
Côte d'Ivoire

During 2005, the political impasse between the Ivorian government and northern-based New Forces rebels resulted in a steady increase in human rights abuses by Ivorian security forces, the rebels, and militias associated with both sides. Throughout the year there were persistent reports of extrajudicial executions, torture, arbitrary detentions, extortion and looting, and of recruitment and use of child soldiers by all sides. Two deadly outbreaks of ethnically motivated violence resulted in some one hundred deaths. 2005 saw no meaningful efforts by the Ivorian government, rebels or the international community to combat the pervasive culture of impunity in the country.

Efforts to end the political-military crisis saw the failure of a third internationally negotiated peace accord, the African Union-brokered Pretoria Agreement, signed in April 2005. To avoid a constitutional crisis following the end of incumbent Gbagbo's five-year term, the African Union (A.U.) in October proposed a plan calling for Gbagbo to remain in office for up to one year. The new plan—which was not signed by the warring factions—also calls for the appointment of a new prime minister acceptable to all parties who would help ensure the implementation of crucial reforms including laws relating to nationality and naturalization and the powers and composition of the Independent Electoral Commission. However, while the plan was later endorsed by the United Nations Security Council, it was rejected by the rebels and opposition political parties.

At year's end, the apparent disenfranchisement of the rebels from the political process—as well as internal divisions along ethnic lines within the Ivorian security forces—led to serious concerns about either a renewal of armed conflict or a coup d'état. The prospect of a renewed military offensive by either side raises serious human rights concerns given the government's prominent use of ill-disciplined militias and hate media to incite violence against perceived opponents. The extent to which the rebel leadership maintains effective command and control over its forces and the extent to which U.N. peacekeepers could protect vulnerable groups of civilians are also of concern.

As the political crisis deepens, the institutions that once provided benefits to ordinary Ivorians—the public education system, healthcare services, and the judicial system—continued to deteriorate, resulting in serious hardship particularly in the rebel-held north. Some four thousand French troops monitor a buffer zone or “Confidence Zone.” between the government-controlled south and the rebel-controlled north of the country. A six thousand-strong United Nations peacekeeping mission, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), established in April 2004, is deployed country-wide. The issues at the heart of the Ivorian conflict—the exploitation of ethnicity for political gain, competition over land and natural resources, and corruption—remain unresolved.

Abuses by State Security Forces

During 2005, scores of summary executions were carried out by the police, army, and the Central Command Security Operation Force (CCOS) —a new security force of about 1700 men created by Presidential decree in July to ensure security in Abidjan. The majority of these executions appeared to target northerners, West African immigrants and other perceived rebel sympathizers, though the government maintained that the executions took place in the course of combating common crime. The police, army, CCOS and, to a lesser extent, armed militias engaged in systematic and widespread extortion, racketeering and intimidation of businessmen, street traders, and motorists among others. Perceived rebel sympathizers were believed to be particularly targeted. Army officers regularly engaged in the cross border recruitment of Liberians, including former child combatants, to fight with Ivorian pro-government militias. In July 2005, a group of armed soldiers from the Ivorian Republican Guard stormed the Abidjan offices of state broadcaster RTI and instructed directors not to broadcast footage of opposition members.

Abuses by Pro-government Militias and Groups

In 2005, pro-government militias and groups, sometimes working together with state security forces, intimidated and at times attacked opposition party members, journalists and human rights activists aligned with pro-opposition newspapers and United Nations peacekeepers. A violent pro-government student group, the Students' Federation of Cote d'Ivoire (FESCI), committed serious abuses, including torture and rape, against students perceived to be supporting the opposition. In July 2005, the pro-government Young Patriot militia burned opposition newspapers, threatened to kill newspaper vendors, surrounded and threatened the offices of opposition newspapers, and forced their way into a public TV station. U.N. peacekeepers and civilian staff were, on several occasions, intimidated, surrounded, and prevented from patrolling and conducting investigations in government-controlled areas.

