

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	109
Land:	Elfenbenskysten
Kilde:	Human Rights Watch
Titel:	Côte d'Ivoire: Ouattara Forces Kill, Rape Civilians During Offensive
Udgivet:	9. april 2011
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	7. september 2011

Title	Côte d'Ivoire: Ouattara Forces Kill, Rape Civilians During Offensive
Publisher	Human Rights Watch
Country	Côte d'Ivoire
Publication Date	9 April 2011
Cite as	Human Rights Watch, <i>Côte d'Ivoire: Ouattara Forces Kill, Rape Civilians During Offensive</i> , 9 April 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4da3f63cc.html [accessed 23 August 2011]
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Côte d'Ivoire: Ouattara Forces Kill, Rape Civilians During Offensive

(Zwedru) - Forces loyal to President-elect Alassane Ouattara killed hundreds of civilians, raped more than 20 alleged supporters of his rival, Laurent Gbagbo, and burned at least 10 villages in Côte d'Ivoire's far western region, Human Rights Watch said today. Forces loyal to Gbagbo killed more than 100 presumed Ouattara supporters as Ouattara's forces advanced in their March campaign. Upon taking power, Ouattara should urgently open a credible and impartial investigation into serious abuses by both sides and ensure that those responsible at all levels are brought to justice, Human Rights Watch said.

People interviewed by Human Rights Watch described how, in village after village, pro-Ouattara forces, now called the Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (*Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire*, FRCI), summarily executed and raped perceived Gbagbo supporters in their homes, as they worked in the fields, as they fled, or as they tried to hide in the bush. The fighters often targeted people by ethnicity, and the attacks disproportionately affected those too old or feeble to flee.

"Killing and raping civilians is no way for Ouattara's forces to end this conflict," said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "Ouattara should fulfill his public pledge to investigate and prosecute abuses by both sides if Côte d'Ivoire is to emerge from this horrific period."

In one particularly horrific incident, hundreds of ethnic Guéré civilians perceived as supporting Gbagbo were massacred in the western town of Duékoué by a mixture of pro-Ouattara groups, including Republican Forces under the overall command of Ouattara's prime minister, Guillaume Soro.

Three Human Rights Watch researchers conducted investigations in the Grand Gedeh region of Liberia between March 26 and April 7, interviewing over 120 victims of and witnesses to human rights abuses committed by both sides' forces in the far western region of Côte d'Ivoire. More than 40,000 Ivorians have fled to Grand Gedeh as a result of the fighting. Human Rights Watch also interviewed some 20 victims and witnesses still in the far west towns of Guiglo, Duékoué, and Bloléquin by telephone.

The abuses documented by Human Rights Watch occurred from March 6 to 30, 2011, as

the western towns of Toulepleu, Doké, Bloléquin, Duékoué, and Guiglo, all formerly controlled by pro-Gbagbo forces, fell to the pro-Ouattara forces seeking to force Gbagbo from the presidency. He has rejected calls to step down after an election Ouattara is internationally recognized to have won.

Ouattara's Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire comprise a loose coalition of combatants who previously fought for the *Forces Nouvelles* ("New Forces") rebellion, the long-time rebel army led by Soro that has controlled the northern half of the country since late 2002. The Republican Forces also include former Ivorian army soldiers, policemen, and gendarmes who have recently defected from Gbagbo's side.

In village after village investigated by Human Rights Watch, Republican Forces combatants killed, raped, and pillaged the predominantly Guéré population. The Guéré are originally from western Côte d'Ivoire and largely supported Gbagbo in last year's election. A 47-year-old woman told Human Rights Watch that she looked on as two fighters killed her father, husband, and 10-year-old son around the family's cocoa farm near Doké. A 32-year-old man described pro-Ouattara forces entering Diboké and opening fire on civilians as they ran out to see which side's forces had entered, killing at least three people right in front of him. In at least 10 villages around Toulepleu and Bloléquin, villagers said they hid in the bush and watched as the Republican Forces set fire to houses and buildings used to store crops and seeds, slaughtered animals, and stole everything of value.

Many residents fled in anticipation of or immediately upon the arrival of pro-Ouattara forces. Others, particularly some elderly residents who were unable to undertake the 40 or more kilometer walk to neighboring Liberia, were caught by the Republican Forces and held captive in their villages. Human Rights Watch documented the execution of more than 30 of these detained civilians. One 67-year-old woman described pro-Ouattara fighters taking several captives out each day - often men and women between 60 and 80 years old - and executing them at point-blank range.

Dozens of women were also detained for a day or longer and repeatedly raped. One woman from Bakoubli, near Toulepleu, said the forces raped her in front of her children, then killed her husband who tried to intervene.

