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Africa : Côte d'Ivoire

REPUBLIC OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Head of state: Laurent Gbagbo

Head of government: Charles Konan Banny (replaced Seydou Diarra in December)

Death penalty: abolitionist for all crimes

International Criminal Court: signed

UN Women's Convention: ratified

Optional Protocol to UN Women's Convention: not signed

Overview - Covering events from January - December 2005

[Background](#) : [Deaths in detention and unlawful killings](#) : [Abuses by the New Forces](#) :
[Extrajudicial execution by French peacekeeping forces](#) : [Ethnic clashes in the west of the](#)
[country](#) : [Demobilization at a standstill](#) : [Child soldiers](#) : [Freedom of expression under attack](#) :
[AI country visits](#)

The postponement of presidential elections in October, despite intense diplomatic efforts by the African Union and pressure from the UN and the international community, resulted in political deadlock. In December a transitional government and prime minister were appointed. A resumption of hostilities was averted by international efforts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis and the presence of 10,000 peacekeeping troops. Both government security forces and the New Forces (Forces Nouvelles), a political coalition of former armed opposition groups in control of the north, continued to commit human rights abuses. People suspected of supporting the opposition forces were reportedly killed in the custody of the security forces. The death of a foreign national detained by opposition forces was believed to be the result of torture or other ill-treatment. Inter-ethnic tensions were stirred up by xenophobic propaganda. No progress was made in demobilizing forces under the peace process. Freedom of expression was under constant attack by both sides.

Background



Côte d'Ivoire

[Archive information](#)

[Côte d'Ivoire: Stop the](#)
(AI Index: AFR 31/003)

[Côte d'Ivoire: Threats](#)
[future](#)
(AI Index: AFR 31/013)

[All documents on Côte](#)

In February a pro-government militia attacked a New Forces position in the first renewal of hostilities since forces loyal to President Laurent Gbagbo bombed rebel-held towns in November 2004, shattering an 18-month ceasefire.

In April, following mediation by South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki, both sides signed an agreement (Pretoria I) declaring an official end to the war, and pledged to demobilize, disarm and reintegrate all forces enlisted since the start of the insurgency in September 2002. Following ethnic clashes in the west in May and June, all the parties further agreed in June (Pretoria II) to African Union sanctions against forces that failed to implement peace agreements. In July, President Gbagbo adopted legal amendments identified in the peace accords as pre-conditions for presidential elections in October, but the New Forces and other opposition parties claimed the amendments were not in line with the Pretoria agreements.

In July tensions increased after attacks by unidentified armed groups on guard posts in two towns close to Abidjan, the economic capital, in which at least five military policemen were killed. In August, General Mathias Doué, a former Army Chief of Staff, threatened to use "any means" to oust President Gbagbo, saying he was an obstacle to peace.

In October, following postponement of the presidential elections, the African Union proposed that President Gbagbo remain in power until October 2006, 12 months beyond his term of office, while conditions were created to hold fair elections. Under this proposal, which was endorsed by the UN, a new Prime Minister "acceptable to all Ivorian parties" was appointed in December as a result of the mediation of Presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria. Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny and a new government that included members of all Ivorian political parties were appointed for a transitional period until October 2006 to prepare future presidential elections.

The UN Security Council and Secretary-General continued to raise the possibility of sanctions against those undermining the peace process. In October, after a visit to Côte d'Ivoire, the head of the UN Sanctions Committee said that the international community would impose "measures" against political factions if they failed to reach a peace agreement.

Deaths in detention and unlawful killings

The security forces were responsible for the extrajudicial execution of detainees suspected of supporting the armed elements of the New Forces.

