

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	115
Land:	Elfenbenskysten
Kilde:	Human Rights Watch
Titel:	Côte d'Ivoire: Gbagbo Supporters Tortured, Killed in Abidjan
Udgivet:	2. juni 2011
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	8. september 2011

Title	Côte d'Ivoire: Gbagbo Supporters Tortured, Killed in Abidjan
Publisher	Human Rights Watch
Country	Côte d'Ivoire
Publication Date	2 June 2011
Cite as	Human Rights Watch, <i>Côte d'Ivoire: Gbagbo Supporters Tortured, Killed in Abidjan</i> , 2 June 2011, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dec7c852.html [accessed 23 August 2011]
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Côte d'Ivoire: Gbagbo Supporters Tortured, Killed in Abidjan

(Dakar) - Armed forces loyal to President Alassane Ouattara have killed at least 149 real or perceived supporters of the former President Laurent Gbagbo since taking control of the commercial capital in mid-April, 2011, Human Rights Watch said today. Pro-Gbagbo militiamen killed at least 220 men in the days immediately preceding and following Gbagbo's arrest on April 11, when the nearly four-month conflict drew to a close.

Between May 13 and 25, Human Rights Watch interviewed 132 victims and witnesses to violence by both sides during the battle for Abidjan and in the weeks after Gbagbo's arrest. Killings, torture, and inhumane treatment by Ouattara's armed forces continued while a Human Rights Watch researcher was in Abidjan, with clear ethnic targeting during widespread acts of reprisal and intimidation.

"The hope of a new era following President Ouattara's inauguration will fade fast unless these horrible abuses against pro-Gbagbo groups stop immediately," said Corinne Dufka, senior West Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. "The president has repeatedly promised credible, impartial investigations and prosecutions; now is the time to keep those promises."

Ouattara's Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (*Forces Républicaines de la Côte d'Ivoire*, FRCI) killed at least 95 unarmed people in Abidjan during operations in late April and May, when they sealed off and searched areas formerly controlled by pro-Gbagbo militia, Human Rights Watch found. The majority of documented abuses occurred in the longtime pro-Gbagbo stronghold of Yopougon, the focus of the final battle in Abidjan. Most killings were point-blank executions of youth from ethnic groups generally aligned with Gbagbo, in what appeared to be collective punishment for these groups' participation in Gbagbo's militias.

One man described how Republican Forces soldiers killed his 21-year-old brother: "Two of them grabbed his legs, another two held his arms behind him, and a fifth one held his head," he said. "Then a guy pulled out a knife and slit my brother's throat. He was screaming. I saw his legs shaking after they'd slit his throat, the blood streaming down. As they were doing it, they said that they had to eliminate all of the [Young] Patriots that had caused all the problems in the country."

Another woman who witnessed the May 8 killing of 18 youths found hiding in Yopougon was brutally raped by a Republican Forces soldier after being forced to load their vehicles with pillaged goods. On May 23, an elderly man in the same neighborhood saw Republican Forces execute his son, whom they accused of being a member of pro-Gbagbo militia.

Human Rights Watch also documented 54 extrajudicial executions in formal and informal detention sites, including the 16th and 37th Yopougon police stations and the GESCO oil and gas building now used as a Republican Forces base. On May 15, Human Rights Watch observed a body burning less than 30 meters from the 16th precinct police station. Several witnesses told Human Rights Watch the following day that it was the body of a captured militiaman who had been executed inside the police station grounds.

A Republican Forces soldier described the execution of 29 detainees in early May outside of the GESCO building. The soldier said Chérif Ousmane, the close ally of Prime Minister Guillaume Soro and longtime zone commander in the northern capital of Bouaké for Soro's *Forces Nouvelles* rebel group that now comprise the majority of the Republican Forces, gave the execution order. Two other witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they saw Ousmane in a vehicle that disposed of the tortured and executed body of an infamous militia leader in the Yopougon sub-neighborhood of Koweit around May 5. Ousmane oversees the Republican Forces' operations in Yopougon.

In addition to killings, Human Rights Watch interviewed young men who had been detained by the Republican Forces and then released, and documented the arbitrary detention and inhumane treatment of scores more young men - often arrested for no other apparent reason than their age and ethnic group. Nearly every former detainee described being struck repeatedly with guns, belts, rope, and fists to extract information on where weapons were hidden or to punish them for alleged participation in the Young Patriots, a pro-Gbagbo militia group. Several described torture, including forcibly removing teeth from one victim and placing a burning hot knife on another victim, then cutting him.

Human Rights Watch called on the Ouattara government to immediately ensure the humane treatment of anyone detained and to provide uninhibited access to detention sites for international monitors and members of the human rights division of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (*Opération des Nations Unies en Côte d'Ivoire*, ONUCI).

Witnesses consistently identified the killers or abusers in detention as Republican Forces who descended on Abidjan from their northern bases, dressed in military uniforms and boots and often arriving in vehicles marked FRCI. These forces are overseen by Soro and Ouattara. Numerous witnesses and two soldiers who had participated in the killings said mid- and high-level commanders had been at or near the place where some killings took place.