The month-long onslaught of abuses against Guéré civilians in the far west, which began in late February, culminated in the massacre of hundreds in the town of Duékoué on March 29. After securing the town that morning, fighters from the Republican Forces - accompanied by two pro-Ouattara militia groups - proceeded to the Gbagbo-stronghold neighborhood of Carrefour. Eight women told Human Rights Watch that pro-Ouattara forces dragged men, young and old, out of their homes and executed them with machetes and guns in the street, sometimes with multiple rounds of bullets. While committing the often gruesome killings, some attackers threatened "to kill the Guéré until the last one" because of their support for Gbagbo. One witness told Human Rights Watch that the Republican Forces abducted a carload of boys, including her younger brother, and shouted that they would be taken to the town of Man - the former *Forces Nouvelles* base in the far west - to "become soldiers."

Human Rights Watch also found evidence of ongoing atrocities by pro-Gbagbo forces including the March 28 massacre in Bloléquin of more than 100 men, women, and children from northern Côte d'Ivoire and neighboring West African countries; the March 29 killing of another 10 northerners and West African immigrants in the town of Guiglo; and the mid-March killing of eight Togolese in a village just outside Bloléquin.

"To understand the tragic events in Côte d'Ivoire, a line cannot be drawn between north and south, or supporters of Gbagbo and Ouattara," Bekele said. "Unfortunately, there are those on both sides who have shown little regard for the dignity of human life."

Both pro-Ouattara and pro-Gbagbo forces are obligated to abide by international humanitarian law, or the laws of war, for a non-international armed conflict, as found in the Protocol II to the 1949 Geneva Conventions and customary international law.

Prohibited acts include killings, rape, torture, and mutilation of civilians and captured combatants, collective punishment, recruitment and use of child soldiers and pillage.

Anyone who participates in, orders, or has command responsibility for serious laws-of-war violations committed with criminal intent may be prosecuted for war crimes. Serious crimes, including murder and rape, committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack on a civilian population, such as a political or ethnic group, may be prosecuted as crimes against humanity. States have a responsibility to investigate and prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity committed on their territory, or ensure that individuals implicated are prosecuted in another venue.

Human Rights Watch called on Ouattara to take decisive measures to address serious violations of international law by all forces, prevent further reprisals and acts of collective punishment, and urgently investigate and prosecute all those responsible for abuses to bring to an end Côte d'Ivoire's longstanding cycle of impunity.

"While the international community has been focused on the political stalemate in Abidjan over the presidency, forces on both sides have committed numerous atrocities against civilians, their leaders showing little interest in reining them in," Bekele said. "Ouattara should send a strong message to Guillaume Soro and the Republican Forces that such abuses will be fully punished at home or by an international tribunal."

Widespread Killing, Pillaging by Republican Forces

Armed clashes in the far west between pro-Ouattara and pro-Gbagbo forces began on February 25 around the town of Zouan-Hounien. After quickly taking Zouan-Hounien and Bin-Houyé along the Liberian border in late February, Ouattara's Republican Forces, under Soro's overall command, faced much greater resistance in Toulepleu, Doké, Bloléquin, and Duékoué. On March 10, Soro acknowledged Commander Fofana Lossani as leader of the "pacification of the far west" for the Republican Forces, with the mandate "to protect the populations in the name of Ouattara's government." Witnesses and Ouattara officials also identified Capt. Eddie Medi as leader of the military offensive around Toulepleu and Bloléquin in particular.

As combat waged in and around these towns throughout March, the Republican Forces systematically targeted alleged pro-Gbagbo civilians, despite repeated public pronouncements by Soro and Ouattara spokespersons that their fight was only against Gbagbo's armed forces. Soro's visits to the Republican Forces in Toulepleu on March 9 and 10 do not appear to have reduced their abuses.

Human Rights Watch documented the killing of civilians by pro-Ouattara forces in at least a dozen villages in and around Toulepleu and Bloléquin, including summary executions, dismemberment, and immolation. While the majority of the region's ethnic Guéré residents fled in anticipation of the Republican Forces' attack, those who remained were subjected to collective punishment for the group's perceived support for Gbagbo.

A 57-year-old Guéré man from Zoguiné, a village between Toulepleu and the nearby official border crossing into Liberian, described to Human Rights Watch how the Republican Forces executed a farmer walking home, set fire to his mother's house, burning her alive, and destroyed his village:

The rebels^[1] arrived at my village on Monday, March 7, at 10 in the morning. The women in the village had already fled once we heard Toulepleu had been attacked. But my mother remained because she couldn't flee, and then there were 14 men who stayed as well. Most of us were in the village, but one was in his fields outside the village.

