http//://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/Africa/2981383.stm (accessed April 28, 2003).

203 Integrated Regional Information Network, "Bockarie's death boosts chances for peace," May 9, 2003, at www.reliefweb.int (accessed May 30, 2003).

The rebels have also denied responsibility for violations of international humanitarian law, in particular the killing of over fifty detained gendarmes and family members in Bouaké in October 2002. They have however acknowledged the increasing lack of discipline among the MPCI troops, citing tensions between the military and political wings in the long period between the signing and the implementation of the Marcoussis accords.[204]

Accountability for the Bouaké massacre and other reprisal killings will be a vital step towards establishing peace and reconciliation in Côte d'Ivoire. In addition, the continuing questions surrounding the links between the MPCI and the MPIGO, and the chain of command over the Liberian fighters require further investigation in order to establish the command responsibility for their abuses against civilians in the west.

The French response

France, the ex-colonial power, has had a long and complex relationship with Côte d'Ivoire. Over twenty thousand French nationals were present in the country up to September 2002, and the French retained a military presence in Abidjan, a reflection of the continuing French economic, political, cultural and social interests in the country. A treaty between France and Côte d'Ivoire provided that the French could protect Ivorian territory if it was threatened by an external power.[205]

Initially, the French forces of Operation Unicorn intervened only to the extent of evacuating Western nationals from areas engulfed by fighting. However, following the first cease-fire between the rebels and the government on October 17, 2002, the French agreed to monitor the cease-fire line. French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin also engaged in considerable diplomatic lobbying with President Gbagbo and the rebel forces, both around the first cease-fire and later. However, French relations with President Gbagbo's regime deteriorated markedly, particularly after the signing of the Marcoussis accords. President Gbagbo appeared to be increasingly reluctant to implement the accords and did little to stem the demonstrations of the "young patriots." The French soon found themselves attacked on both sides, by the government who claimed they favored the rebels by not denouncing the insurgency, and by the rebels who claimed that they obstructed the rebel advances on San Pedro and Abidjan.

Once French troops agreed to monitor the cease-fire line, they were witness to many attacks on civilians by both forces. Initially, they did attempt to publicize and verify the worst of these: the mass grave in Monoko-Zohi and the helicopter attacks on Menakro, for instance, were confirmed by French forces. They were later given a United Nations mandate to support the ECOWAS troops and protect civilians,[206] but tended to interpret this fairly narrowly. For instance, they did distribute telephone numbers to civilians in Daloa, Duékoué and Guiglo, which they could use to call for help if needed, and Human Rights Watch was told of several cases where individuals were saved by French forces from acts of violence and even executions by government troops. However, in other instances, they did little to deter or prevent violence; placing troops around the Nicla refugee camp, for instance, might have had some effect in deterring the recruitment and militarization of that camp.

French pressure brought both sides to the peace table at Linas-Marcoussis in late-January, and forged the accords, which gave human rights issues a prominent place. In an annexe, the Linas-Marcoussis accords tasked the new government of reconciliation with legislative reform of the laws on nationality, electoral procedure, and land inheritance, the immediate creation of a national human rights commission, the establishment of an international inquiry into serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, and demanded an end to the impunity of those responsible for summary executions, in particular the death squads. While all of these steps are worthwhile, few if any of them have been initiated, and all will be necessary in order to try to bridge the deep divisions in Ivorian society.

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204 Human Rights Watch interview with Guillaume Soro, Secretary- General of the MPCI, Bouaké, March 31, 2003.

205 This was one reason why Houphouet-Boigny did not build up the Ivoiran military. Another reason was that he mistrusted the potential threat to stability—and his own power—posed by a strong military. Given the history of military coups in the region, he was not short-sighted in that regard.

206 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1464, February 4, 2003. S/RES/1464/2003.