Human Rights Watch called on the Ouattara government to place on immediate administrative leave, pending investigation, commanders against whom there is credible evidence of implication, either directly or by command responsibility, in killings, torture, or other severe abuse. At a minimum, this should include Chérif Ousmane and Ousmane Coulibaly for potential abuses in Yopougon and Captain Eddy Médy for his role in overseeing the western offensive that left hundreds of civilians dead.

Retreating pro-Gbagbo militia also left a bloody trail during the final battle for Abidjan, Human Rights Watch said. Human Rights Watch documented more than 220 killings perpetrated by pro-Gbagbo militia groups in the days and hours before being forced to abandon Abidjan. The day after Republican Forces seized Gbagbo, his militia went on a rampage in several areas of Yopougon, killing more than 80 people from northern Côte d'Ivoire and neighboring West African countries because of their presumed support for Ouattara.

A 65-year-old man there described how militiamen murdered five of his sons after

breaking into his compound on April 12, the day after Gbagbo's arrest. The bodies were buried in a small mass grave, among 14 such sites identified by Human Rights Watch in Yopougon alone. Human Rights Watch documented seven cases of sexual violence by militia, particularly in Yopougon, often accompanied by the execution of the woman's husband.

No fewer than 3,000 civilians have been killed during the post-election crisis as a result of grave violations of international law by armed forces on both sides, Human Rights Watch said.

On May 19, the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) declared his intention to open an investigation into crimes committed in Côte d'Ivoire. An ICC investigation could make an important contribution to ensuring accountability, but Human Rights Watch also urged Ouattara's administration to hold fair domestic trials to ensure justice for victims and promote respect for the rule of law in the conflict-ravaged country.

Human Rights Watch presented its findings to Interior Minister Hamed Bakayoko, who promised to convene an emergency meeting with Soro and the principal Republican Forces commanders. He also said that the Ouattara government would not shield military and security forces from prosecutions for crimes they commit. The minister's commitments were a positive sign and should be fulfilled swiftly, Human Rights Watch said.

"If President Ouattara is serious about bringing this decade of abuse to an end, he should immediately suspend and investigate the commanders responsible for this horrific abuse," Dufka said. "Those implicated in grave crimes on both sides should be brought to justice"

Killings and Other Abuses by Republican Forces During Patrols and Search Operations

Human Rights Watch documented 95 killings by Republican Forces soldiers against unarmed residents during cordon and search operations following the end of active fighting with pro-Gbagbo forces. Two were on May 23 and 24, following Ouattara's inauguration on May 21. Human Rights Watch believes the total number of non-combatants killed to be much higher, as many witnesses, largely from ethnic groups linked to former President Gbagbo, were too terrified to talk or had fled Abidjan during or following the violence.

The vast majority of documented killings were in the Yopougon, a neighborhood with a large number of Gbagbo supporters and many former informal bases of militia groups that actively backed him. Yopougon appears to have been disproportionately targeted for reprisal killings by the Republican Forces, who meted out deadly collective punishment against young men from the Bété, Attié, Guéré, and Goro ethnic groups, which largely supported Gbagbo in the 2010 presidential elections.

Witnesses described how many youth were dragged out of their homes and executed, or shot while fleeing; others were taken into detention centers, formal and informal, where they were tortured and sometimes killed. The Republican Forces also killed older men accused of housing or assisting the militia. Numerous neighborhood residents told Human Rights Watch that the militia and mercenaries, who had for months targeted and killed pro-Ouattara groups, had largely fled prior to the Republican Forces' takeover, so that those who remained were civilians, presumed to be Gbagbo supporters.

Yopougon, with a population of around 1 million, is divided into dozens of smaller sub-neighborhoods, or "*quartiers*." While the Republican Forces committed violence throughout Yopougon - and to a lesser extent in Koumassi and Port Bouët - more than 70 of the killings documented by Human Rights Watch occurred in the sub-neighborhoods of Koweit and Yaosseh.

Koweit

Koweit was one of the last areas of Abidjan to fall, with fighting ending around May 3. In

the days and weeks that followed, the Republican Forces conducted house-to-house searches in which males from pro-Gbagbo groups appear to have been targeted for abuse. Human Rights Watch also documented one case of rape. A 34-year-old woman from Yopougon Koweit described how she was brutally raped by a Republican Forces soldier on May 8, then saw the Republican Forces kill 18 youth:

Guys in military uniform arrived that morning at 9 and said that they were searching for weapons. Eight of them entered my house. They yelled, "Give us your money or we'll kill you. It's you who took care of the militias here." They took 50,000 CFA (US \$115), my mattress, my tank of gas - everything of value, they took.

The guys were big, these were FRCI military men with clean uniforms. They had a clear leader among them. He said, "You the Bété, the Guéré, the Attié, it's you who made this war. Where are the youth [males], we're going to kill them all."

They went door to door and pillaged all of value. They stayed for hours. When the goods started piling up, they forced me to load their cars - to load televisions, refrigerators... I'd have a big can of cooking gas on my head and another in my hand. It went on and on. I loaded up a pickup truck, a sedan, then another sedan, all stuffed full of everyone's valuables. They left nothing.