Seven of the rebels entered. When we heard the firing we all fled to the bush to hide. But the guy at his plantation didn't know they'd come. He came back to his house and when he did, they fired on him and hit him in his knee so he couldn't walk. They were in military fatigues, all of them,

and they had white bandanas on their heads. Some of them had charcoal on their faces; others had put red paint on.

The rest of us were hidden in the bush and watched it all from 100, maybe 200 meters away. They shot him with a Kalash [AK-47 "Kalashnikov" assault rifle] in his knee from about 10, 20 meters. They came to him after that first shot and aimed their guns at him. Then [our neighbor] yelled out to us, "Come back from the bush! It's not the rebels who've come. It's our protectors [the pro-Gbagbo troops]." They tried to trick us. But we could see them, we could see them with their guns pointed at him. So we didn't move. After a couple minutes, they must have realized that we weren't coming back. They set fire to his house, and then several of them grabbed him and dragged him along the ground. They must have dragged him 85 meters, bringing him toward the main road that runs through the village. Then they shot him at point-blank range and cut out his insides with a long knife. They left his body there.

Then they went back into the village and started breaking into all the houses. They searched those close to the road and took everything of value. They set fire to the houses that had straw roofs. My mother was old and sick and couldn't leave her bed. They burned her house with her still in it. I found her burned body later, after they left. I watched as they burned my house after stealing everything. Since they'd come to the village on foot, they amassed all of the belongings along the main road. And then they called in their companions who arrived with a military cargo truck to take it all away. They took TVs, radios, anything they could get their hands on. They slaughtered all of our animals - just opened fire on them with their Kalashes - before getting into the truck.

In a few towns and villages, the Republican Forces arrived sooner than expected, before most people had taken flight, and frequently opened fire as the panicked population tried to flee into the surrounding bush. Human Rights Watch documented dozens of killings during such instances in Toulepleu, Diboké, Doké, and Bloléquin.

Witnesses said pro-Ouattara forces went house-to-house after taking over a village, killing many who remained. A 23-year-old from Diboké told Human Rights Watch that fighters from the Republican Forces entered her house and killed her mother, father, and younger brother. She escaped through a window, ultimately fleeing to Liberia. A 25-year-old from Bloléquin hid under her bed as pro-Ouattara forces entered her house and killed her 20-year-old sister. In at least four cases documented by Human Rights Watch, victims had parts of their arms cut off and then their insides cut out with long knives - two while they were still living, two others after they had been shot.

After working through the towns and villages, some Republican Forces fanned out on foot on the smaller roads into areas where residents work on their cocoa plantations - killing additional people who believed they had fled to safety. In one of several such accounts, a 47-year-old woman told Human Rights Watch:

When we heard that the rebels were coming, my family fled to our *campement* (small cocoa plantation). It's two kilometers outside of Doké, on a road you can only get to on foot or motorbike. We thought we would be safe there, even if there was fighting in the town. On March 16, I was with my father, husband, and 10-year-old son. My sister and her children were also there. We were preparing food when two rebels came across us in the bush. One of them was dressed in full military camouflage with a white bandana; the other one had on military pants and a black t-shirt. Perhaps they'd seen the fire, that's how they found us.

They saw me first, and they opened fire on me from 20 or 30 meters away. I went down to the ground and pretended I was dead. They hadn't hit me. Then they saw the others and went toward them. They opened fire again, and they killed my family - my son, my husband, and my father were all

killed. They were shooting with big guns, guns that fired quickly like "boom-boom-boom." I lay there, watching as my boy fell down dead, but I couldn't cry. If I cried they would know that I was still alive, and they would have killed me. But why am I still alive? They have taken my son, my husband, and my father. I have nothing. I'm no longer alive anyway.

They left again and after a little time I got up and looked at the bodies. Blood had run into the ground, but none of them were moving anymore. My boy had been hit with two bullets, one in the chest and the other one in the stomach. I held him and cried silently. My sister then came out of hiding - they'd been a little distance away when the rebels came and had been able to hide in the bush - and said we needed to go.

We went toward Bloléquin, but when we got there we found out in the bush that the rebels had taken over the town. So we passed through the bush toward Guiglo. When we got there we discovered that the loyalist troops had left, so we took flight again, this time toward Tai. We went 20 kilometers on the bush road there and then crossed over into Liberia on a pirogue.

After summarily killing Guéré civilians found in a village, the Republican Forces often proceeded to pillage and burn houses, dozens of witnesses told Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch documented the partial burning of at least 10 Guéré villages around Toulepleu and Bloléquin. Several witnesses told Human Rights Watch that while hiding in the bush they saw structures used to store the village's rice and rice seed being burned by pro-Ouattara forces.

Summary Executions of Detained Civilians, Primarily the Elderly

As the Republican Forces swept through, those who were elderly or ill, as well as family members who refused to leave loved ones who were unable to flee, often remained behind in their houses. In at least several instances, Republican Forces locked these people in one or several village houses and then killed them in the days that followed.

