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UNHCR POSITION ON RETURNS TO CÔTE D'IVOIRE

1. A very tense and uncertain situation has prevailed in Côte d'Ivoire since the political impasse that followed the 28 November 2010 Presidential elections.¹ It has been characterized by incidents of violence and reports of serious human rights abuses against civilians in different parts of the country, including against women, children and displaced persons.² Abductions, disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and acts of sexual violence as well as destruction of property have been reported in Abidjan, the capital city, and elsewhere in the country. As many as 250 persons have been reported killed since the elections.³
2. Over 18,000 Ivorians have been displaced internally. Thousands more have fled the country, mainly to Liberia and Guinea. In Liberia alone, close to 30,000 Ivorian refugees, mostly women and children, have been registered by UNHCR as of 19 January 2010. An average of 600 continue to arrive daily. UNHCR welcomes the decision of these Governments and others in the region to recognize these refugees on a *prima facie* basis and for their generous response and cooperation with UNHCR and other humanitarian actors in the face of this growing crisis.
3. As the situation in Côte d'Ivoire is fluid and may remain tense for some time to come, UNHCR further appreciates the measures taken by a number of European Governments to suspend forcible returns of nationals or habitual residents of Côte d'Ivoire, including rejected asylum-seekers, until such time as the security and human rights situation in the country has stabilized sufficiently to permit a safe return. UNHCR strongly recommends that other States consider implementing such measures at this time.

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Geneva
20 January 2011

¹ For more on the political background to the current situation, see UNHCR, *Update of UNHCR's Position on the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Côte d'Ivoire*, July 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46dc372c2.html>.

² See, UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution 1962 (2010) [on renewal of the mandate of the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and of the French forces which support it]*, S/RES/1962(2010), 20 December 2010, para. 9, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4d270ae12.html>; and UN Human Rights Council, *Human Rights Council debates situation of Human Rights in Côte d'Ivoire*, 23 December 2010, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=10614&LangID=E>.

³ United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, www.onuci.org.