As I was making my seventh trip, their leader, a large man, grabbed me and pulled me into where one of my neighbors slept. The neighbor had left Abidjan, but the FRCI had broken down his door. He threw me on a mattress and told me to open my legs. I said, "Mister, please, not like this." I begged him to let me go, but he struck me and told me to shut up. He forced himself on me, and he raped me. He kept me there, raping me, for more than an hour. He was violent the whole time, by the time he finished I was bleeding from between my legs. The whole time, the other FRCI were still pillaging. They knew what he was doing, they walked by. He was their leader though. I heard them call him Commander Téo.

After he finished abusing me, he had his Kalash [rifle] on him and he tried to ram it into me. I closed my legs and it smashed into my thigh, a mark is still there. He laughed and said "well done" and walked out of the room.

As I finished loading their vehicles after I was abused, they were still searching house to house. Several houses down, they found a bunch of young men hiding. As I was going back and forth to their cars, I saw the men had been stripped and made to lie down on my street. I counted them, they were 18. A few of the FRCI stayed with them, yelling at them about being militia - they weren't militia, they were just youth from the neighborhood. All the militia had fled by then.

I finished loading the cars around 2 p.m.; there was no room left in any of them. The soldiers talked about what to do with the prisoners, as I was finishing with the last stolen goods. One of them said, "We didn't come to waste time, we came to kill" and another agreed, "We can't lose time, we don't have space to take them, let's finish the job and go." Then they opened fire - the youth were lying down on the ground, naked except for underwear. They fired back and forth across them, killing them all right there. Then they drove off.

I couldn't stay there anymore. As I was leaving Koweit, all around there were bodies. I saw dozens. It was 3 in the afternoon when I got out of there. I came across an old man and asked him if I could clean myself in his house. Soon after, another group of FRCI came to his house. One said, "Hand over your money or you're dead." I said, "They've just come from taking everything I have. All my money, all my valuables. I have

nothing left to give you." He slapped me, but let me go. The old man handed over his money, and then that group of FRCI pillaged his house as well.

Human Rights Watch documented six more killings in Koweit by the Republican Forces on the same day. A witness described five men being stripped, lined up, and machine gunned by a soldier. Four victims died instantly; the fifth, shot in the thigh, pretended to be dead and later crawled to a nearby house. The witness, a friend who lived nearby, went to him, and the man asked for water. As the witness went for water, he heard several gunshots. He found his friend dead - with a gunshot to the arm that had left bone fragments on the ground and another to the chest that had exited through the victim's back.

The killings in Koweit began immediately after the Republican Forces took control of the neighborhood. On May 3, a witness watched as soldiers executed a 63-year-old man at point-blank range after accusing him of renting a room to a pro-Gbagbo militia. One man described his brother's killing:

They searched house by house on the day the FRCI were trying to take the Marine Base [May 4 and 5]. They arrived in 4x4s, pickup trucks, Kias, many had "FRCI" written on the side. There were dozens of soldiers. They thought all of us, the Bété, Guéré, or Goro youth, were militia. They seized three of us from the house I was hiding in, myself and two of my brothers. They took my youngest brother, who is 21, and demanded his ethnic group. He said he was Bété. Two of them grabbed his legs, another two held his arms behind him, and a fifth one held his head. Then a guy pulled out a knife, said his mystical prayer, and slit my brother's throat. He was screaming. I saw his legs shaking after they'd slit his throat, the blood streaming down his body. It was worse than you'd kill an animal. I couldn't turn away. It was my brother. As they were doing it, they said that they had to eliminate all of the Patriots that had caused all the problems in the country.

Then they turned to me and asked my ethnic group. I said Dioula, because I can speak Dioula. They knew I wasn't, but it was enough to not kill me. My other brother was scared; he knew he was next, so he started to run. One of them fired his Kalash; he fell down dead immediately. They then came back to me and said I was militia. They beat me with their guns, with their fists. They kept demanding that I say that I was militia, that they'd only stop if I said so. Eventually I relented and said I was. They loaded me up in a cargo truck and took me to the 16th precinct (police station). They had killed other youth right then in the neighborhood. It didn't seem to make sense who they killed and who they took.

Another witness described seeing the Republican Forces slit the throat of a youth in front of his father after finding a Kalashnikov and grenade in his bedroom during a 4 a.m. house-to-house search. The witness was stripped and forced to hand over his laptop computer, cell phones, and money. Human Rights Watch documented similar pillaging of scores of houses in Koweit. The witness, like many others interviewed by Human Rights Watch, wanted to flee Abidjan to his family village, but had no money for transportation since the Republican Forces had taken everything.

One member of the Republican Forces in Yopougon told Human Rights Watch that men under the control of Ousmane Coulibaly - a *Forces Nouvelles* zone commander in Odiénné more commonly referred to by the nom de guerre "Ben Laden" - were in charge of the offensive and the "clean-up" operation in Yopougon Koweit.

Yaosseh

A Republican Forces commander told Human Rights Watch that, after heavy fighting from April 12 to 19, his forces consolidated control of Yaosseh around April 20. After taking the area, many of the soldiers based themselves in the local police station - the

16th precinct - which had formerly housed militiamen loyal to Gbagbo.

