

Cote d'Ivoire: ICC Urged to Investigate Ivory Coast's Forces Nouvelles Leaders
By Peter Clottey
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The former chief of investigations for the United Nations Special Court for Sierra Leone has called on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate and prosecute leaders of the Forces Nouvelles over alleged atrocities the group committed during Ivory Coast's civil war.

Alan White says there is need for the ICC to administer equal justice in Ivory Coast.

"All we are looking for is to ensure there is a balanced investigation and a balanced prosecution. Quite frankly that is one of the areas right now that the country of Ivory Coast is struggling from is the fact that there is not a sense of justice," White said.

The ICC is gathering evidence to prosecute former Ivorian president Laurent Gbagbo for his role in the civil war after he refused to accept the October 2010 presidential vote. The election dispute led to the conflict.

Human rights groups accused supporters of both Gbagbo and current President Alassane Ouattara of human rights violations during the conflict.

White says for credibility and real reconciliation, the ICC will need to prosecute those on the pro-Ouattara side and since the court granted jurisdiction to the prosecutor to investigate and prosecute crimes against humanity and war crimes dating back to September 19, 2002 to the present.

Gbagbo supporters have accused the ICC of favoritism, claiming that the former leader has been singled out for prosecution.

"If the court continues to pursue a balanced approach, I think the credibility will improve and certainly Gbagbo's supporters, although they may not change their mind about the court, if they are fair about the court they will certainly reserve judgment if they see that there is a balance prosecution to eliminate this perception of persecution," said White.

Guillame Soro, leader of the Forces Nouvelles, is currently Ivory Coast's speaker of parliament. Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the United Nations documented what they say are atrocities allegedly committed by the Forces Nouvelle.

Critics have said they wonder if the ICC has the political will to go after Mr. Soro due to his current position as the speaker of parliament. Others, however, say the ICC is experiencing a financial crunch, which has hampered its ability to investigate and prosecute alleged perpetrators in Ivory Coast.

"For international justice to succeed, it must be viewed as fair, free and balanced. If it is seemingly balanced on one side, it will certainly be cause for alarm for the people that would cooperate with the court," said White.