

Africa: Ivorian Government Foes Wage, Plot Attacks - Investigate, Prosecute War Criminals From Côte d'Ivoire Conflict in Liberia

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Former president Laurent Gbagbo at his first appearance in the Hague Court.

Nairobi — Armed militants hostile to the Ivorian government have recruited Liberian children and carried out deadly cross-border raids on Ivorian villages in recent months, Human Rights Watch said today. Liberian authorities have failed to investigate and prosecute dozens of Liberian and Ivorian nationals who crossed into Liberia after committing war crimes during Côte d'Ivoire's 2010-2011 post-election crisis, some of whom have been implicated in the recent attacks, Human Rights Watch said.

Since July 2011, at least 40 Côte d'Ivoire residents, including women and children, have been killed during four cross-border attacks that targeted civilians from ethnic groups who largely support President Alassane Ouattara. In the most recent attack, on April 25, eight people were killed in the Ivorian village of Sakré. The attackers, who told Human Rights Watch they are planning further cross-border raids, are primarily Liberians and Ivorians who fought with the forces of former President Laurent Gbagbo during the Ivorian post-election crisis and remain violently opposed to Ouattara's government.

"For well over a year, the Liberian government has had its head in the sand in responding to the flood of war criminals who crossed into the country at the end of the Ivorian crisis," said Matt Wells, West Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. "Rather than uphold its responsibility to prosecute or extradite those involved in international crimes, Liberian authorities have stood by as many of these same people recruit child soldiers and carry out deadly cross-border attacks."

Between April 25 and May 3, Human Rights Watch conducted field work in the towns of Zwedru, Toe Town, and Tempo in Liberia's Grand Gedeh County, which borders Côte d'Ivoire, as well as in villages and gold mining camps near the Ivorian border. Human Rights Watch interviewed 21 Liberians and Ivorians who fought for forces loyal to former President Gbagbo during the 2010-2011 Ivorian crisis. Human Rights Watch also interviewed police officers, prison officials, prosecutors, and residents of areas with a strong presence of militants involved in committing or planning cross-border attacks.

Human Rights Watch documented the recruitment and use of Liberian children by the armed groups carrying out cross-border raids. A 17-year-old boy said he led a "unit" that included other children and had participated in cross-border attacks. Residents of several Liberian border towns described the presence of children ages 14 to 17 at a training camp, while another resident described seeing several armed boys among those returning from the April 25 attack.

One border town resident said that he had reported the recruitment of child soldiers to Liberian authorities, but that they told him there was insufficient evidence to make arrests.

Human Rights Watch called on the Liberian government to take immediate measures to protect children from recruitment into armed groups. Human Rights Watch urged the Liberian government to ratify speedily the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which it signed in 2004. The protocol prohibits any armed group from recruiting children under 18 and obliges governments to take measures to prevent and criminalize such practices.

Several thousand Liberian mercenaries fought in Côte d'Ivoire during that country's post-election crisis, the vast majority for the Gbagbo side. The mercenaries, recruited and financed by Gbagbo's inner circle, fought side-by-side with local ethnically based militias in western Côte d'Ivoire, where they committed widespread killings targeting perceived Ouattara supporters. After Gbagbo was arrested on April 11, 2011, many of these mercenaries and militiamen crossed into Liberia, in part due to the fear of reprisals by pro-Ouattara forces. Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire share a 700 kilometer border, but most pro-Gbagbo militants crossed into, and remain in, the Liberian counties of Grand Gedeh, River Gee, and Maryland.

"Liberian fighters have been involved in atrocities across the sub-region for more than a decade and remain a threat to Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia as these countries try to move on from periods of massive human rights violations," Wells said.

The involvement of Liberian mercenaries in the Ivorian conflict was noted in the December 2011 report of the United Nations Panel of Experts on Liberia, mandated by the UN Security Council to report on sanctions imposed on Liberia. The panel expressed concern about recruitment and mobilization in the border area and concluded: "[T]he Government of Liberia has demonstrated an inadequate response to the issue of Liberian mercenaries returning from Côte d'Ivoire, and the infiltration of Ivorian militia."