Several days later, the Republican Forces began search operations in Yaosseh, where many of the area's militiamen had previously lived. Eleven witnesses interviewed by Human Rights Watch described how, between April 25 and 26, the soldiers killed at least 30 unarmed men, mostly youth from pro-Gbagbo ethnic groups. Most witnesses said the majority of victims had not been active members of the militia, who had fled around April 19.

A 16-year-old boy saw his 25-year-old cousin shot and killed by soldiers as the two sat outside a health center at 2 p.m. on April 25. The witness was spared because of a serious medical condition which the soldiers said made clear he had never been a militiaman. A 42-year-old woman saw Republican Forces kill her younger brother along with several others that same night:

They got to Yaosseh around 1 or 2 in the afternoon; there was shooting everywhere. It lasted for a couple hours, and then there was calm. When it picked up a second time, I decided to leave. The whole neighborhood was fleeing. As I passed by the Parliament [an assembly point of the Young Patriots], there were lots of bodies outside. I don't know if they were killed in battle or executed.

We stayed away for several hours, but I had nowhere to sleep so I decided to go back home. I was with my younger brother, who was 22. I was ahead of him when I heard a gunshot. I turned around and he'd been hit in the leg, he'd fallen down. Then four of the FRCI came out and grabbed him. They were all in military uniform. One of them said, "Slit his throat." And they did, right in front of me. I cried, and one of them said, "Lady, we have no business with you. It's the militia we're after." I kept crying, saying that my brother was no militiaman. Then one of the others said, "You're the women guarding the militia. Show us where the others are, or we'll kill you," and he slapped me and then showed a knife that was still dripping with my brother's blood. I said I don't know any militia, I'm just trying to go home, and the other soldier told him to leave me.

I hid at a neighbor's house. The 16th precinct where they were based is right by where we are. I saw them coming into the neighborhood that night, shooting. I saw them kill two more young men they'd caught that night. They shot them at point-blank range. I left the neighborhood the next morning.

Two days later, I went to see my house. It had been completely pillaged, nothing was left. That day, our neighborhood buried four more youth right in front of me. Another five bodies were strewn on the street.

I still don't know where my husband is. My brother was killed in front of me, and my husband has been missing since the day they attacked Yaosseh. His phone is off. I assume he, too, is dead. I have nothing.

Another witness described how FRCI soldiers entered and opened fire into a neighborhood restaurant, killing eight males inside.

A 34-year-old woman witnessed three more executions on April 26, including her sister's husband, following a Republican Forces clash with Liberian mercenaries:

When they entered, they said, "We're only here for the boys." They were all in military fatigues. They were many, scores of them. I could see FRCI written on some of the cars, pickups, and 4x4s that they'd arrived in. They came from the 16th precinct that is nearby. I know lots of people who saw killings, but in front of me they killed three - two by gunshot at point-blank range and a third, my sister's husband, by slitting his throat....

As they were killing, they said, "You who killed our relatives, we're going to kill you also." But it wasn't our boys who are still there that did the killing. All of those guys have left, they fled.... After that day, we knew the neighborhood wasn't safe for the males, so we fled. We can't go home.

As in Koweit, houses in Yaosseh were systematically pillaged, said residents interviewed by Human Rights Watch who had both witnessed the pillaging and who had returned to find their houses emptied of nearly all valuables.

Witnesses described a few instances in which senior officers intervened to stop the extrajudicial killings, including a case in the Gesco neighborhood of Yopougon in late April. After one soldier appeared to be at the point of executing a youth he had detained on the basis of being from an ethnic group believed to have supported Gbagbo - "because all Guéré, Bété, and Goro must be eliminated" - a higher-ranking soldier intervened and told them to leave the youth if they had no evidence that they were militia.

More often, however, soldiers who opposed executing civilians were unable to convince fellow soldiers who were intent on inflicting collective punishment against men from pro-Gbagbo groups. A 38-year-old woman described what happened on April 26:

My neighbor who was a medicine vendor was killed in front of me. They trapped him in his house and pulled him out into the street. They argued a little over whether they should kill him and one of the FRCI was against killing him. He said the guy had nothing to do with the fighting; there was no reason to kill him. But his comrade shot him first in both arms and then in the head.

Extrajudicial Executions of Detainees

The extrajudicial execution of 54 detainees by the Republican Forces documented by Human Rights Watch took place in three Republican Forces bases also used as detention sites in Yopougon - the 16th and 37th precinct police stations and the GESCO oil and gas company building - as well as in Koumassi and Port Bouët neighborhoods. Some of those captured had been identified by local residents as pro-Gbagbo militiamen who had committed crimes against members of their own communities, but the soldiers did not appear to have any information in most cases that linked those executed to any crime.

A member of the Republican Forces under the command of Chérif Ousmane described the execution in early May of 29 of detainees outside the GESCO building:

It shocked me when we executed 29 people that we had arrested during the search of the neighborhood Millionaire [Yopougon]. That day, Commander Chérif was really angry because he had lost six men during combat with the militia in Abobo-Doumé [the neighborhood near Yopougon where the Marine Base is located] The head of our unit asked Chérif by phone what we were to do with the prisoners, and the order came to us, with Chérif directly mentioned, "You haven't arrested anyone, I don't want to see a single prisoner." Ben Laden [the nom de guerre of Ousmane Coulibaly] was there at GESCO at the time, but he didn't watch the execution, he left the place just before.