Human Rights Watch documented the killing of more than 30 Guérés who had been unable to flee with their families; in the vast majority of cases, the Republican Forces shot elderly victims at point-blank range. Scores of other refugees interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they left behind elderly loved ones in other villages around Toulepleu and Bloléquin, suggesting that this death toll could be even higher.

A 21-year-old Guéré woman from a village near Toulepleu described how in early March, she, her family, and five other villagers were detained. She was raped, her husband was killed for trying to defend her, and others were executed:

The village was attacked by rebels [around March 7]. The loyalists [pro-Gbagbo troops] had been in the village for some time before, but they fled right before the rebels arrived. My husband, two children, and I hid in our house. The rebels found us and took us to the village chief's house, where we were held for around a week, together with five other villagers, including two women.

Every day they took someone out and shot him in front of the house. The rebels would enter, take the person out, and then a shot would be fired and the person never came back. On the fifth day I was raped inside the house by one of the rebels. He raped me right in front of my children. When my husband tried to defend me, they took him outside, fired a shot, and he never came back.

Soon after, something was flying overhead. It went over twice, and all of the rebels left the village. That's when I took my children and came across to Liberia.

A 67-year-old woman from Doké, where fighting between Ouattara and Gbagbo forces took place on March 13, similarly described to Human Rights Watch the execution of 20 Guéré civilians, the majority elderly men and women:

I woke up to gunfire the first day that they attacked Doké. I was in my house, and when I heard the shooting I ran outside. The rebels caught me immediately. Some of them were in military camouflage; some were in t-shirts with military pants. There were military cargo trucks and 4x4s around town. Six of them trapped me along with four other people. They locked us in one of the bigger houses in the village. When they put us there, one said, "We didn't come here for you. We didn't come here to kill you."

The second day, they brought more people to the house. Some of them were from the village, mostly other aged or sick people that couldn't flee. And then there were similar people from neighboring villages that they brought there. Altogether we were more than 30, more than 40 people even. We were all over 45 years old.

It was this day that they started to kill. The rebels pulled people out of the house and then executed them right in front. I could look out and watch it all. I was so surprised the first time, we all cried out knowing then we were going to die. They grabbed an elderly man - it was three of them that came in - they pulled him outside, told him to start walking away, and then shot him from two, three meters away. His body just went down to the ground. Then they came in and grabbed another person. That day they killed our village chief. They demanded 100,000 CFA [about US\$210] from him, but he said he didn't have any money. They shot him three times; it was the third shot that killed him.

In total they killed more than 20 people that were held there. I saw them all with my own eyes. This was over three days; they killed some every day. A few they killed by slitting the person's throat with a machete, but most [killings] were by gunshot. They killed mostly men, but they executed a few women as well. We the old and the sick couldn't flee from war. What fight did they have with us?

Once I overheard one of them say to another rebel, "These are people we're going to kill. These are the Guéré who brought on this war." But other than that, they didn't speak to us. There were many of them that did the executions. It changed every day. New 4x4s of rebels were always coming through, bringing new people. Doké became their base as they were looking to attack Blolœquin.

After three days of killings, they brought some of the bodies together and burned them. The smell was horrible from all the decaying bodies outside the house.

They'd slammed my foot with a Kalash that first day, so my foot was really inflamed. A young rebel came to me because of my injury and said that I was to go into the bush and collect wood to cook for them later. He told his friend that I couldn't run away because my foot was so inflamed. They didn't realize I was still strong, that I knew if I stayed I would be killed. So when I went into the bush to get that wood I made my escape.

I was in the bush for two weeks, arriving here nine days ago. I still don't know where my husband and children are. They fled when the fighting started, and I don't know if they escaped. I ask new refugees every day, but I still haven't heard.

An 84-year-old man held in another house in Doké with six other Guéré described how on the fifth day of their captivity, uniformed members of the Republican Forces locked the

one-room house in which they were being detained and then opened fire through the walls. Five of the seven captives died immediately, all of them over age 50, and the witness had three gunshot wounds in his left leg.

Pro-Ouattara forces left the village - which was briefly taken back over by pro-Gbagbo forces without a fight that day - allowing the man to escape with the other survivor. They found a car that took them to Guiglo, where the Red Cross treated him. Faced with another imminent attack by the Republican Forces in Guiglo, the 84-year-old man spent two weeks traveling more than 100 kilometers on foot to cross into Liberia and find refuge in a village there.

Rape and other Sexual Violence

Human Rights Watch documented 23 cases of rape and other sexual violence by the Republican Forces as they advanced through the far west. All the victims were Guéré. In several instances, the attackers referred to the victim's ethnicity before or during the sexual violence. Credible reports from humanitarian organizations working along the Liberian-Ivorian border suggest dozens more such cases.