Although a few Liberians were arrested after returning from active hostilities in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberian authorities have failed to follow through with prosecutions for atrocities there - despite provisions in Liberia's Penal Code that would allow for the prosecution of crimes like murder or rape that are recognized both under Liberian law and as war crimes under international treaties to which Liberia is a state party. The Liberian Penal Code also criminalizes "mercenarism" under Section 11.13, which could apply to a number of its citizens who fought in Côte d'Ivoire.

Liberia has a duty under international law, including the Geneva Conventions it has ratified, to detain, investigate, and prosecute or extradite suspected war criminals on its territory. Human Rights Watch called on Liberia to fulfill its responsibility as a member state of the International Criminal Court and pass legislation to enable the domestic prosecution of atrocity crimes committed anywhere in the world.

At least two infamous Liberians credibly implicated in atrocities in Côte d'Ivoire have been released by Liberian authorities after originally facing charges of "mercenarism." One is Isaac Chegbo, better known as "Bob Marley," whom Human Rights Watch implicated in overseeing two massacres in Côte d'Ivoire in which more than 100 people were killed; and the other is A. Vleyee, better known as "Bush Dog," who was a deputy under Chegbo and likewise oversaw forces who committed widespread violations. According to reports by the UN Panel of Experts, both of these men fought as mercenaries in the 2002-2003 Ivorian civil war and its aftermath. Liberian forces where they were based were credibly implicated in war crimes, including summary executions and the recruitment of child soldiers, during that period as well.

Several former combatants told Human Rights Watch that "Bush Dog" was actively engaged in recruiting and training fighters, including Liberians and Ivoirians who participated in recent cross-border attacks. Officials with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) expressed similar concern about "Bob Marley."

Based on interviews with people involved with the armed groups, who described the number of mobilized fighters in their village or training camp, Human Rights Watch identified between 100 and 150 people who have either participated in past cross-border attacks or are organizing for future attacks. The true number

could be larger, however. Those interviewed reported close to an even split between Ivorians and Liberians.

UN officials monitoring the border area told Human Rights Watch that they did not think the armed groups hostile to the Ivorian government had sufficient strength to carry out a large-scale attack. However, they said the armed militants have the ability to continue conducting cross-border raids that target and kill perceived Ouattara supporters. Moreover, the militants openly say they want to carry out larger attacks - a real concern in a sub-region marked by insecurity, armed conflict, and grave crimes over the last two decades, Human Rights Watch said.

A level of organization among those involved in cross-border attacks is evident in the manner the recruitment and mobilization are financed. Many of those involved in the attacks are engaged in artisanal gold mining along the Liberian border, and they told Human Rights Watch that profits go up a chain of command. Several people involved in planning attacks also told Human Rights Watch that they receive financial support from people in Ghana, where much of the Gbagbo political and military elite are in exile. Ivorian authorities have issued arrest warrants for people in Ghana alleged to have been involved in post-election crimes - and made extradition requests through Interpol for some of them - but Ghanaian authorities have not acted on them.

On May 2, following the April 25 attack, high-level government officials from Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia met in Abidjan to discuss border security issues. Liberian officials promised to increase security forces along the border and to cooperate with Côte d'Ivoire regarding the Ivorian militiamen who have been in detention in Liberia since June 2011.

"This regional problem demands a regional response," Wells said. "Ghanaian and Liberian authorities need to demonstrate greater willingness to prosecute or extradite to Côte d'Ivoire people who committed or oversaw atrocities during the Ivorian crisis."

Failure to Prosecute Suspected War Criminals Living in Liberia

The Liberian government has failed to extradite Ivorians or ensure the prosecution of Liberians and Ivorians implicated in grave crimes during Côte d'Ivoire's post-election crisis. This has allowed people suspected of war crimes to find refuge near the border, where many have conducted cross-border raids and recruited and mobilized for larger-scale attacks.

Section 1.4 of Liberia's Penal Code gives "extraterritorial jurisdiction over an offense" when, among other things, "conferred upon Liberia by treaty." This would include crimes under the Geneva Conventions and Rome Statute, to which Liberia is a state party. Section 1.5 of the Penal Code, however, limits jurisdiction to crimes specifically enumerated under the Penal Code "or another statute of Liberia." This would encompass crimes like murder and rape, but not the international crimes of war crimes or crimes against humanity. In addition, Liberia's Penal Code criminalizes "mercenarism," defined in part as the "enlisting, enrolling or attempting to enroll in ... armed forces partially or wholly and [sic] consisting of persons not nationals of the country being invaded ... for money, personal gain, material or other reward."

