

Cote d'Ivoire: Continuing the Recovery

International Crisis Group

16 December 2011

Despite a marked improvement, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire remains fragile. The transfer to The Hague of former President Laurent Gbagbo – indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) – only twelve days before the parliamentary elections of 11 December 2011, has stoked political tensions. After a vote characterised by low turnout, the country remains deeply divided and still faces grave threats. The weakness and imbalance of the security apparatus and the two-tiered justice system, both of which reinforce the convictions of extremists, are the two main challenges the government must overcome in the months ahead. Although voting itself was peaceful, an electoral campaign marred by incidents serves as a reminder that political violence is still an everyday reality. The installation of a new Assembly marks a further step towards normalisation, but the country has yet to escape trouble.

The results of the legislative elections come as no surprise: President Alassane Ouattara's party, the Rally of Republicans (Rassemblement des républicains, RDR), wins a majority of seats, followed by the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (Parti démocratique de Côte d'Ivoire, PDCI) of former President Henri Konan Bédié, who supported Ouattara during the 2010 presidential election run-off. Low voter mobilisation mostly reveals the extent of the trauma caused by the recent post-election conflict. But for the Ivorian Popular Front (Front populaire ivoirien, FPI), Gbagbo's party, it reflects the success of its call for a boycott. The Ouattara camp must be modest in its victory and consider the voters' lack of enthusiasm as a sign of the scale of efforts needed to reconcile Ivorians with their democratic institutions, and reach national consensus on necessary reforms.

President Ouattara must personally prioritise the overhaul of the defence sector, and avoid delegating responsibility for this essential reform. Members of the Gbagbo-era Defence and Security Forces (Forces de défense et de sécurité, FDS) coexist uneasily with former New Forces rebels (Forces nouvelles, FN) in the new army, the Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (Forces républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire, FRCI). FN military leaders who were promoted to senior ranks – some of whom continue to conduct criminal activities – wield disproportionate power.

Having endorsed the installation of a democratically elected president by ex-rebel forces, the international community could have predicted the difficulty of pressing them to restore state authority rather than celebrate victory and continue abuses. Security reform, moreover, falls under the purview of their political head, Prime Minister and Defence Minister Guillaume Soro. Côte d'Ivoire's foreign partners, notably France, the U.S. and the European Union (EU), should play a crucial role of assisting disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration (DDR) efforts and security sector reform (SSR).

Many areas have seen major progress since President Ouattara's inauguration on 21 May 2011. The Ivorian economy has re-started, thanks to better governance and significant international aid. But growth in itself will not guarantee lasting stability, especially as the economic revival focuses on urban centers and highlights a reluctance to prioritise the regions and communities that suffered most from the conflict.

Justice is still partisan. To date, none of the ex-rebels incorporated into the FRCI have been prosecuted, despite strong suspicions some committed serious crimes. Prosecutions have targeted only the former president's supporters. International justice is also perceived as biased by many Ivorians, who consider the transfer of Laurent Gbagbo to the ICC as an impediment to reconciliation. The involvement of the ICC is actually a vital step to fight the impunity which has fed political violence over the last decade. But it can only reconcile Ivorians if the ICC prosecutor investigates those responsible on both sides for serious war crimes and crimes against humanity during the recent crisis and also since September 2002.

For now, the following measures must be taken:

The president should play a more active role in resolving security issues. He should in particular appeal publicly for all the civilian militants who fought for his legitimate right to the presidency to lay down their arms and reintegrate into civilian life.

The SSR working group currently subordinated to the prime minister's cabinet should fall under the president's responsibility. This group will underpin a central structure leading the reform, which will have to develop a plan to overhaul the new army, with short-, medium- and long-term objectives. It will also lead in implementing immediate measures to enhance cohesion between elements of the former FN and of the FDS, such as community work.

UNOCI should have the necessary resources to assist the government's SSR. The special representative of the secretary-general should be actively involved in elements essential to reform. He should carefully monitor and report on progress, bearing in mind that only a truly republican army, balanced in representation, can avoid recreating conditions for rebellion.

France should significantly increase its support to the restructuring of the police and gendarmerie. The European Union (EU) should establish a technical and financial assistance program to strengthen police forces.

The international community should continue its political and financial support to the government's efforts toward political and economic stabilisation. Côte d'Ivoire's main partners, notably the U.S., France and other EU members, must keep a critical eye on the new authorities and, in particular, reiterate to President Ouattara the need for him to meet his commitments to fair justice, national reconciliation and a genuine SSR. The Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) should also encourage the president to commit personally to SSR and provide political support to this reform.

The Ivorian authorities should create in the months ahead conditions for normalising democratic political life, by making concessions to their opponents, especially to FPI members, to encourage their return to the political scene for the 2012 regional and local elections.

Particular effort must be made to develop the battered Moyen-Cavally region, so as to strengthen the state's presence and credibility there. The government should give particular focus to upgrading existing roads, creating new transportation routes and building public

infrastructure. More broadly, President Ouattara will have to offer his newly re-elected Liberian counterpart Ellen Johnson Sirleaf a plan to open up and coordinate development in border areas.

Read more [information](#)