In a few instances, combatants seized women and girls during their initial attack on a village, forced them into the surrounding bush, and raped them. A 31-year-old woman from Bohobli, a village in the area of Toulepleu near the Liberian border, decided not to flee as the Ouattara forces advanced because her grandmother could not leave and because of her own disabled foot. She told Human Rights Watch that three armed men entered her house. One fighter killed the grandmother with a machete, while the other two dragged the woman into the bush, where one raped her.

In the vast majority of documented cases, however, fighters held women captive in houses for one or several days, gang raping them repeatedly before moving on to the next town or village. Around March 7 or 8, the Republican Forces moved through Basobli, about 10 kilometers from Toulepleu toward the Liberian border. While most inhabitants fled once they heard that Toulepleu fell, a 25-year-old woman interviewed by Human Rights Watch stayed to look after her younger brothers and sisters:

Armed rebels arrived in the village. Seven of them took over my family home and held me captive for two nights with three younger brothers and sisters and one cousin. Three of the seven men raped me in the house multiple times both nights. The rebels were always there, but during the day I was allowed to walk around the village. Three other women in the village were being held in their homes as well; I spoke with them during the day when the rebels allowed me out, and the women said that they were being raped as well. When we talked the third day, we decided to flee. I got my family and when we saw the chance, we fled into the bush.

After the pro-Ouattara forces took over Bloléquin on March 20, they similarly held men and women captive who had been caught in the fighting and were unable to flee. In a villa not far from the prefecture where several Republican Forces' commanders were staying, combatants repeatedly raped eight young Guéré women, including several girls, as described by a man held with them:

I was taken to a house in Bloléquin along with 15 other captives. It was a very large villa in town. The FAFN [another name for *Forces Nouvelles*] military leaders were staying at the prefecture building in town, but another group of FAFN had commandeered this house which wasn't too far away. They kept us there as prisoners. Of the 16, eight were women - some girls, 14, 15 years old. All of us were Guéré.

During the night, they came and grabbed the women, who would start crying and pleading with the soldiers not to touch them. All of the FAFN there had the same idea, to rape the women, especially the youngest. The first time, three of the soldiers came at the same time and one said as he grabbed a girl, "Your Guéré husbands wanted war with us, so we'll give

them war."

They even fought among themselves, right in front of us, over who would get to be with which girl. All night they took the girls - one or two FAFN would grab one, take the girl into a room across the hall, or downstairs - and then rape them. I listened to the cries all night; I didn't sleep, none of us did. Then the girls would be brought back, and another FAFN would take his turn. We were all kept in the same room, and the girls would come back and tell us that the soldiers had raped them over and over. They said that the soldiers would put a gun or machete to their neck, tell them to undress, and then rape them.

Duékoué Massacre Involving Republican Forces

After Republican Forces took control of Duékoué in the early morning of March 29, hundreds of Guéré residents were massacred in the town's Carrefour neighborhood. Human Rights Watch interviewed eight women who witnessed the events, as well as several people who helped count or bury the bodies in the days after the massacre.

Five witnesses clearly identified Republican Forces among the attackers, saying they arrived in the neighborhood in trucks, 4x4s, and on foot in military uniforms. Others described seeing two pro-Ouattara militias that worked closely with the Republican Forces in committing abuses against the civilian population: a tribally based civil defense group known as the Dozo, generally armed with shotguns and identified by some witnesses as dressed in their traditional robes; and a group of Burkinabé militiamen who live in the region and are led by a man referred to primarily by his first name, Amadé.

The Carrefour neighborhood's residents have long had a concentrated presence of pro-Gbagbo militia. However, according to witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch, the pro-Ouattara forces there executed men not believed to be militia members, including boys and older men. Statements made by members of the pro-Ouattara forces as they took part in the massacre demonstrate that they were targeting the neighborhood's population as collective punishment against the Guéré, victims and witnesses said. A 39-year-old woman described the killing of her husband as well as dozens of others, in testimony similar to those of numerous others who witnessed the massacre:

It was Tuesday morning [March 29], right after the [pro-Ouattara] rebels took control of Duékoué, that they came into the neighborhood and started shooting everywhere. There had to have been 500 of them that descended on the neighborhood that morning.

They went house-to-house and took the men out to kill them. Two of them broke down my door and entered the house; they forced my husband outside. Several others were carrying a flame and set the house on fire. I came out screaming behind them, and they shot my husband at point-blank range. It was with a large gun; one of them pulled him out and the other shot him. As my husband fell down no more than five meters from me, they said in French "We're here to kill Gbagbo, but since you the Guéré voted for Gbagbo, we'll kill you, we'll kill you until the last Guéré."

