

Côte d'Ivoire: Crimes Against Humanity by Gbagbo Forces

As Crisis Deepens, Grave Abuses Committed by Both Sides Human Rights Watch 15
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(...) The three-month campaign of organized violence by security forces under the control of Laurent Gbagbo and militias that support him gives every indication of amounting to crimes against humanity, Human Rights Watch said today. A new Human Rights Watch investigation in Abidjan indicates that the pro-Gbagbo forces are increasingly targeting immigrants from neighboring West African countries in their relentless attacks against real and perceived supporters of Alassane Ouattara, who is internationally recognized as having won the November 2010 presidential election. (...)

(...) Armed combatants have committed war crimes, including executions of detainees and targeted killings of civilians and destruction of their property, Human Rights Watch said. The killing of civilians by pro-Ouattara forces, at times with apparent ethnic or political motivation, also risks becoming crimes against humanity should they become widespread or systematic. No one has been held accountable for the attacks, which have left hundreds dead, and neither side has even publicly denounced abuses by its own forces.

"The time is long overdue for the UN Security Council to impose sanctions against Gbagbo and his allies directly implicated in the grave abuses of the post-election period," said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. "The international community should also send a clear message to Ouattara's camp that reprisal killings will place them next on the list."

As the level of violence escalates on both sides, United Nations and French peacekeepers need to take all necessary measures within their mandates to protect civilians, Human Rights Watch said. (...)

(...)

Key Recommendations

To the United Nations Security Council: In response to the continuing grave human rights abuses during the post-election period, amounting to crimes against humanity, implement an assets freeze and travel ban against Laurent Gbagbo, Republican Guard commander General Bruno Blé Dogbo, and CECOS commander General Guiai Bi Poin. For consistent incitement to violence against UN troops and foreign nationals on RTI, implement the same sanctions against RTI Director General Pierre Brou Amessan. Consider sanctions against other military and political leaders close to Gbagbo who are implicated in grave human rights abuses.

Publish the 2004 Commission of Inquiry report that detailed grave crimes committed during the

2002-2003 civil war and its aftermath, which would help break a decade-long cycle of impunity that fuels the ongoing crisis.

To improve the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire's (UNOCI) capacity to effectively protect civilians, ensure the prompt deployment of reinforcements already authorized and make plans for additional deployments of well-trained and equipped troops, as well as equipment such as helicopters, should the situation deteriorate further.

Request a briefing from the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and ensure that she remains seized of the situation.

To Alassane Ouattara, Guillaume Soro, and Commanders of Forces Loyal to Their Government:

Publicly denounce the crimes committed by their supporters against civilians in the village of Anonkoua-Kouté and make clear that the perpetrators will be held accountable in the future.

To Laurent Gbagbo, Alassane Ouattara, and Commanders of Armed Forces on Both Sides:

Give orders that all military actions must be carried out in accordance with the standards of international human rights and humanitarian law.

Ensure humane treatment of all detainees and allow access to international and domestic monitors.

Investigate cases of extrajudicial executions and hold perpetrators responsible.

Ensure that all combatants receive training in international humanitarian law, including the criminal responsibility of commanders for failing to prevent or prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

To UNOCI and the French Licorne Peacekeeping Force:

Continue increasing patrols in volatile neighborhoods and use legitimate force, when necessary,

to protect civilians "under imminent threat of physical violence" in their deployment areas, as per their mandates.

Give special attention to the urgent protection needs of ECOWAS nationals and be prepared to evacuate them if necessary.

To the United Nations Human Rights Council:

Establish a Commission of Inquiry to investigate post-election human rights and humanitarian law violations. Ensure that the mandate is sufficiently broad to cover both the targeted campaign of violence led by Gbagbo's security forces, as well as recent and any future crimes committed by both sides of the conflict as the violence escalates. (...)

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