The Liberian government should ensure that the provisions of the Rome Statute and other international treaties are fully incorporated into domestic law. This would make clear that people suspected of serious international crimes, including war crimes and crimes against humanity committed anywhere in the world, can be prosecuted in Liberia. However, even without modifying the current Penal Code, there remain ample provisions to investigate and prosecute the serious crimes committed in Côte d'Ivoire by people in Liberia.

The March 2012 Special Report from the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire noted that of "88 suspected armed elements, mainly from Côte d'Ivoire ... detained in Liberia in

April 2011 ... two Ivorians remain in detention, as well as three suspected Liberian mercenaries. The other detainees were released on 13 March."

An additional 39 Ivorians were arrested in June 2011 after the discovery of a large weapons cache in Fishtown, Liberia, near the Ivorian border. Human Rights Watch interviewed a prison official at the Zwedru correctional facility who said that the 39 Ivorians, as well as four Liberians, have been held there in pre-trial detention since their arrest. The Zwedru prison official said that the Ivorians had been charged with "mercenarism," a crime that, as noted by the UN Panel of Experts, "seemingly would not apply to Ivorian combatants fleeing to Liberia."

Human Rights Watch called on the Liberian authorities to clarify the status of these detainees, and to prosecute them for applicable crimes under the Liberian Penal Code, extradite them to Côte d'Ivoire if requested by Ivorian authorities, or release them.

The UN Panel of Experts said in its December 2011 report that there were "numerous instances in which mercenaries and Ivorian militia entered Liberia and evaded Liberian authorities." Those who "evaded Liberian authorities" far outnumber those in detention, and include prominent mercenary and militia leaders whom Human Rights Watch and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) implicated in overseeing serious crimes in Côte d'Ivoire.

For example, the 39 Ivorians arrested in June 2011 were part of a convoy of more than 100 people who crossed into Liberia in May. The rest of the convoy members remain at large. The Panel of Experts reported that "almost all of the individuals ... were combatants.... Several of the Ivorian leaders had served in FANCI [the armed forces] or the gendarmerie, while others were ranking members of the Jeunes Patriotes[militia group]. Many of the detainees are hardline, pro-Gbagbo combatants who had continued to fight in Yopougon, Abidjan, after the former President was captured."

Several high-profile Liberian fighters who were arrested for "mercenarism" after crossing into Liberia have since been released, either on bail or due to insufficient evidence. In interviews with Human Rights Watch, prosecutors in Grand Gedeh and Montserrado counties described difficulties in building cases, even when they believed people had been mercenaries or had been involved in related criminal activity. Part of the problem appears to be that prosecutors have not collaborated with Ivorian authorities or civil society to gain what would be, in certain cases, access to considerable evidence on these individuals' crimes in Côte d'Ivoire.

Two cases underscore the larger failure of the Liberian authorities. Vleyee, or "Bush Dog," was arrested by Liberian authorities in April 2011. Research by Human Rights Watch and the Panel of Experts indicate that, during the crisis, Vleyee was in a command position with mercenary and militia forces implicated in atrocities in and around the Ivorian town of Bloléquin. Soon after his arrest in Liberia, Vleyee was released. The Panel of Experts said the investigation was "hampered by a lack of proper evidence-gathering and contradictory statements by Liberian Government officials." The investigation focused on whether Vleyee brought military material into Liberia, rather than his possible command responsibility for killings in Côte d'Ivoire.

In May 2012, Human Rights Watch interviewed three Liberian fighters and two border town residents who said that the same "Bush Dog" was recruiting Liberians and Ivorians for attacks in Côte d'Ivoire. At a time when Vleyee should be on the radar of Liberian authorities - given his alleged role in atrocities and previous arrest - a resident near Zwedru decried authorities' failure to respond to his ongoing recruitment:

I informed security [forces] about the recruiters, including General Bush Dog.... His training camp is in the bush near the border; it's a few minutes' walk to Côte d'Ivoire. I have not been to the training camp to see for myself, but a small boy by the name of [redacted for security reasons] came when he was seriously sick in the training camp. He explained everything to me because I was a friend to his late father, who died last year....