We brought them to GESCO and executed them several meters away on the side of the road. We killed some five at a time, some four at a time, after lining them up. We didn't even put blindfolds over their eyes, they watched it all. They cried and begged us to let them live, saying they had nothing to do with the militias. Some were killed by machine gunning across them; others were killed by automatic pistols at point-blank range. They were all youth, in their 30s and in civilian dress. I promise you that no one can say what crime these men had committed. They were arrested simply because they had an appearance that showed them as suspects of either being

militiamen or those that tell the militia about our movements. I wasn't happy about [being part of this], but I was only executing orders.

I think the bodies were thrown into the Banco forest. I have a comrade who was part of those that threw out the bodies. The military heads told us after to never tell this story and that all of the civilian deaths would be identified with the militias.

I killed men before in Yopougon, but it was men armed and shooting at us as well. When one fires on unarmed men that are begging for their life, it's difficult to forget. In Yopougon, we speak often of a lot of "disappeared," these are for the most part executions like those that I've described. The FRCI arrested a lot of militiamen and executed them. We've also dug mass graves in order to bury certain bodies in Yopougon at night. There have been too many civilian and military deaths here in Yopougon.

Two former detainees in the 16th precinct police station similarly described the execution of at least four young men during the first night of their detention, around May 5. A 25-year-old who was picked up after fleeing the combat in Koweit told Human Rights Watch:

As we were coming out of the bush onto the main road, there were five FRCI waiting. One of them had an RPG [rocket-propelled grenade] that he pointed at us, and he told us not to move, to lay down immediately. We all lay down. This was around 2 or 3 p.m. They forced us to walk to the 16th precinct. A few had on FRCI T-shirts with military pants; others were in full military uniform.

At the station, Koné, an FRCI soldier, was the person you met upon arrival. He asked each person whether he was a militia. We were surrounded by people with guns. As we responded, they inspected our hands and elbows, saying they could tell if you'd ever picked up a weapon. I said no, and I guess my answer satisfied them. Four others, though, were executed in front of us that night. They said their fingers were calloused, so they were militia. There was one guy that did the executions. He put on a balaclava and shot them at point-blank range, it was done one-by-one in front of everyone. The people were begging for forgiveness, saying that they weren't militia, but the guy shot them anyway ... a bullet each time in the person's chest.

They told us to move the bodies outside by the bridge, then Koné poured gas on the bodies and set them on fire. I was there for a week. They didn't kill anyone after the first day.

On May 15, a Human Rights Watch researcher saw a burning body less than 30 meters from the 16th precinct, still controlled by the FRCI, and was told by numerous witnesses at the scene that it was a pro-Gbagbo militiaman who had been caught and killed. The following day, two people who participated in the capture and witnessed the execution described the events. The account describes a relationship between the FRCI and local pro-Ouattara youth that Human Rights Watch observed and that was repeatedly described by witnesses. One witness said:

The guy that you saw burning the other day was one of the militia involved in burning alive two people on February 25. Yesterday, we spotted him walking in Yaosseh. When he saw us, he started running. We chased and caught him around 9 a.m., then handed him to a group of FRCI from the 16th who were on patrol.

We went with them to the station, and the FRCI did their work. They executed him. When we first arrived with him, I said that I knew he was militia, that he had taken part in burning alive two of our comrades on February 25. The FRCI asked him if this was true, and he denied it. So they

tortured and beat him, asking again and again whether he had raised a gun during the crisis, whether he had killed. Eventually he said it was true. They kept beating him and asking for him to give the phone number of his accomplices. Eventually he did. The FRCI guys called another militiaman and tried to set a trap. But the guy never came. The militiaman begged for forgiveness after they'd finished torturing him but an FRCI guy said, "Those that kill, those that burn, they can't live." Then the FRCI finished their work, they did justice, executed him with two shots. We were there for all of it. After he was killed, his body was set on fire across the street.

Since the end of April, after the FRCI liberated the area, I've been involved in the capture of five militiamen. Two at one time, then one three different times. The FRCI executed them all. Two were thrown over the bridge, one body was left in the neighborhood, and the other two were killed in the 16th precinct.

Some of the militiamen are coming back, testing whether they can live with the people. But we haven't forgotten what they did. If you're [a Gbagbo supporter] that never picked up a gun, you can live here. But those who picked up guns, they will pay if they return.

A Human Rights Watch researcher presented evidence about summary executions in and around the 16th precinct, an area used by republican forces as a base and detention center, to Commissioner Lezou - a member of the Republican Forces currently in charge of the precinct despite the gradual return of police officers to their post. Lezou adamantly denied that such executions took place.

He said that any bodies found on the streets were from the fierce combat in the area between April 14 and 18 and that witnesses may have been "mistaken." He also flatly denied that a body was burned across the street from the precinct on May 15, even though the Human Rights Watch researcher said he had seen it himself.

Human Rights Watch also documented five extrajudicial executions of people detained in the 37th precinct of Yopougon between May 12 and 19. Victims were taken out of the station at night over two days and executed on grounds nearby, said several detainees and neighborhood residents.

