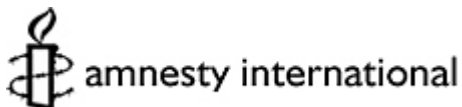


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Amnesty International Report 2009 - Côte d'Ivoire

Head of state: Laurent Gbagbo
Head of government: Guillaume Soro
Death penalty: abolitionist for all crimes
Population: 19.6 million
Life expectancy: 47.4 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f): 192/173 per 1,000
Adult literacy: 48.7 per cent

Presidential elections originally due to take place in 2005 were again postponed due to delays in registering voters and disarming fighters. The UN Security Council decided that international peacekeeping forces would remain in the country until after presidential elections and extended an arms embargo and targeted sanctions. Security forces used excessive force to disperse people demonstrating against rising living costs. Human rights abuses continued to be committed by both government and opposition forces, particularly against women, and harassment and physical assault remained widespread, notably at roadblocks.

Background

The coalition government remained in place, composed of supporters of President Laurent Gbagbo and led by Guillaume Soro, Secretary General of the New Forces (Forces Nouvelles), the coalition of armed groups in control of the north since September 2002. However, the main objectives set out in the 2007 Ouagadougou peace agreement were not achieved. Despite some efforts, the process of disarming members of the New Forces and creating an integrated army was not completed. In addition, the identification and voter registration processes were hampered by attacks launched by a student organization linked to President Gbagbo. The students ransacked registration centres, stole computer equipment and seized birth certificates. In October, the presidential elections were again postponed for a fourth year.

In October, two people were convicted of dumping deadly toxic waste in Abidjan in 2006 and sentenced to 20 and five years' imprisonment. Officials from Trafigura, the Dutch multinational company which operated the ship that brought the waste to the country, escaped prosecution after reaching a financial settlement with the Ivorian government,

apparently in return for immunity from prosecution.

In October, the UN Security Council renewed for a further year the embargo on arms and diamond exports as well as sanctions on individuals seen as obstacles to peace such as travel bans and asset freezes. The Security Council stressed that these measures would be reviewed after free, fair and transparent presidential elections.

Excessive use of force

In March and April, riot police dispersed several hundred demonstrators who had blocked roads and burned tyres in Abidjan, the economic capital, to protest against the rising cost of staple foods. The police used tear gas grenades and live ammunition. Two people were killed and more than 10 people, including women traders, were wounded.

- A 16-year-old school student died after being hit on the head by a tear gas canister in Yopougon commune, Abidjan. A 24-year-old man was reportedly shot three times in the head in Port-Bouet commune, near Abidjan. The Ministry of Interior said that investigations had been launched into the killings, but by the end of 2008 no member of the security forces appeared to have been charged or prosecuted.

Violence against women and girls

Acts of sexual violence against women and girls continued in both the area held by government forces and in the northern area controlled by the New Forces. Most of the alleged perpetrators were never brought to trial or were released shortly after arrest.

- In April, a 14-year-old girl was raped and killed by four members of the New Forces in the town of Katiola, an area held by the New Forces. No-one was held to account for this crime. A few days later, in the same town, a woman was sexually assaulted and then raped by a member of the New Forces who was arrested, held for a few days and then released.
- In September, two young girls were raped in Duekoué (in the west of the country) by six men who were part of an armed group carrying guns, suspected to be members of a pro-government militia. None of the perpetrators had been arrested by the end of 2008.

No measures were taken to provide reparation or access to health care for the countless women and girls subjected to rape and sexual assault by fighters and civilians linked to them since 2002, when armed conflict broke out.

Police and security forces

The security forces frequently committed abuses to extort money at checkpoints and during inspections of identity documents.

- In February, Lanciné Bamba, a bus driver, was shot dead by a member of the Command Centre for Security Operations (Centre de commandement des Opérations de Sécurité, CECOS) after he had refused to hand over money at a checkpoint. In October, a member of the CECOS was convicted of the murder and sentenced to three years' imprisonment.

Abuses by armed groups

Combatants and supporters of the New Forces were responsible for human rights abuses

including torture and other ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and widespread extortion. A climate of impunity prevailed due to the absence of a functioning judicial system in the north.

- In September, more than 50 people were arrested in the area of Vavoua and Séguéla reportedly because they objected to the dismissal of Zakaria Koné, a military leader of the New Forces. Those arrested were sent to Bouaké, the stronghold of the New Forces, where they were reportedly detained unlawfully.

Amnesty International reports

- Côte d'Ivoire. Silence and Impunity: the only response to sexual violence against women (16 December 2008)

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