

Côte d'Ivoire: UN Warns of Worrying Rights Situation, With Media Fanning Hatred

17 March 2006 - The human rights situation in Côte d'Ivoire is causing deep concern with virulent articles in the media encouraging violence and the resumption of conflict in a country split between Government and rebel forces since 2002, United Nations officials have warned.

In his latest report, the head of the Human Rights Division of the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unoci/>>), Simon Munzu, said the tense political climate was dominated by the controversy over the legitimacy and powers of the president, which had serious effects on the enjoyment of basic rights in Côte d'Ivoire.

The report underlined the virulence of political rhetoric and the ceaseless calls by certain political sectors for the overthrow, even by force, of President Laurent Gbagbo.

"In the context of the tense political environment and a constantly deteriorating security situation, the Ivorian media abundantly relayed messages encouraging violence, xenophobia, the resumption of internal conflict and ethnic intolerance, through virulent articles likely to block the peace process," UNOCI said in a statement.

The report stressed that freedom of expression and opinion was threatened and wrongly used in Côte d'Ivoire.

Earlier in the week, members of a UN Security Council Committee on Côte d'Ivoire expressed "deep concern" at the situation in the western region and at the media incitement.

In his report, Mr. Munzu noted that the rights of women and children continued to be flouted and there was a marked increase in violence, with female minors being subjected to rape and forced marriages.

Denouncing obstacles to the freedom of movement of the international peacekeepers from supporters of both camps, Mr. Munzu challenged Government authorities and the rebel Forces Nouvelles to ensure strict respect for free movement in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

He appealed to the relevant authorities of the west and other zones for diligent and appropriate measures to ensure the normal operation of justice in the entire country and to fight the persistence of impunity.

Côte d'Ivoire was divided into a Government-ruled south and rebel-held north after the failure of an attempted coup against President Gbagbo in September 2002 triggered a civil war.

More than 7,500 uniformed UN personnel are at present in the country as part of UNOCI's mission to monitor the ceasefire between the warring parties as well as to help disarm and dismantle militias and support the organization of free, fair and transparent elections.

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