Among those executed were several neighborhood-level leaders from pro-Gbagbo militia groups, including well-known Young Patriot leaders "Andy" and "Constant" in Koweit between May 5 and 6. A witness to Constant's death described how relatives of local people killed by Constant and his militia described crimes he was involved in to the Republican Forces, after which four soldiers killed him. Human Rights Watch documented six killings by Andy and Constant in early March that targeted pro-Ouattara groups, as well as a gruesome gang rape and killing of an 18-year-old woman. Witnesses said that, before the soldiers executed Constant, he showed them a cache of arms in his house.

Two witnesses said they saw Chérif Ousmane in a convoy of six 4x4s that disposed of Andy's body on the side of the road on May 6. A witness who helped move the body said that it had been mutilated, with numerous knife and bullet wounds, likely indicating he had been tortured.

While the killings were not on the same scale as in Yopougon, Human Rights Watch also documented extrajudicial executions in Koumassi and Port Bouët between April 13 and April 15, just after the Republican Forces took over those areas. Several of those executed were militia alleged to be implicated in dozens of killings and area residents said in possession of large caches of arms. As in Yopougon, neighborhood youth played a role in many of the documented cases in identifying, denouncing, and trapping the alleged militiamen, before bringing them to the Republican Forces, in the words of one such youth, "to do their work."

Many former Yopougon residents from real or perceived pro-Gbagbo groups have fled, telling Human Rights Watch they were terrified of returning home when the Republican Forces still tightly control the neighborhood and killings continue.

Torture, Inhumane Treatment in Detention

Human Rights Watch documented dozens of cases of torture and inhumane treatment of detainees by the Republican Forces. During and after the military offensive in Abidjan, hundreds of youth from pro-Gbagbo ethnic groups were arrested and detained - often at abandoned police stations and military bases as well as in makeshift detention facilities like gas stations and the GESCO complex.

Almost all former detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch described being routinely beaten, most often with some combination of guns, belts, clubs, fists, and boots, as Republican Forces soldiers ordered them to reveal the location of weapons or militia leaders.

Most had been arrested and detained simply because of their age and ethnic group - particularly the Guéré, Bété, Goro, and Attié, all strongly linked to former President Gbagbo - or the neighborhood they were from. A university student in Port Bouët described being arrested, detained, and beaten on April 21 because he had lived at one of the university housing complexes in the neighborhood - sites that had long been bastions of the Student Federation of Côte d'Ivoire (*Fédération estudiantine et scolaire de Côte d'Ivoire*, commonly known by its acronym FESCI), a violent pro-Gbagbo student group:

I lived in the university housing because I'm a student from out of town, without family in Abidjan. I was never among FESCI. The Republican Forces arrested me and took me in a cargo truck from the 2nd precinct in Port Bouët. There were 10 of them, two of us students. Four of them beat me repeatedly over three hours, and one took out a knife and cut down my shoulder and back [wound seen by Human Rights Watch]. As they beat me, they kept demanding where the guns were. I told them I'd never taken part in FESCI, but they didn't believe me. They threatened to kill me several times.

It was only when someone else from the community came later that night and said I wasn't part of FESCI that they relented. The commander told me to forget what happened, to let it go, and gave me back my two cell phones. We're still threatened though, just because we're students. We can't go back to school, we can't go back to living in the university housing - they were mostly destroyed by the community because of their link to FESCI.

In several cases, the Republican Forces' treatment clearly reached the level of torture, defined under the Convention Against Torture as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person" by a state actor for purposes including obtaining information or punishing the person for an act committed or suspected of being committed. A 20-year-old who was detained for one week in the 37th police precinct in Abobo-Doumé [a sub-neighborhood where the Marine Base is located] described being tortured:

Each day the FRCI pulled us out of the small cell to beat us with their Kalashnikovs. Generally it was two of them; they'd strike you over and over with either their guns or their boots. It would last about five, ten minutes, then they'd leave and come back a couple hours later to do it again. As they hit me they'd say, "Are you going to answer our questions truthfully next time? Are you going to give us information?" Every time I told them that I'd never raised a weapon, but the beatings continued.

On the second day, they put a knife into a fire until it was scorching hot. Then they placed it on my left shoulder, making a cut as well. They

demanded, "Are you militia? Where are the arms that have been hidden?" It was the burning that hurt more than the cut - it was the worst pain I've ever felt [wounds, including charred, discolored skin and a long scar on the victim's shoulder, seen by Human Rights Watch].

Another detainee described how the Republican Forces forcibly removed several of his teeth during questioning after cornering him on a small road in Yopougon Wassakara in mid-April:

As I was walking to work [as a security guard] in Wassakara, the FRCI ambushed me, encircling me from all around. They were all in uniforms and wore military boots. They pulled me into an alleyway near Pharmacy Keneya saying that I was Gbagbo militia. I said, "No, no, I'm just going to my job. I'm a guard." They said, "No, you're militia."