Then the rebels moved on to the next house, leaving me there screaming. My husband, my brother-in-law, several cousins, they were all killed by Alassane's [Ouattara] forces that day.

Most of the attackers throughout the neighborhood were in military uniform - the uniforms of the Republican Forces. Many had on red headscarves. Others were the Dozo in the traditional clothes and some Dioula youth who came with knives and machetes. The Republican Forces came in first on their cars and on foot, and then the rest followed. They killed unarmed people everywhere. I saw people who had their throats slit with machetes and knives, others who were executed by gunshot. You could see the blood marking the road from all those who were killed.

Bodies were everywhere. You could just see lines of bodies from those they'd marched out and shot.

Most of those killed were males, but they killed boys like men like the elderly. I saw them kill boys, right in front of my eyes. One of them couldn't be more than 10 years old and as they had pulled him out he looked at me so scared and said, "Mama, please," and then they shot him. Everywhere there were people dead by gunshot. Our husbands, our brothers, our children were all killed.

A 29-year-old woman from Carrefour likewise said her husband was killed in front of her because he was Guéré, followed by the forcible recruitment of her 15-year-old brother:

Around 8 a.m. on Tuesday [March 29], they began attacking the Carrefour neighborhood where we live. They told the women they could leave but, "We're here to kill your men." There were many, many of them. There were Dozo, Amadé's men, armed youth in civilian clothes, and FN [*Forces Nouvelles*] soldiers. We were hiding in our house, my brother, my husband and our baby.

After the forces came to say "Women leave, men we'll kill you," everyone started trying to escape if they could. We did the same. At 1 p.m. we had fled our house and were on foot along the main route near the bridge.

There were many corpses in the streets, pro-Ouattara forces everywhere in the middle of killings. I saw people being shot with Kalashes around us in the streets as we fled, but I couldn't pay attention, I was too scared. A 4x4 passed us; one of them saw us and pulled over. They parked the vehicle right by us. There was a design of a serpent on it.

Three men got out and stopped my husband. They said, "We are looking for Guérés. You voted for Gbagbo, we are going to kill all of you. You are Guéré." He said "No, I voted for ADO [Ouattara's initials]," but they said "No you didn't, you are Guéré so you voted Gbagbo." We didn't vote in fact. They pulled my husband away from me. I had our 6-month-old baby in my arms. They were chanting "ADO! ADO! You are all Guérés, you who voted for Gbagbo! You didn't vote ADO, we are going to kill you all. They're all Gbagbos here."

Then they shot my husband in his stomach. All three of them fired their Kalashes at him, even when he was just in front of them. They looked at my 6-month-old baby and decided my baby couldn't be of use, but my 15-year-old brother was there too. He was crying, "Why did you kill him?" Killing my husband wasn't enough; they took my little brother as a soldier. They said, "Today you will become a soldier. We are going to take you to Man. In Man, you will become a soldier." Man is where their base is, those who are shooting us, the Forces Nouvelles. They took him by force to the truck. There were at least six other young boys inside waiting, including children that looked as young as 10. I didn't recognize them, but they were boys in civilian clothes, with fear on their faces. I heard the boys begging [for] forgiveness as the men came back, but the soldiers didn't reply. They pushed my brother in with the other boys, got back in and drove off. I've had no news of my little brother since.

The men who killed my husband were military men carrying knives, machetes, and Kalashes. They were wearing warriors' *gris-gris* [traditional amulets often worn by fighters from the north], jean pants, and military camouflage tops. It was clear they were pro-Ouattara forces; they were singing ADO. FN had taken over the city that day, with the Dozo and the Burkinabe who were out on the streets too, burning things and killing people, going house to house. There was not a single house left untouched in Carrefour. They burned the houses. My apartment doesn't exist anymore;

it was burned like the others.

A religious leader in Duékoué who went to the Carrefour neighborhood on March 31 told Human Rights Watch that hundreds of bodies were still there, including 13 in a church called l'Eglise du Christianisme Céleste. One was the pastor, riddled by bullets in his religious attire.

Credible reports, including from the United Nations and international humanitarian organizations working in the area, have indicated that pro-Gbagbo groups killed West African immigrants and northern Ivorians as they retreated from Duékoué, but Human Rights Watch has been unable to confirm these accounts.

Killings by Pro-Gbagbo Forces

Human Rights Watch also documented the killings of hundreds of people from northern Côte d'Ivoire and neighboring West African countries by pro-Gbagbo forces as they retreated from towns and villages in the far west. This included [massacres](#) of more than 100 people in Boléquin and at least 37 in Bédi-Goazon, as well as killings in Guiglo, Keibli village, and the cocoa plantation camps around Zidibli.

