

Ivory Coast's Gbagbo must go – And so should other African leaders who overstay The Guardian

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(...) Almost all the blame for the chaos can be laid at Gbagbo's feet. The former academic rejected efforts to resolve the tensions while he and his supporters stoked up ethnic and religious divisions with inflammatory language against Ouattara – a northern Muslim – and his supporters and unleashed a campaign of terror. Gbagbo deserves to answer for this in the international criminal court.

Now, with fighting on the streets of the commercial capital, Abidjan, and defections of key allies, an end to this crisis may be in sight. We must hope so, as medicines run out and families dare not leave their homes to buy food. But Ouattara has questions to answer. He has done little to reassure southerners that he would govern in their interests – and the discovery that perhaps 1,000 people were slaughtered last week in a district of Duékoué under the control of his supporters will only increase fears.

It will be hard to rebuild trust given recent events, especially just eight years after the civil war. But there are clear lessons to learn. Although the international community displayed rare unanimity against Gbagbo, demanding he respect the election result, diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis were hesitant. The African Union prevaricated, while the rest of the world fleetingly focused on the curiosity of the besieged winner holed up in a plush hotel, then turned away as the Arab spring erupted. It took until last week for the UN Security Council to finally adopt a tough stance against Gbagbo and his cronies.

What a contrast with Libya, where the UN Security Council rapidly passed one of its strongest resolutions in years, invoking its "responsibility to protect" to authorise military action. Sadly, despite the presence of thousands of UN peacekeepers, there seems to have been no shared sense of responsibility to protect the people of Ivory Coast. (...)

There are 19 elections due in Africa over the next 18 months, including a critical poll this week in Nigeria. There needs to be a far tougher line against despots who refuse to be dislodged. The African Union must show leadership while the west should stop showering them in aid and selling them weapons. Just as in the countries north of the Sahara, new generations need leaders who represent them, not repress them. (...)

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