Chegbo, better known by his nom de guerre "Bob Marley" and "Child Could Die," is of equal concern. Human Rights Watch and UNOCI found evidence indicating his participation and commanding role in a unit responsible for grave crimes, including two massacres in western Côte d'Ivoire in which a total of more than 100 people were killed. Liberian authorities arrested Chegbo after he returned to Liberia in April 2011, but quickly released him.

After pressure from Ivorian authorities, Chegbo was re-arrested in late May 2011 and transferred to Monrovia's central prison, charged with "mercenarism." In February 2012, however, Chegbo was quietly released on bail. The Associated Press reported that the prosecutor for Montserrado County (Monrovia) "had no knowledge" that Chegbo had been released, until the journalist raised the issue. The prosecutor was unsure about Chegbo's whereabouts, but said he still wanted to prosecute Chegbo. The UN Panel of Experts reported that, after Chegbo's 2011 transfer to Monrovia, "key evidence, such as Chegbo's pistol, [went] missing from police custody." Several Zwedru residents told Human Rights Watch that as of early May, Chegbo was back in Grand Gedeh County.

The UN Panel of Experts report showed that, although the precise command structure of Liberians who fought in Côte d'Ivoire was volatile, "Bob Marley" appeared to occupy a command position above "Bush Dog." Both fighters were based out of Bloléquin.

Failure to Investigate Cross-Border Attacks

In the four cross-border attacks since June 2011, the motivation appears to have been both political vengeance and related to land conflict - issues that overlap in Côte d'Ivoire's volatile west. Those killed or whose houses were burned predominantly belong to ethnic groups that largely voted for President Ouattara.

The 40 deaths in these attacks have all been along the border near the Ivorian town of Taï. During previous field work in Côte d'Ivoire, Human Rights Watch documented the first two cross-border raids, in July and September 2011. The recent attacks, on February 20 and April 25, displaced thousands from villages in the area.

Liberian authorities have failed to investigate those involved in the attacks. Section 1.4.2 of the Liberian Penal Code provides jurisdiction over the attackers, stating: "A person is subject to prosecution in Liberia for an offense which he commits partly within Liberia. An offense is committed partly within Liberia if either the conduct which is an element of the offense or the result which is such an element, occurs within Liberia." For the cross-border attacks, both the preparation for the attacks - which have each included murder - and the intent to carry out the attacks have occurred within Liberia.

A Liberian resident of Tempo described how the town and its surrounding area have been used as a base for some of the cross-border attacks:

All the attacks taking place in Ivory Coast are being done by both Ivorians and Liberians, but the heads are Bush Dog and Oulaï Tako. These guys are training and sending youth to fighting zones. This recent time [April 25] there was an attack in Ivory Coast, and civilians - adults and children - were killed.... They've attacked Gahabli, Sakré, Taï, and Nigré, and we hear them say they are planning to launch a heavy attack later this year.... [We saw] many of the fighters... come back to Tempo [after the Sakré attack] wounded, and they have gone to their training camp [outside town].

The Panel of Experts reported that Vleyee and Tako fought in close proximity in Côte d'Ivoire. Tako was the Bloléquin commander of the Front pour la libération du grand ouest (FLGO), a notorious pro-Gbagbo militia formerly based in western Côte d'Ivoire.

A 33-year-old Liberian former combatant in Toe Town, who told Human Rights Watch that he had on several occasions been approached to join those conducting and planning cross-border attacks, said the

recruitment of fighters was an open secret in the region. He also said that those involved in planning attacks had told him that they had moved a considerable quantity of arms from Côte d'Ivoire to Liberia "without anyone blowing the alarm," concluding: "Either the border patrol in Liberia is poor, or security officers are part of this deal."

An official with UNMIL said he believed that at least some local and regional officials had to be acquiescing to the activities of former Liberian mercenaries - hypothesizing that it could be due to revenues from gold mining or to a perceived fear of "stirring the hornet's nest."