As the Republican Forces advanced, particularly after the fall of Toulepleu, fighters loyal to Gbagbo retreated quickly. Other pro-Gbagbo forces, however, notably Ivorian militiamen and Liberian mercenaries, often stayed behind. Many appeared to remain for a final opportunity to commit atrocities against alleged Ouattara supporters before retreating as well.

Human Rights Watch has documented the recruitment of hundreds of Liberian mercenaries by both sides. The mercenaries, many former fighters from Liberia's brutal civil war, have often been paid between \$300 and \$500 each to cross into Côte d'Ivoire and fight.

A person taken captive by Ouattara's forces in Boléquin described to Human Rights Watch what happened several days later as pro-Gbagbo mercenaries and militiamen tried to retake the town. When the pro-Gbagbo forces took control of the prefecture, the building housing local government and administration, they massacred over 100 men, women, and children from ethnic groups from northern Côte d'Ivoire and neighboring West African countries, he said:

On Monday, March 25, we were still held as captives in the prefecture building when we heard heavy weapon fire. It was around 4 a.m., and we could hear really loud clashes. The prefecture was shaking from the fire. All of the FAFN [pro-Ouattara forces] who had been sleeping there were gone. The townspeople had generally separated by their ethnic group into different rooms, and we, the Guéré, were lying down in a large room there. From 4 until 6 in the morning there was heavy fire.

Just before 6 o'clock, armed men broke into the room where we were. It was the Liberian mercenaries and some other pro-Gbagbo fighters. The mercenaries were led by a guy who goes by the name "Bob Marley." As they broke into the room we put our hands up screaming, "We're captives, we're captives, don't shoot!" They asked if there were any rebels among us, and we said "No, we're all Guéré, we're captives." They led us out of the room and we started to see bodies all over the ground in the other rooms. They had us go out the back way, saying, "There are too many bodies in the main entry hall for you to pass by there." I could look and see bodies stacked up. There were women, there were men, there were young children.

At the entrance to the prefecture they had a Guéré militia guy standing there, who asked each person, one by one, what ethnic group he or she was from - he spoke to the person in Guéré to hear if we could speak the language as a mother tongue. If you could speak Guéré, they led you outside. If you couldn't, they forced you into another direction. We'd

combined with people from other rooms at this stage, so some were Dioula, Mossi, Malinké. I heard babies and women crying, they killed them all. They massacred them. We were standing outside and they had us wait while they opened fire on everyone who wasn't Guéré. I don't know how anyone could have survived. There was so much noise from the firing, from the crying. I have never heard anything like it. I'm still not right in the head.

When they finished with the killings, they said that they were going to take us to Guiglo. They started walking in that direction, others were loaded up in cars, but I took a moment where they weren't watching us closely and I fled into the bush. I later heard that FAFN took Bloléquin back several hours later.

Another person interviewed by Human Rights Watch arrived in Bloléquin several days later and found scores of bodies in the prefecture. He confirmed that the victims were from ethnic groups from northern Côte d'Ivoire and neighboring West African countries.

Human Rights Watch also documented the killing of 10 northern Ivorians and other West African nationals in Guiglo in the early morning of March 29, when it was controlled by pro-Gbagbo forces. Witnesses said that the perpetrators tied the victims together, then slit their throats. Another person interviewed by Human Rights Watch, who saw the bodies the following day, identified two as Malian nationals and another as Guinean. The pro-Gbagbo forces left Guiglo on March 30, hours before the Republican Forces moved in.

Both witnesses in Guiglo said they had received credible information of similar killings in other parts of the town, but the security situation had made it impossible to confirm the reports.

Human Rights Watch also documented the killing of eight Togolese nationals from Keibli in mid-March, before the village just outside Bloléquin was captured by Republican Forces. A Bloléquin resident interviewed by Human Rights Watch found their dismembered bodies in and around a lake. Credible reports implicated a combination of pro-Gbagbo militiamen and Liberian mercenaries.

Human Rights Watch previously documented the March 22 massacre of at least 37 primarily West African nationals in Bédi-Goazon, a village between Bloléquin and Guiglo. At around 2:30 in the afternoon, Liberian mercenaries and other pro-Gbagbo militiamen killed West African immigrants inside their homes and as they attempted to flee. The attack appeared ethnically based, with a witness telling Human Rights Watch that attackers told the Guéré that they were safe to stay, but told the Malians and Mossi (a group primarily from Burkina Faso) that they would be killed.

In both the Bloléquin and Bédi-Goazon massacres, witnesses told Human Rights Watch that the attackers were led by a Liberian mercenary whose *nom de guerre* in Côte d'Ivoire is "Bob Marley." According to witnesses and several other credible accounts, including from former combatants in Liberia, "Bob Marley" has worked for Gbagbo dating back to the 2002 civil conflict, using the village of Ziglo, just outside Bloléquin, as his base for recruiting and training Liberian mercenaries since just after the second round of elections.

