

UN report pessimistic on Ivory Coast situation  
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The United Nations Wednesday drew a pessimistic picture of the situation in Ivory Coast, where rebel forces are believed rearming themselves amid a sharply deteriorating humanitarian crisis. "Negative trends threaten to reverse the important gains achieved on the security fronts," said Secretary General Kofi Annan's quarterly report on the war-torn country. "The initial improvement in the security situation in Abidjan . . . is now marred by the activities of armed militia groups who are opposed to the Marcoussis Agreement," it said, referring to the accord that established a national unity government in March. "In particular," said the report, the UN was concerned with "the activities of the militias of the patriotic peace group and the so-called 'young patriots.'" "I urge the Ivoirian law enforcement authorities to curb the activities of militias, thuggish groups and individuals who seek to undermine the peace process," said Annan's report.

The National Armed Forces of the Ivory Coast (FANCI), the main rebel group, "should consider a moratorium on purchasing new weapons," said the report. "There are ... confirmed reports about continuing rearmament by FANCI as well as suspicion that the New Forces (FN-another rebel group) are rearming. "For their part, the FN must end the de facto partitioning of the country." Annan's report said the humanitarian situation in Ivory Coast was reaching critical proportions. "Half a million people ... have fled the Ivory Coast as a result of xenophobia and ethnic tensions," it said. "In addition an estimated 800.000 people are internally displaced." According to UN figures, the Ivory Coast conflict has left the country's health and social structures badly damaged and disrupted water distribution, exacerbating the health crisis. "The optimistic projections of 3 per cent growth in 2002 for Ivory Coast's economy have been revised downwards, to minus 1.2 per cent," said the report.