On at least one occasion, Liberian security forces tried to thwart a cross-border attack. But they did not follow through with successful investigations and prosecutions. In late January, Liberian security forces arrested 76 Ivorians and Liberians near the border, believing they were planning to attack Côte d'Ivoire. A police officer in Zwedru said:

Joint security forces in Grand Gedeh County discovered sometime in January what was described as a dissidents' training base in Konobo district. Following the discovery, the Liberia national police assigned to the county stormed the area and arrested 75 of the suspect dissident forces. The men were arrested while en route to neighboring Ivory Coast, [we believe] with the aim of invading and toppling the government.... The dissidents included Ivorians and a few Liberians. They were intercepted and arrested at the double bridge crossing point near the border. They were carried to the Monrovia correctional palace, but all of them were later freed because of lack of evidence.

Human Rights Watch interviewed one of those arrested in January. The 27-year-old Liberian made clear the groups' intentions:

Our group is organized.... We have attempted to enter Ivory Coast once in January at the double bridge to the border, but the mission was unsuccessful because the secret was exposed to the security [forces]. We were arrested, but later released.... We have different support from different persons, but we are aiming at one goal. The goal is to go back to Ivory Coast to fight when we are called upon from [his gold mining camp].

Neither the police officer involved in the raid nor a Grand Gedeh county prosecutor interviewed by Human Rights Watch could explain why they lacked evidence to bring charges since both believed firmly the men had been planning to carry out an attack.

A Tempo resident, who works in a border gold mining camp, blamed the police's lack of experience in investigating such issues as well as residents' fear in denouncing those involved:

This is where the fighters were [first] interrogated... The security personnel don't know how to investigate issues like this, so they made the situation [look] false when it was true. These guys talk about their training camp in our territory, we know where it is, but we can't say it, because we fear for our safety and our mining activities.... They have guns you have not even seen before and some of us are now planning to move from here to find a better location for our mining.

Child Soldier Recruitment

Human Rights Watch documented the recruitment of Liberian boys for recent and future attacks on Ivorian villages. The scale of child recruitment was unclear. However, several Liberian residents as well as a 17-year-old fighter described the recruitment effort, which they said was led in part by "Bush Dog." Residents said they had seen children - recruited from villages and towns near the Ivorian border - in training camps and returning from recent cross-border attacks.

A 17-year-old Liberian near Tempo who was recruited to fight with armed militants hostile to the Ivorian government told Human Rights Watch that he took part in at least one cross-border raid. He said other boys around his age had also been recruited and fought:

They call us "small boys unit" and we are always safe when we go to the war zones in Ivory Coast. I am a Liberian and I never fought the Liberian wars, but I am going to Ivory Coast to help my friends, whatever they want us to do for them. I have [carried out] some attacks with my unit, and we were able to succeed by knowing the territory. I don't know the total that we have killed.... In this mission, we have our bosses who train us and follow us to the field. The bosses are Bush Dog and Oulai Tako....

A 25-year-old resident near Tempo said that he had seen boys ages 14 to 17 in a training camp in the area, as well as among those who returned from the April 25 attack. The Tempo resident said that he seen Bush Dog and Tako involved in the training camp from which boys have been sent to carry out cross-border attacks. Bush Dog has been previously linked with recruiting child soldiers. A 2005 report from the UN Panel of Experts noted: "UNMIL reported that on 22 March, MODEL General Amos Vleyee, also known as 'Bush Dog,' had recruited 10 children in Grand Gedeh County."

A 32-year-old trader from a town just outside Zwedru decried the failure of the Liberian authorities to respond to the recruitment of child soldiers:

There are so many things and activities that are happening in our communities that concerned citizens like me don't like. There are some guys in our community who have started recruiting small boys, who the police cannot allow to even ride motorbikes because of their age. Their age is between 14 and 16 years. We have been complaining to the security [forces], but they are always saying they don't have evidence to prove it.

In 2004, Liberia signed, but has not yet ratified, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The protocol prohibits any recruitment of children under 18 by armed groups distinct from the armed forces of a state and obliges governments to take measures to prevent and criminalize such practices. The recruitment and use of child soldiers under 15 is also considered a war crime.