They beat me with their Kalashnikovs until I was bleeding from my head. I'm still not right in the head, I constantly have headaches. Then they held me down, two of them grabbed me by my shoulders, two by my legs, and one held open my mouth. One of their guys had pliers, and he ripped out one of my teeth up top. Then he ripped out a second one, but it broke and only part of it came out. They kept demanding, "Where are the weapons you've hidden?" The pain was so much, I couldn't even respond. So they kept going. They took out four from up top and one from below in total. After the first couple, they stopped even asking questions. They yelled, "We're going to kill all of you militia that caused these problems. You're one of Gbagbo's Patriots, we're going to kill you all."

I still can't really eat from all the pain. At night [a month later], blood still comes into my mouth from these wounds.

Killings by Pro-Gbagbo Militia in Retreat From Abidjan

Human Rights Watch documented more than 220 killings by pro-Gbagbo militias and mercenaries against real and perceived Ouattara supporters as the Republican Forces swept through Abidjan between March 31 and the end of April, including in the weeks after Gbagbo's arrest as fighting continued in Yopougon.

The killings documented by Human Rights Watch took place in Yopougon, Koumassi, and Port Bouët. Credible sources, including local human rights groups and neighborhood leaders of West African nations, had information about similar killings in other neighborhoods, like Treichville, Williamsville, and Plateau, suggesting that the total number killed by pro-Gbagbo militias during this period is probably higher. Bodies were often burned, sometimes en masse, by pro-Gbagbo militia or by residents who could no longer tolerate the smell - leaving no trace except for small bone fragments still visible to a Human Rights Watch researcher.

The militia, as documented by Human Rights Watch throughout the post-election violence, erected scores of roadblocks at which they frequently demanded identity cards from passers-by. Those from northern Côte d'Ivoire or neighboring countries like Burkina Faso or Mali were systematically killed, often in gruesome ways.

Yopougon

As the longtime base of Gbagbo's militia and the final battle zone in the fight for Abidjan, the Yopougon neighborhood was the site of particularly intense killings of perceived pro-Ouattara groups. Many killings were in the days after Gbagbo's arrest, as militias overtly sought retribution.

In the largely Muslim Mami-Faitai section of Yopougon, Human Rights Watch saw what appeared to be eight recently-dug common graves, which people involved in the burials said each contained between two and 18 bodies. At least 46 people were killed in the area between April 11 and 13.

The residents of Mami-Faitai had created a checkpoint at the entrance to their neighborhood, where, according to several involved who were interviewed, unarmed youth signaled if attackers were coming by banging pots and pans. Residents described how seven attackers in BAE (an elite police unit) uniforms descended on the checkpoint just after midnight and, within 10 minutes, killed 18 people. A survivor who pretended to be dead after being shot told Human Rights Watch:

When they descended upon us, they yelled, "Everyone lay down." Since they had Kalashes, all of them, we had no choice. There were 18 of us there who lay down, 16 of whom were killed. They took our cell phones; one of them said, "Now you won't be able to call ONUC [UN peacekeepers] anymore." They demanded our names; the first two were Ibrahima and Boubakar. They charged their weapons and one said, "It's you that caught President Gbagbo, you're going to pay. We're going to make a mass grave in your neighborhood today." I was the leader of the group, so I said, "We're youth from the neighborhood; we're unarmed. We're not rebels, we're not politicians, we're just protecting our neighborhood, our women."

One of them put his foot down on me and shot into my back [wound seen by HRW]. It didn't kill me though. I lay there like I was dead, hoping they wouldn't notice and shoot me again. He kicked me, and I didn't respond. I tried to lay like life was completely out of me. After a second kick, he moved to the next person. All seven of them were shooting by this time - killing one after another of us.

When the people in our neighborhood heard the gunshots, many came out to defend us. But the Gbagbo guys fired to push back the crowd. Two more bodies were found by the mosque nearby, people who had tried to come toward us. All of this happened in about 10 to 15 minutes. We were mostly youth, but there were several older men there too.

A 65-year-old man who lived in the same neighborhood lost five sons when the militia climbed into his compound around 9 a.m. on April 12:

They were going house by house to kill. They were more than 10 that jumped the fence into my compound. Most were in civilian clothes - all black, a few of them masking their faces with charcoal - but others wore military pants. All had Kalashes. They broke the first door, in which three of my sons were hiding. I was inside the main door, the metal one, which is what saved me. They couldn't break it down like the two wood doors outside in the courtyard. They fired their guns after they jumped over the fence; we all heard and ran to listen and look through a hole in the door.

I watched as they pulled out three of my boys from the first room. They forced them to lay down on their stomachs in the hall here," and then they shot them at point-blank range. First they took everything of value of them, then one opened fire, "pop-pop," on each son. They demanded money, and my sons gave it to them; they demanded clothes, my sons gave it to them; they demanded the TV, cell phones. Everything was given, and yet the militiamen killed them. They yelled that we, the Dioula, were the rebels that had taken over the country. Another said, "It's your brothers that captured Gbagbo yesterday." They pillaged that bedroom, then went to the second door where two more of my boys were sleeping. They broke down that door as well. They immediately shot one who was standing up, right in the chest. One of the attackers then said, "We've taken care of four of them, that's enough, let's go." But another said no. The fifth son was hiding under his bed. They pulled him out and shot him.

Several stayed for more than an hour, while the others continued their killing elsewhere. One of them broke open the fridge and, with the five bodies on the ground, took out couscous, bissap [juice], and ate right there. Crumbs were left on the ground right by the bodies.

