

Press Conference by Secretary-General's Special Advisers on Responsibility to Protect, Genocide, in Connection with Situation in Côte d'Ivoire

United Nations 19 January 2011 In the wake of a unanimous [Security Council decision](#) this morning to strengthen by 2,000 troops the United Nations peacekeeping operation in Côte d'Ivoire — where a power struggle persisted over the presidential election result — the possibility of genocide and related crimes were of grave concern, said United Nations experts during a press conference at New York Headquarters today.

During the briefing, Francis Deng, the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General for the Prevention of Genocide, and Edward Luck, the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, said they were disturbed by allegations that the armed forces and militia groups that backed opposing camps in the current political crisis were recruiting and arming ethnic groups allied to each camp. They were also deeply troubled by reports of hate speech that appeared to be aimed at inciting violent attacks against particular ethnic and national groups. (...)

The Special Advisers further said that "urgent steps" should be taken, in line with the responsibility to protect, to avert the risk of genocide and ensure the protection of all those at risk of mass atrocities.

To date, some 28,000 Ivorians had fled to neighbouring countries and 16,000 were internally displaced as a result of ethnic clashes, they said. There was a real risk that the clashes could spread across the country. While noting that the crisis could culminate in mass atrocities if left unchecked, Mr. Deng stressed that allegations of genocide were not yet being made. The task, he said, was to highlight the elements that had the potential to lead to genocide — and to allow the relevant international bodies to act accordingly.

In that vein, Mr. Luck said that today's Security Council resolution 1967 (2011) — which would reinforce the 9,000-strong United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) — was an encouraging development. "The Council members are quite united in terms of what they expect and what they hope to happen in Côte d'Ivoire," he said.

Regarding the ethnic nature of the clashes there, the Special Advisers stressed that groups aligned with both sides of the conflict were fleeing in "mutual" numbers. That assessment echoed that of other high-ranking United Nations officials, who in recent days had emphasized that no single ethnic group was being targeted more than any other. "It is not a question of pointing fingers," said Mr. Luck. "It's very important that all parties recognize that the international community is watching," he added.

"We need to heighten concern," agreed Mr. Deng.

Responding to a question, which compared the situation in Côte d'Ivoire to that in Rwanda in the 1990s, Mr. Deng said that the access of troops on the ground – including new troops just added by the Security Council - was an extremely important element of preventing mass atrocities from occurring. "Our experience with Rwanda has clearly sharpened the readiness of the international community to act," he said.

He added that other, more recent situations, including Kenya's 2008 post-election crisis, showed successful cases of prevention by the United Nations and other international players. "What happened in Kenya was a very good demonstration of the active will of the international community to prevent the situation from escalating to genocide levels," he said.

Mr. Deng responded to a question about his work in nearby Nigeria and Guinea, where he was seeking to "demystify" the idea of genocide prevention. "The word genocide tends to make people a little nervous and sometimes not so responsive," he said. "I see genocide as an extreme form of identity-related conflicts – not resulting from mere differences, but the way we manage our differences." He hoped that more leaders, including in West Africa, would be open to discussing "prevention from a constructive angle".

Responding to questions about his native Sudan, where he characterized the recently concluded status referendum as "credible", he said that, following years of "terrible conflicts" in that country, "what has just happened in the south is a very impressive achievement".

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