Plans for Further Attacks

The Liberian government's failure to investigate and prosecute those involved in cross-border attacks has appeared to embolden the pro-Gbagbo militants and the Liberians who support them to envision further attacks into Côte d'Ivoire. Several people involved with the armed groups, as well as residents in border villages, described arms caches and a clandestine training camp in the Konobo district of Grand Gedeh.

A 25-year-old Liberian, who lives near the border town of Tempo, told Human Rights Watch that the militants in that area speak openly about their intentions: "What we are observing now in this community is that most of the youth have real arms and ammunition in their possession and are talking of launching an attack on Côte d'Ivoire." Residents near the gold mining sites, where pro-Gbagbo militants have a particularly strong concentration, made similar statements.

Those plotting additional attacks appear to have established at least one training camp and to have stockpiled arms and ammunition. The 17-year-old Liberian, who had taken part in previous cross-border attacks, described the level of organization and support they receive:

Our [training] camp is located in Konobo district ... and we have arms and ammunition, food, medicines, and nurses that can take care of us when we have minor sickness. When the sickness is worse, and you need to be admitted and you are Liberian, then money will be available [from our supporters] and you will be transferred to the government hospital.

Several others involved in planning cross-border attacks described the Konobo training camp, in the same district where police officers had raided another camp in January. The area has dense vegetation and is near the Ivorian border. It also appears to be where a large quantity of weapons, brought from Côte d'Ivoire at the end of the crisis, is stored. A 33-year-old Liberian told Human Rights Watch: "The guns are kept in Konobo district, near the border areas."

In describing their motivations, most of the Ivorian militants speak of "revenge" - revenge for Gbagbo no longer being president, or, more often, revenge for killings and other abuses committed by pro-Ouattara forces in western Côte d'Ivoire. Both sides committed atrocities, including war crimes and likely crimes against humanity, in western Côte d'Ivoire. A 36-year-old at Sloman (also referred to as Solomon) gold mining camp, who said he had not fought with pro-Gbagbo forces during the crisis but had joined the plans for future attacks, explained his reasons:

My family members were killed by Ouattara's forces, and I am frustrated that [the crisis] forced me to leave Côte d'Ivoire and come to Liberia. Many of my [Ivorian] brothers have joined the Liberians in order to get revenge.... There are two possibilities: either we will kill them, or they will kill us.

The historical cross-border links between the Ivorian region of Moyen Cavally and the Liberian region of Grand Gedeh is crucial to understanding the continued role of Liberians. The Guérés in Côte d'Ivoire and the Krahn in Liberia, who are considered the "natives" in these regions, come from the same ethnic group. They speak a highly similar language, and extended families often cross national boundaries. MODEL, a rebel group from the later stages of the 1999-2003 Liberian civil war, was a predominantly Krahn fighting force that also included a significant number of Ivorian Guérés. Thus, while some Liberians expressed primarily financial reasons for mobilizing, citing the lack of jobs in Grand Gedeh, most spoke instead of vengeance and assisting those who fought with or housed them in the past.

A 45-year-old Liberian, who said he had been fighting in regional conflicts for more than a decade, explained his motivation and plans for larger-scale attacks:

We are helping [the pro-Gbagbo Ivorians], because they helped us during the time our war was ongoing and we need to help them in return.... Let no one fool you that the war is over in Côte d'Ivoire. Anytime from now, we are planning to launch an attack.... We have guns that we brought back from Côte d'Ivoire and other support that will help facilitate this process - businesses are established and the supply line is stronger than ever before.... Grand Gedeh alone had more than 12 unofficial entry points to Côte d'Ivoire, and we have access to them all.

Financial Support from People in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire

Two Ivorians and one Liberian who had fought with pro-Gbagbo forces told Human Rights Watch they were receiving outside financial support for attacks into Côte d'Ivoire. The scale of the support was unclear, as were the specific financiers, but those interviewed said that the money came regularly - monthly according to one interviewee. This system of regular financial assistance from people in neighboring countries suggests at least some level of organization among those committed to carrying out additional attacks, which have almost exclusively targeted civilians, according to the evidence documented by Human Rights Watch.

