

Security Council

6506<sup>th</sup> Meeting (AM)

## **TOP PEACEKEEPING OFFICIAL CONVEYS TO SECURITY COUNCIL WEST AFRICAN LEADERS'**

## **REQUEST FOR STRONGER UNITED NATIONS MANDATE IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE**

### **Escalating Violence Cited as Permanent Representative**

### **Warns of Arms Distribution, 'Long-planned Ethnic Cleansing and Genocide'**

The deteriorating security situation in Côte d'Ivoire has had a serious toll on the lives of the West African country's people, Atul Khare, Assistant-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told the Security Council today as he conveyed the request of regional leaders for more stringent measures against recalcitrant former President Laurent Gbagbo.

"The security situation has further deteriorated with the security forces loyal to Mr. Gbagbo using heavy weapons against civilians in Abidjan," Mr. Khare said. The former President lost a presidential run-off election to Alassane Ouattara in November 2010, according to international certification, but refused to step down. "The human rights situation is very grave," the Assistant Secretary-General added, noting that between mid-December and 23 March, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) reported 462 killings, at least 502 arbitrary arrests and detentions, some involving torture, and at least 72 disappearances.

He said that leaders of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), meeting over the past two days in response to the situation, had said that "the time has come to ensure the transfer of power to President Ouattara without any further delay". To that end, they had requested the Security Council to consider strengthening UNOCI's mandate and to adopt more stringent international sanctions against Mr. Gbagbo and his associates. Mr. Khare said the regional leaders had made it clear that the deteriorating security situation and the escalating violence as a "direct consequence of the refusal of outgoing President Mr. Laurent Gbagbo to cede power to Mr. Alassane Ouattara, the universally recognized winner of the 28 November 2010 election".

Mr. Khare said the dire humanitarian situation had the potential to exacerbate the situation in the country, in which up to 1 million people had been displaced, and the wider region, particularly Liberia, he said, noting that the neighbouring country had received some 93,000 Ivorians seeking refuge. In that regard, the emergency flash appeal for assistance to help refugees and internally displaced remained seriously underfunded, he stressed, adding that it was essential that all sides allow unhindered access for humanitarian actors. Unfortunately, the Young Patriots group and security forces loyal to Mr. Gbagbo continued to obstruct UNOCI operations and block access by its patrols to areas in which clashes were ongoing, he said. In addition, a number of attacks against United Nations personnel had been reported, along with much damage to property and one alleged abduction of a peacekeeper.

Describing a few of the most egregious examples of excessive use of force against civilians, Mr. Khare cited the 3 March incident in which Gbagbo loyalists had machine-gunned women demonstrating peacefully in support of President Ouattara, killing seven; the 7 March attack against an ethnic community believed to support Mr. Gbagbo; and the 17 March killing of more than 25, with more than 40 more wounded, when security forces loyal to Mr. Gbagbo had fired mortar shells into a market in the Abobo neighbourhood of Abidjan.

Going on to cite clashes in Abidjan's Yopougon neighbourhood between the Young Patriots and supporters of President Ouattara, he said the latter and armed forces loyal to Mr. Gbagbo had also targeted nationals of other West African countries, vandalizing and looting their businesses in Abidjan. Pro-Gbagbo forces had attacked the residences of several ministers in President Ouattara's Government, while pro-Ouattara youth groups had retaliated by looting two houses belonging to senior officials of Mr. Gbagbo's party in Bouaké and Abidjan.

Relating many other such attacks, he described in detail an incident yesterday in which a UNOCI patrol had opened fire on pro-Gbagbo security forces who had been firing mortars in the direction of civilian targets, causing them to stop their attack and flee. UNOCI had treated 254 wounded persons to date, he said, adding that the mission's Level One Plus hospital was seriously overstretched. The contribution of a surgical team would help address that challenge.

UNOCI had undertaken a number of other actions to protect civilians, including increasing the number of patrols to vulnerable communities under attack, he continued. Arrangements had been made for a permanent patrol to be stationed on "a 24/7" basis in the high-risk neighbourhood of Abobo. "We believe that these measures have prevented additional killings in Abobo, Atecoube and Koumassi from taking place," he said, noting that aerial reconnaissance was ongoing.

The new Force Commander, General Gnakooude Berena, had assumed his responsibilities on 20 March, and the mission was now accessing some of the sites of alleged mass graves that it had previously been prevented from visiting, the Assistant Secretary-General said. Efforts were under way to conduct investigations, and the mission continued to record all reported human rights violations.

Turning to the political front, he said President Ouattara had addressed the nation on 15 March, saying he accepted the decisions of the African Union Peace and Security Council and would support national reconciliation efforts, including the formation of a Government of national unity. Two days later, Mr. Gbagbo's "cabinet" had issued a communiqué stating that the African Union had made its decision without a proper evaluation of the election, and stressing the need for an inter-Ivorian dialogue. It further demanded that "the rebels" disarm.

Following that briefing, Youssoufou Bamba ( Côte d'Ivoire) took the floor to stress that the obligation and responsibility of protecting civilian populations in imminent danger was at the heart of current international concerns. Saluting the legitimate use of force in aiding Libyan civilians, he emphasized that Mr. Gbagbo's forces had committed massive human rights violations since 28 November 2010, massacring more than 500 civilians in just three months

despite the presence of UNOCI.

He reiterated yesterday's ECOWAS call on the Security Council to authorize a strengthening of the mission's current mandate and posture under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. The implementation of Chapter VIII also seemed relevant in allowing for the necessary cooperation between UNOCI and ECOWAS to protect Côte d'Ivoire's civilian population, which included several million originating from the wider subregion.

"Every day Ivorians are dying, every day there are human rights violations," Mr. Bamba said, emphasizing that "every Ivorian knows the trauma that this situation brings". With the distribution of arms to the youth, many under 15 years old, and the discourse of xenophobia and hate, the world was witnessing a long-planned ethnic cleansing and genocide, he said, calling on the Council to take "rigorous" measures against Gbagbo and his supporters. He also called for a global civilian security plan by UNOCI and supporting French forces, including the establishment of a security belt around targeted neighbourhoods and the destruction of weaponry used by Mr. Gbagbo's forces.

He also called for the total diplomatic isolation of, and refusal of visa application by Mr. Gbagbo, his family members and close associates; tighter surveillance of the weapons embargo against Côte d'Ivoire and sanctions against countries breaking it; a freeze on the assets of Mr. Gbagbo and his family members and close associates; the launch of a case by the International Criminal Court; and the authorization of legitimate force to save the population, democracy and peace of Côte d'Ivoire, and install President Ouattara. The Council could not allow itself to be inactive in the face of the planned extermination of millions living in Côte d'Ivoire, he stressed.

The meeting began at 10:10 a.m. and ended at 10:40 a.m.