Background

Since the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire began following the second round of presidential elections on November 28, 2010, Human Rights Watch has documented serious human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law by both sides. Through the end of February, the abuses reported were predominantly committed by security forces under the control of Gbagbo and militia groups loyal to him in a [systematic campaign of violence that indicated crimes against humanity](#). Alleged Ouattara supporters, including members of political parties allied to him, as well as West African immigrants and Muslims, were the targets of human rights abuses including killing, enforced

disappearances, and sexual violence. In response to the intensifying abuses and descent into civil war, the United Nations Security Council on March 30 imposed strong sanctions on Gbagbo and several of his close political allies.

These attacks have continued in recent weeks, including the massacre and other killings documented by Human Rights Watch in the west, as well as in Abidjan, where numerous perceived Ouattara supporters have been killed since pro-Ouattara forces began their offensive there in early April.

Recommendations

To Alassane Ouattara:

- Take all necessary measures to establish command control over all Republican Forces, including those in western Côte d'Ivoire, and ensure their compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law
- Urgently begin investigations into killings, rapes, pillaging, and other abuses since the November 2010 elections by all armed groups, and prosecute, according to international fair trial standards, those implicated. Ensure that all commanders who ordered or are implicated in serious abuses through command responsibility are prosecuted. Seek assistance from the international community to assist in investigations and prosecutions to ensure they meet international standards.
- Make a commitment to provide compensation and other reparations for victims of abuses, to allow refugees in Liberia to return to their former areas in Côte d'Ivoire, and to assist in the rebuilding of villages destroyed during the fighting.
- Immediately ensure that any children serving in any armed group are safely handed over to organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross that can assist in tracing their families. Ensure that those who recruited or used children in their forces are held accountable.
- Ensure access to health care, psychosocial support, legal assistance, and socio-economic reintegration services for victims of sexual violence.
- Fully cooperate with the Commission of Inquiry established by the United Nations Human Rights Council and allow it to work without interference, conducting investigations around the country and interviewing victims and suspects from both sides.

To the United Nations Security Council:

- Adopt sanctions, including travel bans and asset freezes, against all commanders implicated in violations of the laws of war during the armed conflict.
- Ensure that the 2,000 additional UN peacekeepers, now ready to begin arriving in the country after their original authorization in January, are deployed to vulnerable areas, including the far west region and pro-Gbagbo neighborhoods in Abidjan.
- Ensure the necessary assistance to the recently established Commission of Inquiry, particularly by ensuring sufficient staffing and resources to protect victims, witnesses and investigators.
- In the interest of truth and justice during Côte d'Ivoire's now decade-long crisis, publish the 2004 Commission of Inquiry report, including the annex that identified key people responsible for abuses after the civil war started in September 2002.
- Ask the UN secretary-general to include in his reporting detailed information on parties to the armed conflict that are credibly suspected of committing or being responsible for sexual violence, in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1960.
- Ask the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict to provide briefings on rape and other sexual violence to the Security Council and promote a coordinated and effective response to sexual violence by all actors in Côte d'Ivoire.

To the Commission of Inquiry established by the Human Rights Council:

- Investigate the major abuses committed in the far west of Côte d'Ivoire, including the massacres in Duékoué, Bloléquin, and Bédi-Goazon; sexual violence; and the recruitment and use of children and the forcible recruitment of others into armed

forces. Interview Ivorian refugees in the region of Grand Gedeh, Liberia to provide essential testimony regarding serious abuses during the heavy fighting along the Toulepleu-Guiglo axis.

- Identify key perpetrators responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity during the post-election period, including commanders implicated as a matter of command responsibility. Include recommendations for accountability based on these findings.

To the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights:

- Increase staffing and support for the UN Mission in Liberia's human rights division, assisting their efforts in Nimba, Grand Gedeh, and Maryland counties to document human rights abuses that occurred in Côte d'Ivoire. Ensure that staff includes fluent French speakers. Ask human rights monitors to work with the government to strengthen the protection of refugees and address gender-based violence.

To the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS):

- Call on Ouattara and his new government to take urgent action to ensure an independent, impartial and credible investigation of alleged crimes committed by all sides since the election and to cooperate fully with the UN Commission of Inquiry.

To Côte d'Ivoire's International Donors

- Assist and promote national accountability efforts, including criminal investigations and prosecutions, by providing financial assistance and expertise.

[1] In interviews, victims and witnesses used a variety of terms to describe Ouattara's regular armed forces, including "rebels," *Forces Nouvelles* (or FN), FAFN (for *Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles*), and *Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire* (Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire or FRCI) - the official name since Ouattara's declaration on March 17.

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