Until a May 1, 2003 cease-fire was signed in the west, French and ECOWAS troops were reluctant to enter the west, where fighting was on-going and abuses were taking place on a daily basis. However, by late-May, as Liberian fighters were reportedly clearing out of the area, French and ECOWAS troops were preparing to assume monitoring positions and secure areas of the west, and by early June, most of the major towns in the west were stabilizing.

XI. THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

The crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, once considered a pillar of regional stability, has highlighted the ever-increasing fragility of the West African sub-region. The eight months of armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, and in particular, the patterns of human rights abuses in the western part of the country, are a renewed reminder of the need to address the underlying causes of an ever-shifting regional crisis. While the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire has clear internal origins, the evolution of the conflict underlines the extent to which the states of the region are interlinked. The resurgence of the Liberian war is fundamental to the problems in the region, but it is only one element in what has clearly evolved into a regional crisis, with the responsibility for abuses shared by numerous regional actors.

The flow of arms and combatants, including mercenaries, across porous borders paired with the willingness of regional governments to support insurgent groups against neighbors is a dangerous combination. Developments in the past year in Côte d'Ivoire highlight the serious potential for a constant regional cycle of conflict and destabilization as armed groups produce new cycles of human rights abuses, internally displaced persons and refugees, and child soldiers.

Côte d'Ivoire's neighbors: Liberia, Burkina Faso and Guinea

Côte d'Ivoire's war, while mainly spurred by internal grievances and movements, has been strongly influenced by regional dynamics, with Liberia, Burkina Faso and Guinea playing roles in its evolution and sharing some responsibility for the increasing overlap with the Liberian conflict. Questions remain regarding the precise roles of Liberian President Charles Taylor and Burkina Faso's Blaise Compaoré in supporting the rebel groups. Taylor and Compaoré were allies through much of the 1990s,[207] and each would have had interests in seeing a change of regime in Abidjan. Taylor's historical links to Blaise Compaoré are clear, and the use of Burkina Faso as a transit point for illegal arms shipments to Liberia has been well documented by successive reports of the U.N. Panel of Experts.[208] However, key questions regarding the extent of the links between the MPIGO and MPCI rebel groups and the neighboring governments, and whether or not they involved logistical support or took the form of direct orders from Monrovia and Ouagadougou—have not been answered and require further investigation.

Guinea has long been hosting and supporting the LURD insurgency from Liberian refugee camps in the east of the country, and has contributed to the intensification of the Liberian conflict through this policy of support to

207 Personal relationships have dictated much of West African foreign policy throughout the past decades. Three key regional figures became allies of then-rebel Charles Taylor as he led the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) insurgency against Doe's regime in the late-1980s. The first was the president of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré, who provided military training and support to a group of Liberian exiles, including Taylor, after receiving their support in the1987 assassination of then-president Thomas Sankara. The second was Libyan leader Colonel Gaddafi, whose dislike of Doe stemmed from hostility to the United States, and whose military support to Charles Taylor in his rebel days has continued throughout Taylor's presidency, irrespective of the United Nations arms embargo on Liberia. The third was Felix Houphouet Boigny, who supported Taylor after Doe's 1980 murder of Adolphus Tolbert, the husband of Houphouët-Boigny's god-daughter. Houphouët-Boigny also had personal links to Blaise Compaoré, who had married one of his nieces. Houphouët-Boigny's support for Taylor's rebellion included allowing the fledgling NPFL to use western Côte d'Ivoire—in particular the town of Danané, which lies in a strategic position at the intersection of the Ivorian, Liberian and Guinean borders—as a staging base for Taylor's attacks on Liberia. *See* Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*, (Hurst and Company, London), 1999, pp. 160-164.

208 See, for instance, the reports of the U.N. Panel of Experts on Liberia of October 25, 2002 (S/2002/1115) and April 24, 2003, (S/2003/498).

