

## **Cote d'Ivoire: Human Rights Violations Threaten to Erode Progress in Cote d'Ivoire, UN Expert Says**

UN News Service  
20 MARCH 2013

An independent United Nations expert has urged authorities in Cote d'Ivoire to boost the democratic process by focusing on human rights and an impartial judicial process, and called on the international community to provide continued support for the country, particularly given the security and humanitarian crisis in neighbouring Mali.

"The urgency of the need for political reconciliation and for democratic, economic and social reconstruction is made stronger by the crisis in Mali, the political, military, religious and economic implications of which could destabilize all countries in the region profoundly and in the long term," the UN Independent Expert on human rights in Cote d'Ivoire, Doudou Diène, said as he presented his latest report to the Human Rights Council yesterday.

"A multicultural, democratic, egalitarian society that respects human rights is the best defence against this new peril that is fuelled by violence, intolerance and discrimination," he added.

A civil war in 2002 split Cote d'Ivoire. A 2010 presidential election, meant to be a culminating point in the peace process, resulted in months of violence when former President Laurent Gbagbo refused to step down after losing to Alassane Ouattara, who finally took office in May 2011.

Renewed fighting flared up last year, with a spate of attacks targeting national security forces in and around Abidjan, the commercial capital.

Based on his visit to Cote d'Ivoire from 24 September to 12 October 2012, Mr. Diène cautioned that significant democratic, economic and social gains could be eroded without a greater emphasis to the situation of human rights in the country.

He noted that the security situation is further negatively impacted by a lack of progress on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and of security sector reform, stemming in part from insufficient funds to absorb disarmed and demobilized ex-combatants.

"In spite of the Government's efforts, the delay in this area is contributing to the deterioration of the security situation in the country and giving rise to human rights violations," Mr. Diène said.

In his presentation, he also underscored the need to bring those responsible for atrocities in the past decade to justice, but that the process must be fair and open.

"The fight against impunity is under way although, to date, it remains a one-way process that is neither fair nor swift and is, essentially, directed at the supporters of former President Gbagbo," the expert noted.

Many political and military figures close to the former president who were involved in human rights violations and whose names have appeared in UN reports during the past 10 years have now been charged and detained, he said.

He added that Cote d'Ivoire will not overcome the internal and external challenges it faces without the international community's support.

"Cote d'Ivoire needs the international community's vigilant support to reinforce democratic and pluralist dynamics, an impartial justice, a human rights culture nurtured by the traditional values and practices of community life, and the urgent lifting of the international embargo," Mr. Diène underscored.

The UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo on Cote d'Ivoire in 2004, which only allows the supply of arms and related materiel to the Ivorian security forces, intended solely for support or use in the Ivorian process of security sector reform, as approved in advance by the relevant UN Sanctions Committee. The embargo was last extended in April 2012 for one year.

Independent experts are appointed by the Human Rights Council to examine and report back, in an unpaid capacity, on specific human rights themes.

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