

Côte D'Ivoire: Inquiry's Shortcuts Raise Red Flags Human Rights Watch 23 February 2012

Côte d'Ivoire's national commission of inquiry investigating the 2010-2011 post-election violence should extend its mandate by six months to August 2012, Human Rights Watch said today. The extension would better ensure an impartial and comprehensive investigation into crimes committed by all sides, Human Rights Watch said.

Although created in July 2011, the commission only began its investigations in mid-January 2012 and is already finalizing its report. It appears unlikely to have adequately either documented the conflict's serious crimes or identified those responsible on both sides after only a month of investigations, Human Rights Watch said.

In meetings with Human Rights Watch, Ivorian civil society representatives, United Nations officials, and diplomats highlighted serious problems with the commission. They cited its failure to include representation from pro-Gbagbo groups and to consult sufficiently with civil society, and said the commission appears to have rushed its work. (...)

(...) The commission was created after a UN-established international commission of inquiry and international human rights groups found that both sides had committed war crimes and likely crimes against humanity as former president Laurent Gbagbo tried to hold on to power after losing the election to Ouattara.

To date, all of the at least 120 people charged by military and civilian prosecutors with post-election crimes are from the Gbagbo camp.

When questioned about the one-sided justice that has so far marked Côte d'Ivoire, Ouattara has cited the national commission of inquiry as evidence of his commitment to impartiality and promised to ensure that the people the commission's report finds criminally responsible are brought to justice. (...)

(...) The vast majority of victims who suffered abuses by the pro-Ouattara Republican Forces do not feel secure speaking to the commission. This raises serious concerns of a one-sided report and demands greater efforts by the commission to solicit the testimony from victims of abuses committed by

pro-Ouattara forces and to protect victims and witnesses from reprisals, Human Rights Watch said. (...)

The leader of another Ivorian human rights organization said that while the group had “consultative” meetings with the commission prior to its field work, the body “hasn’t really associated with civil society... nothing concrete. We’ve had no role in reality.”

UN officials and Ivorian activists likewise criticized the cursory nature or even complete lack of investigations in certain areas particularly hard-hit by human rights abuses or where a large concentration of victims remain. (...)

Human Rights Watch called on the Ivorian government to ensure that the commission is able to complete a comprehensive, in-depth examination into the post-election crimes. This should include sufficient time throughout the country and in neighboring Liberia to build confidence with and interview victims on both sides.

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