

Open Statement on the Situation in Côte d'Ivoire

Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect 17 December 2010 There is a serious risk of mass atrocities in Côte d'Ivoire. On 16 December, government security forces loyal to incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo opened fire on opposition supporters protesting in Abidjan, killing at least twenty people and injuring unknown numbers. The clash between security forces and supporters of presidential candidate Alassane Ouattara occurs in a context of heightened post-electoral tensions in which both Gbagbo and Ouattara claim victory. An escalation in the situation could easily lead to the commission of mass atrocities, crimes that states committed themselves to protect populations from in adopting the responsibility to protect (R2P) at the 2005 World Summit, and a return to armed conflict. In keeping with the responsibility to protect, swift domestic and international action must be taken to deter actors from committing or inciting atrocities and resorting to violence to retain or secure power. (...)

(...) The potential for further escalation is all too real, especially as both sides draw support from armed elements. (...)

(...) With security forces and the Forces Nouvelles pitted against each other, the re-ignition of armed conflict is a real possibility and there is a significant risk that massacres, rapes and sexual abuse, torture and use of child soldiers – crimes against humanity and war crimes, perpetrated by all sides during the earlier conflict, will be committed again. Conditions on the ground are deteriorating rapidly. (...) State security forces, national authorities, and opposition officials have a responsibility to protect the people of Côte d'Ivoire from atrocities and their incitement. The security forces must exercise restraint, abide by international law and standards on the use of force, and protect all persons in Côte d'Ivoire irrespective of their political affiliation, ethnic, religious or national identity. It is imperative that the political impasse is resolved quickly and through peaceful means. Gbagbo and Ouattara must avoid instigating violence and demand that their supporters, including the security forces and Forces Nouvelles, refrain from the commission of atrocities and make it clear that those who incite or commit crimes will be held accountable. (...).

The UN Security Council has a critical role to play in averting and halting atrocities in Côte d'Ivoire. It has already acknowledged in previous resolutions that a threat to international peace and security exists and that it is empowered to act. The Council has a number of tools at its disposal to increase pressure on Gbagbo and Ouattara, their supporters, and those who may take up arms, to behave in a responsible way. Among the measures that the Council should adopt is the expansion of the list of individuals facing targeted sanctions as well as enforcement of the arms embargo currently in place. It should also make clear that those who incite or commit mass atrocities will be held accountable by domestic authorities, or failing that, by the ICC.

It is imperative that UNOCI is able to fulfill this mandate [to “protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence.”], this includes deploying to areas where populations face the

greatest risk, being prepared to take robust action, and having the resources necessary to do so. The UN Security Council should in turn send a clear message that it expects UNOCI to fulfill this mandate. The Council deployed on 24 November additional peacekeeping troops from the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to UNOCI for a period of four weeks to bolster security around the election, this is a positive step. The Council must be prepared to renew their presence, while seeking alternatives to ensure that UNMIL's ability to fulfill its mandate is not compromised. Debates in the Council about the UN's role in certifying the election results threatens to obscure a key issue for the Council – the current risk of mass atrocities in Côte d'Ivoire. The Council's role, and its priority, should be using every means possible to deter and dissuade actors from the commission of atrocities and from a return to armed conflict.

It is critical that, in keeping with the responsibility to protect, efforts are focused on the immediate need to ensure the protection of all persons in Côte d'Ivoire, by preventing the situation from escalating to the point where mass atrocities occur. This is not the time for wavering; it is the time for unified action to save untold numbers of lives. (...)

See full
[statement](#)