

Despite a high degree of uncertainty in the resurgent conflict in Cte d'Ivoire, life seems to be returning to normal in Abidjan and other major cities and hate broadcasts that raised the spectre of further ethnic violence have given way to calls for restraint and a return to work, the United Nations mission there reported today.

"National Radio and Television have been airing peace messages significantly different in tone and content to the ones we have been hearing of late," the UN Operation in Cte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) said, a day after the UN adviser on the prevention of genocide warned that the situation could be referred to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The Security Council yesterday imposed an immediate arms embargo on the West African country and gave the parties one month to get the peace process back on track or face a travel ban and a freeze on their assets after government forces attacked northern rebels earlier this month in violation of a nearly two-year-old ceasefire agreement.

The proliferation of hate broadcasts was one of the most worrying aspects of the ensuing violence which escalated with anti-French rioting and ethnic clashes, after French troops destroyed the Ivorian Government's air force in reprisal for the deadly bombing of French peacekeepers in the UN-patrolled Zone of Confidence (ZOC) separating the combatants.

With thousands of Ivorians and foreigners, mainly French, fleeing the country, Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Juan E. Mendez, warned yesterday that xenophobic hate speech could exacerbate already widespread violations of human rights, which in the recent past included extrajudicial killings, torture, disappearances and sexual violence.

Radio ONUCI, the mission's radio station, is highlighting the Security Council resolution and Mr. Mendez's message, and an increased presence of UN peacekeepers in Abidjan has contributed greatly to reassuring the local population and ensuring security of evacuees, the mission reported.

Commercial activities have resumed but the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said electricity and water has not been fully restored in rebel-controlled areas in the north.

Meanwhile, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that Ivorians arriving in Liberia, already estimated to have surpassed 10,000, say more people are on the way. The refugees are pouring through at least a dozen entry points along a 45-kilometre stretch of relatively remote frontier, often crossing the border river in small canoes.

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