- In April, Samassi Abdramane, Touré Adama and Nimba Kah Hyacinthe were arrested by the police on suspicion of being "rebels". They were denied access to their lawyer, although their families were able to visit them at police headquarters in Abidjan some days after their arrest. A few days later, their bodies were found in the morgue at Anyama, 20km north of Abidjan. Despite a judicial investigation, by the end of 2005 no significant progress appeared to have been made in identifying their killers.
- In July, following an attack by unidentified armed men on police stations in the towns of Abgenville and Anyama, the security forces arrested dozens of civilians as suspects. A number were reported to have been extrajudicially executed, including Koné Gaoussou, a driver, and Diarra Lacény, an apprentice driver. No investigation was known to have been opened into these deaths.

Abuses by the New Forces

Armed New Forces units continued to be responsible for human rights abuses, including arbitrary detention, torture and ill-treatment.

- In March, Brian Hamish Sands, a New Zealand national, was arrested on suspicion of being a mercenary and detained incommunicado in Bouaké, the New Forces stronghold. He died three weeks later, according to the New Forces from natural causes. However, autopsy findings appeared to exclude this possibility. Other reports suggested that he had been tortured or might have committed suicide. There was no independent investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death.
- Also in March, some 35 men accused of being pro-government fighters were arrested by the New Forces. They were transferred to Korhogo, where they were allegedly detained for months incommunicado, without charge or trial and at risk of torture.

Extrajudicial execution by French peacekeeping forces

In May, soldiers of the French peacekeeping force Licorne killed Firmin Mahé, an alleged highway gang leader wanted for murder and rape. He suffocated while being transferred to hospital on the road between Bangolo and Man in the west. In October, three members of the French forces – including General Henri Poncet, former commander of the peacekeeping

force – were suspended and reprimanded over their role in covering-up the killing. French investigators subsequently launched a military investigation and a criminal investigation into voluntary manslaughter.

Ethnic clashes in the west of the country

In the west, antagonism between the indigenous population and farmers from other regions or neighbouring countries such as Burkina Faso continued to provoke ethnic clashes. Xenophobic rhetoric by politicians and the news media aggravated the conflict.

- In May and June, more than a hundred people were killed, many with machetes and cudgels, in two separate incidents in Duékoué, 500km north-west of Abidjan. The conflict took place in a region under government rule, alongside the “confidence zone” controlled by French soldiers and the peacekeeping force of the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI).

Demobilization at a standstill

The stalling of the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programme constituted one of the most obvious failures of the peace process. An estimated 50,000 combatants enlisted since the start of the insurgency in September 2002 were supposed to enter the programme. They included armed elements of the New Forces, pro-government militia members, and women and child soldiers. However, none of the measures anticipated in the timetable had been implemented by the end of 2005, in particular the preparation of sites designated for demobilized combatants. The main obstacle to progress appeared to be a lack of mutual confidence between the government and the New Forces leadership.

Child soldiers

As in previous years, child soldiers were recruited by both parties to the conflict.

- In February, two children aged 10 and 11, apparently of Liberian origin, took part in an attack on the western town of Logoualé by a pro-government militia, the Movement for the Liberation of Western Côte d'Ivoire (Mouvement de Libération de l'Ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire). The two children were placed under the protection of UNICEF, the UN Children's Fund.

Freedom of expression under attack

Journalists and media organizations were harassed and attacked by the security forces and pro-government militias.

- In July, members of the Young Patriots (Jeunes Patriotes), a loosely defined movement professing support for President Gbagbo, destroyed copies of opposition newspapers including *Le Patriote* and *Le Nouveau Réveil*.
- Also in July, the National Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting suspended broadcasts of *Radio France Internationale* in Côte d'Ivoire, and accused the station of unprofessional and biased coverage. Its broadcasts were still suspended at the end of 2005.
- In August, General Philippe Mangou, the Army Chief of Staff, threatened to ban newspapers that were “not working in the interests of the country”.

AI country visits

In January and February an AI delegation visited Côte d'Ivoire to investigate reports of human rights abuses during clashes in November 2004, including the alleged use of excessive force by French peacekeeping forces against civilian supporters of President Gbagbo in Abidjan.

[Back to Top](#)

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