A 30-year-old from western Côte d'Ivoire, who fought with Gbagbo militia groups during the crisis, said that, in their effort to recruit and mobilize, "we are receiving support from [people in] Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Ghana." Two other former combatants, one Ivorian and one Liberian, likewise specifically mentioned receiving money from people in Ghana. Those interviewed by Human Rights Watch in Liberia would not provide the names of their financiers. However, a 35-year-old former non-commissioned officer in the Ivorian military, now a refugee in Liberia, said, "Former fighters and former Ivorian politicians are all key players in these activities, making money and other resources available."

A number of high-level military and political leaders from the Gbagbo camp remain in exile in Ghana. Several of them - including the longtime Young Patriots militia leader, Charles Blé Goudé, and the former head of the gendarmerie's armored vehicle squadron, Jean-Noël Abéhi - are subject to arrest warrants by the Ivorian justice system. Ghanaian authorities have failed to arrest and extradite them. A May 8 article in Jeune Afrique, based on interviews with the pro-Gbagbo leaders in Ghanaian exile, reported that many still speak of revenge and of toppling the Ouattara government. In its December 2011 report, the UN Panel of Experts discussed its concerns about external financial support for groups planning cross-border attacks from Liberia:

External financiers could seek to supply weapons and ammunition, which could be easily smuggled into Liberia using existing trafficking networks, such as those already used to trade in illegal Liberian gold and Guinean artisanal weapons.... Considering that the Ivorian crisis only recently ended and that the Ouattara Government has increasingly solidified military control, if such support for Liberian mercenaries and Ivorian militia from abroad does exist, it would likely be in its initial, "exploratory" and planning stage.

Gold Mining Indicative of Organization in Recruitment, Mobilization

At least scores of those involved in cross-border attacks are engaged in artisanal gold mining along the Liberian border. In interviews with Human Rights Watch, they spoke openly about using gold revenues to fund attacks into Côte d'Ivoire. The structure of the gold mine financing efforts demonstrates a level of organization among these armed militants.

Human Rights Watch visited five informal artisanal gold mining camps - CVI, Bentley, Golo, Dark Forest, and Sloman - along the Liberian-Ivorian border. Liberian and Ivorian former combatants worked side by side in these camps. Those interviewed said that the gold mining camps serve as bases for recruitment, mobilization, and the financing of violence in Côte d'Ivoire. A 30-year-old Ivorian in CVI mining camp said:

We came to CVI to mine gold to empower ourselves. The plan is to mine and sell gold to get money in order to get revenge against [pro-Ouattara forces] who killed our family members and burned our houses.... We are more than 45 Ivorians living in this mining camp, but only 37 have agreed to mine in the interest of this mission.... We have reorganized ourselves to go back with force this year.

The CVI miner's statement shows that not all of the gold miners there see mining as an opportunity to fund attacks; a minority of Ivorians had no "interest" in the "mission." In other mining camps, however, those who refuse to be recruited reported being threatened and forced off the land. A 27-year-old Liberian at Sloman gold mining camp told Human Rights Watch:

I have been at this mining camp since December 2011. Some of us came here to look for money to support our family ... but others have different intentions with the money they are receiving. I was here when some people came to this mining zone to recruit some youth for a mission at the border. All of us who refused to join them were driven away from the camp. They even threatened to kill us.

The statements of several armed militants involved in gold mining along the border indicate a command structure for collection of money potentially used to finance recruitment and mobilization. A 26-year-old Liberian mining at Dark Forest mining camp said:

[Revenge] can only be done when we're financially equipped. Liberian and Ivorian ex-combatants are working hand to hand in this mining zone. Gold is being found in abundance.... Our bosses always visit us here at night to carry away the gold.

People mining gold at a different camp mentioned the name of one the same "bosses," saying he came by frequently to collect the gold.

In addition to gold mining, some people involved in efforts to attack Côte d'Ivoire have used motorcycle transport to raise money for recruitment and mobilization. A 37-year-old Sierra Leonean, who had fought in wars in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire, said:

Fifteen motorbikes have been offered to us [by our bosses] for easy transportation, [as well as] phones for easier communication. These motorbikes are also used for commercial purposes to generate money for our mission.... All our guns are along the border with Côte d'Ivoire, kept safe while we're mining.

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