Around 2 p.m., we stopped hearing gunfire and we went out. When I saw the bodies, I was in shock, I couldn't even cry. We marched through blood to get out of the compound, the five bodies just laying there. Bullet holes had gone into the concrete floor. We couldn't take the time to bury them, as we didn't know when the militia would return.

When we came back, we were told by a few who had hidden in the neighborhood that the militia had packed the bodies together and then set them on fire. Burn marks were out in front of our compound. We found some remains of bones, but nothing more.

In the Doukouré sub-neighborhood of Yopougon, 29 people lie in a single mass grave from the killings of April 12, according to several residents who helped bury the bodies on April 13. At least seven more graves are nearby in the same dusty parking lot for the neighborhood mosque, with body counts between one and twelve, according to others who assisted in the burial. As they went from house to house killing, the militia also raped several women, including a 23-year-old:

Around 2:30 in the afternoon the militia knocked on the door to the courtyard. Before we could even come to open it, they'd broken it down. My husband raised his hands. They demanded his ethnicity, his identity card. He said, "I'm Dioula," and they said, "Ah, it's you that supports Alassane." He didn't respond, but as they grabbed his identity papers, they shot him in the arm and then his ribs.

Then they told the women to take off their clothes and lay down or they would shoot us. I begged for forgiveness, but one of them called in the others who had remained outside. First, five more came in, then one went out to call in more, and three more came. They all had weapons. The first who entered wore military fatigues and carried a Kalash. The others were in civilian dress and had knives and machetes.

There were three women in the rooms that share the courtyard, and they raped all three of us. One militia raped each woman. They forced us to turn around and then raped us. After they finished, they took everything we owned, left us with nothing.

Killings within the sub-neighborhoods controlled by the militia continued through the final days of the battle for Yopougon. On April 25, pro-Gbagbo militia took advantage of a brief movement by the Republican Forces out of Yopougon Andokoi to set up a roadblock. Two Malian brothers came into the neighborhood around noon, thinking it was safe, and were stopped at the militia checkpoint. The older brother, interviewed by Human Rights Watch, escaped but looked back to see that his 26-year-old brother been stopped. After the Republican Forces took back the area that night, the older brother returned to find his brother's half-charred body stacked next to five more victims who had also been burned almost beyond recognition.

On April 27, the sub-neighborhood of Locodjoro, one of the last areas to fall to the Republican Forces, was burned to the ground by retreating militiamen. Hundreds of homes were destroyed, and according to witnesses, two Malians were detained, bound, and executed. One was on his way into the area to save his mother who had been unable to flee earlier violence.

Yopougon residents from both political parties said they had seen a few well-known militia leaders in and around the sub-neighborhoods of Yopougon where large numbers of killings occurred. Witnesses described repeatedly seeing militia leader Bah Dora in the area of Toit Rouge, another of the final bastions of the militia. Witnesses there also described the involvement of militia members under Bah's command in multiple killings of civilians from alleged pro-Ouattara groups. Several neighborhood residents told Human Rights Watch that Bah Dora had been captured by the Republican Forces and was being held at the 19th precinct police station.

Two witnesses also said they saw Maho Glofiei, a longtime militia leader from the far western region of Côte d'Ivoire, in Yopougon just before Gbagbo's arrest.

Recommendations

To President Alassane Ouattara:

- Demonstrate that promises of impartial and credible prosecutions of grave crimes are meaningful by ensuring immediate investigations into killings, extrajudicial executions, and torture committed by the Republican Forces in Abidjan. Hold those responsible accountable, including commanders who oversaw the crimes, regardless of their military rank.
- Put commanders implicated in serious abuse on administrative leave, pending investigation.
- Make publicly clear that anyone detained - including former Gbagbo militia implicated in grave crimes - is to be treated humanely in accordance with Ivorian and international law.
- When cordon and search operations are conducted by the Republican Forces, ensure that police, gendarmes, or UN and French peacekeepers are included.
- Seek the assistance of key international donors in assessing the capacity of the Ivorian justice system to prosecute grave crimes and addressing the weaknesses identified.
- Provide complete access to all detention facilities to international monitors and members of the human rights division of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, including access that allows detainees to describe the conditions of their treatment without the presence or interference of the Republican Forces.
- Cooperate fully with the ICC, including arresting suspects, if the court prosecutor opens an investigation of crimes committed in Côte d'Ivoire.

To the UN Security Council:

- To bring light to atrocities committed in the past decade in Côte d'Ivoire, publish the 2004 Commission of Inquiry report when the 2011 Commission of Inquiry report is presented before the Human Rights Council in June. Failure to do so continues to send the signal that certain people deeply implicated in war crimes and other grave abuses, are being shielded from justice.

To the United Nations Operations in Côte d'Ivoire:

- Increase significantly patrols, including joint patrols with the Republican Forces, in Yopougon, particularly in vulnerable pro-Gbagbo neighborhoods like Koweit, Yaosseh, Kouté, and Abobo-Doumé.
- Visit detention centers daily, particularly in Yopougon, and demand access to prisoners without interference by the Republican Forces.

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