Abuses by the Forces Nouvelles

New Forces rebels systematically extort money and pillage goods, including livestock and foodstuffs, from civilians in villages both under their control and within the buffer zone. Suspected government collaborators and spies were on several occasions tortured and summarily executed by rebel leaders. In the north, rebel commanders arbitrarily dispense justice, in turn leading to severe violations of human rights: numerous individuals accused of common crimes are arbitrarily detained within prisons, informal detention centers and military camps for often extended periods of time. The Dozos, a traditional tribally based civil defense group now working in coordination with the New Forces, has also committed serious violations including extortion, arbitrary detention, torture and rape.

Intercommunal Conflict over Land

During 2005 there were at least two violent episodes of inter-communal conflict between indigenous groups and immigrant farm workers in the cocoa and coffee plantation areas of the west. The causes of the violence are multifaceted and involve a complex interplay of economic factors, disputes over land rights, the proliferation of armed militias, and the political manipulation of ethnicity. In February 2005,

sixteen people were killed and thousands displaced in clashes sparked by an attack by pro-government militia on the rebel-held village of Logouale. In May and June 2005, at least seventy people were killed and thousands more displaced in a spate of revenge killings in and around the town of Duékoué.

Accountability

Throughout 2005, neither the government nor the rebel leadership took concrete steps to discipline, investigate or hold accountable those responsible for ongoing crimes, much less past atrocities which took place during the 2000 election violence, 2002-2003 civil war, and violent crackdown on an opposition demonstration in March 2004.

For their part, the United Nations Security Council and African Union resisted the adoption of concrete efforts to either hold perpetrators accountable through prosecutions or to restrain the actions of alleged human rights violators through the imposition of travel and economic sanctions. The U.N. Security Council has yet to make public or discuss the findings of the Commission of Inquiry report into serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law since September 2002, which was handed to the UN Secretary General in November 2004. The report contained a secret annex listing people accused of human rights abuses who could eventually face trial. Similarly, the Council refused to implement travel and economic sanctions authorized under resolution 1572, which was passed in November 2004. This resolution authorized the use of sanctions against Ivorians who violated human rights, broke the arms embargo, indulged in hate speech, or blocked the peace process.

While the prosecutor for the International Criminal Court announced in January 2005 that he would send a team to Cote d'Ivoire to lay the groundwork for a possible investigation into war crimes, he had at year's end yet to do so. The prosecutor was acting on an ad hoc request to the ICC by the Ivorian government made in September 2003.

Key International Actors

No one country, international body or individual appeared willing or able to exert sufficient influence to move the two sides towards a peaceful resolution to the political and military crisis. Throughout the year key international players were exasperated with the lack of progress in the implementation of yet another peace accord. However, the African Union, which during 2005 took the lead in peace negotiations, was loath to use and maintained effective veto power over the only leverage tool available -- United Nations economic and travel sanctions. Key international players were equally unprepared to take measures to combat impunity although the United Nations on numerous occasions expressed concern about ongoing violations. This reluctance—in the name of undermining future prospects for peace—appeared to embolden the perpetrators and fed into the intransigence of the Ivorian government and New Forces.

Following the failure of the parties to fully implement the Pretoria Agreement, there was no consensus as to which would be the most suitable body to play the role of negotiator during the coming year: The A.U.-appointed envoy, South African President Thabo Mbeki, was deeply mistrusted by the rebels who

accused him of being too close to the government. Key members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)—Burkina Faso and Mali—were blamed by the government for supporting the rebels. France, who has been accused of favoritism by both sides, and the United Nations deferred to the African bodies. In response, the African Union created the International Working Group (IWG)—to be chaired by Nigeria's Foreign Minister and composed of senior officials from Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, Niger, South Africa, France, United States, Britain, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, European Union, African Union and regional body ECOWAS—to monitor the implementation of future commitments.

While the United Nations Security Council appeared frustrated with both parties to the conflict, it was reluctant to take a leadership role in pushing for accountability or sanctions. However, in June 2005, it authorized an increase of some 850 more troops.