Liberian rebel groups. Guinea's main link with the Ivorian war has been as a major recipient of refugees. An issue of particular concern in relation to the Ivorian crisis has been Guinea's reluctance to admit certain ECOWAS nationals, even in transit, into its territory. As a result of the government's refusal to allow Burkinabé nationals entry, thousands of Burkinabé civilians and others displaced from western Ivory Coast were trapped within Liberia for weeks, and remain dispersed in eastern Liberia without access to humanitarian assistance or protection. This example presents anew the need for regional governments to uphold their obligations to refugees and displaced civilians fleeing conflict zones, regardless of ethnicity or nationality.

The regional actors: ECOWAS

The ECOWAS countries quickly recognized the gravity of the Ivorian situation, touching as it did the economic heart of the region. Although a commitment to send in ECOWAS troops was hampered by funding and stalled for almost two months after it was made on October 29, members of ECOWAS made consistent efforts to broker cease-fires, set up peace negotiations and bring the parties to conflict together in Lomé, Dakar, and Accra in numerous meetings and forums. ECOWAS concerns largely centered on the economic impact of the crisis and the risks to regional stability posed by the conflict. The Ghanaian, Togolese, and Senegalese heads of state played the most active roles in mobilizing troops for the ECOWAS contingent and attempting to defuse the conflict. As of late-May, 2003, approximately 1,300 ECOWAS troops were in place in Côte d'Ivoire, where they coordinated with French forces in monitoring the cease-fire line.

The ECOWAS community—and the African Union—has been notably weak in terms of systematically condemning human rights abuses by regional governments. This weakness is very likely due in part to the dubious human rights records of many of the ruling governments in their home countries. Strengthening the regional human rights mechanisms and the human rights commission of the African Union would be an important step towards creating greater accountability within member states and the region.

The United Nations

Security Council

From the start of the conflict, the United Nations has often deferred to France on political and military matters concerning Côte d'Ivoire. A Security Council resolution in February 2003[209] condemned human rights abuses in the conflict and conferred Chapter VII authority on French and ECOWAS forces, but United Nations forces have otherwise played a minimal role. A U.N. mission to Côte d'Ivoire, MINUCI, was proposed in late-April and approved in early May. The mission included military observers and liaisons and a vital human rights monitoring component, but the Security Council cut human and financial resources for the mission's civilian components, based mainly on U.S. concerns over the budget and staffing. This response by the United States was seriously short-sighted given the urgent need for a human rights monitoring framework in Côte d'Ivoire.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

An OHCHR mission to Côte d'Ivoire in December 2002 produced a public report on the situation and highlighted many of the key issues, including the contentious underlying land and nationality debates. A follow-up mission in March evaluated the feasibility of a future commission of inquiry and established several benchmarks for the launching of such a mission. Pushing for an international inquiry or a credible local mechanism backed by international efforts and personnel is vital if justice and accountability are to be achieved in Côte d'Ivoire, and the OHCHR should be closely engaged in the human rights monitoring component of MINUCI and any future commission of inquiry.

209 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1464, February 4, 2003, S/RES/1464 (2003).

XII. METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a ten-week visit by Human Rights Watch researchers to Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire in February, March and April 2003, and on prior and subsequent research. Research was carried out in Ouagadougou, Bobo-Dioulasso, Banfora, Yendere, Nyangoloko, Sikasso, Zegua, Conakry, Nzerekore, Thuo and the Guinean refugee camps, Freetown, Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, Bouaké, Daloa, Duékoué, and Guiglo.

Additional research was conducted in person and through telephone interviews in Europe and North America. Over one hundred and fifty individuals were interviewed, many of them victims of and witnesses to the abuses described in this report. Human Rights Watch met representatives of the Ivorian and Burkinabé governments and with representatives of the MPCI rebel forces. Members of civil society and religious groups, local and international media, diplomatic missions, and humanitarian agencies were interviewed in several countries.

The vast majority of the interviews were conducted directly with interviewees in French or English without a translator. In a handful of cases, a translator was used to translate from a local language into French.

XIII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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