

Country Report on Terrorism 2023 - Chapter 1 - Côte d'Ivoire

Overview: While Côte d'Ivoire (CDI) did not experience any significant terrorist attacks during 2023, the government assessed that the security situation has further deteriorated because of persistent democratic backsliding, lawlessness, and insecurity in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. In January 2022, then-Prime Minister Patrick Achi launched a social welfare program to render more resilient those communities at the front lines of the terrorist threat spilling over from the Sahel. In April, CDI adopted the Niamey Convention, the African Union's convention on cross border cooperation. In response to the increased risk, the Ivoirian government has undertaken a whole-of-government approach to counter the expansion of violent extremism and the threat of terrorism spillover from the Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger).

A social welfare program, PS-Gouv-2, seeks to improve livelihoods in communities along the northern border by increasing the availability of government-provided education and training, empowering women, and making available financial resources for youth employment. With a sustained strong economy, CDI remains a migration destination country, with more than 20 percent of the country's population consisting of foreign citizens. On the security side, the Ivoirian government continues to maintain the Northern Operational Zone (known by the French acronym ZON and comprising an estimated 3,000 soldiers on active patrol); it successfully launched and sustained the operations of a counterterrorism fusion cell, the Counterterrorism Operational Intelligence Center (CROAT). The CROAT continues to lead the way in francophone West Africa on turning intelligence into evidence so authorities can better identify, detain, and prosecute terrorists. The Government of CDI assesses that the Macina Liberation Front (aka Katiba Macina), part of al-Qa'ida affiliate JNIM, is responsible for the series of attacks that took place during 2020-21 in northern Côte d'Ivoire. JNIM exploits historic tensions between ethnic communities and is trying to expand into Coastal West Africa.

2023 Terrorist Incidents: CDI did not experience any terrorist incidents in 2023. However, aggravating a worsening situation were military coups in countries to its North, uncertainty around the UN Peacekeeping mission in Mali, rising inflation and economic pressure brought by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a six-month-long detention of Ivoirian soldiers in Bamako on false pretexts (they were released in January 2023), and the breakdown in cross-border counterterrorism coordination since the arrival of Russia's Wagner Group to Mali. In particular, the Wagner Group's influence in the Sahel contributed to mounting stability risks in CDI.

Law Enforcement and Border Security: Antiterrorism Act No. 2015-493 of 2015 remains in effect. Those convicted of terrorism under this law may face penalties of up to 20 years in prison and fines up to \$80,000.

There were accounts of individuals from one specific ethnicity being subjected to more-frequent questioning and temporary detention by civilian law enforcement in the northern regions of CDI. The Ivoirian government is aware of the negative impact this pattern of behavior undertaken by civilian law enforcement makes on the subjected population. The government is taking steps to reduce stigmatization of historically vulnerable and marginalized communities, especially members of the Fulani community.

Seven law enforcement units contribute to the country's counterterrorism effort; their names are provided in French: Brigade Antiterroriste, Centre de Coordination des Décisions Opérationnelles, Unité d'Intervention de la Gendarmerie Nationale (UIGN), Force de Recherche et d'Assistance de la Police (FRAP), Unité de Lutte Contre la Criminalité Transnationale Organisée, Cellule Nationale de Traitement des Informations Financières, and Police Criminelle et Police Économique.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) relocated its center of policing excellence from Dakar to Abidjan. INTERPOL also opened a new office in Abidjan. The Ivoirian border commission (Commission Nationale des Frontières de la Côte d'Ivoire, or CNFCI) began a comprehensive overhaul of the border security and coordination framework. CNFCI is responsible for implementing the African Union Borders Program (known locally by its French acronym PFUA). The border commission reports directly to the Office of the Prime Minister and hosts liaison experts from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior and Security, Defense, Health, Animal and Marine Resources, Justice and Human Rights, Plan and Development, Transport, Employment and Social Protections, Economic and Finance, Mining-Petroleum and Energy, Budget, and Road Maintenance.

The units responsible for the Ivoirian government's counterterrorism efforts include the CROAT, CCDO (Center of Coordination for Decision Making Operations), UIGN, FRAP, GMI (Mobile Intervention Group), and CTM (Maritime Counterterrorism Group). The Ivoirian armed forces also maintain a counterterrorism unit called the Forces Speciales Ivoiriennes (or FSI). While these units collaborate with one another, they also acknowledge the need to improve coordination. CDI partners with INTERPOL and UNODC on counterterrorism. The Directorate of Territorial Surveillance (DST) carries out systematic controls at land, air, and sea borders. DST relies on INTERPOL-provided databases to verify individual identities. Most of CDI's borders with neighboring countries are poorly demarcated and difficult to monitor. Throughout much of the year, migrants and others take advantage of the lack of demarcations or barriers to enter the country.

On November 30 the Ivoirian courts opened a trial against 18 individuals accused of taking part in the 2016 terrorist attack in Grand-Bassam. Press reported that the trial concluded December 28, with 11 individuals receiving life sentences for their role in the attack, which killed 19 people. Four of the defendants were present in the Ivoirian court. Embassy contacts said the families of the victims who participated in the video conference were pleased with the outcome and handling of the trial. Currently, the Ivoirian authorities are holding seven individuals with ties to Burkina Faso and armed terrorist groups on charges of financing terrorism and recruitment.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: CDI is a member of the Intergovernmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa, and its Financial Intelligence Unit, the National Unit for the Processing of Financial Information in Côte d'Ivoire (or CENTIF-CI), is a member of the Egmont Group.

In June, CDI completed its FATF mutual evaluation, which revealed significant weaknesses and gaps in CDI's anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism regime, such as in the criminalization of terrorist financing and the implementation of targeted financial sanctions without delay. The report identified CDI as particularly exposed to terrorist financing risks by its role as a subregional financial center, significant cross-border commercial and financial flows, and the porous nature of borders with surrounding countries. CDI's large informal sector and cash-based economy, along with increased terrorist threats along its northern border areas, exacerbate terrorist financing risks. The Ivoirian authorities have established a task force to address the priority actions identified in the report.

Countering Violent Extremism: The Ivoirian government continued actions begun in 2022 to reduce the vulnerability of communities in the North with a series of social welfare programs. The PS-Gouv-2 program funds youth employment, improves access to capital, and increases population touchpoints with the government (such as health and other public services). The government also established a youth employment fund specifically for the northern regions of Bagoué, Tchologo, and Bounkani. The Government of Côte d'Ivoire is aware that civilian law enforcement patterns of behavior result in individuals from one specific ethnic group being subjected more frequently to scrutiny and to the possibility of detention. The Ivoirian government is taking steps to reduce stigmatization of this community through public messaging and senior leadership engagement.

International and Regional Counterterrorism Cooperation: Côte d'Ivoire was actively engaged in the following organizations:

- The UN – member state
- The UN Office of Counterterrorism
- The UN Office on Drugs and Crime
- The Global Counterterrorism Forum
- The African Union (AU) – member state
- The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – member state
- The ECOWAS Chiefs of Defense Staff Committee – member state
- The Accra Initiative – member state