**Link: http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/minuci/background.html**

**Background**  
(from the first Report of the Secretary-General on Côte d'Ivoire, [S/2003/374](http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/1464%20%282003%29&Lang=E))

For over three decades after it attained independence in 1960, Côte d'Ivoire enjoyed political stability and relative socio-economic prosperity under its founding leader, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny. As a result, the country attracted large numbers of foreign workers, mostly from neighbouring countries, as well as investors. Following the death of President Houphouët-Boigny on 7 December 1993, Côte d'Ivoire was plunged into a protracted power struggle, which generated intense political instability and culminated in December 1999 in a coup d'état, led by General Robert Gueï, who overthrew President Henri Konan Bédié.

The post-Houphouët-Boigny power struggle was exacerbated by the controversies over nationality laws and eligibility conditions for national elections, particularly the presidential elections, which resulted in the disqualification of some prominent political leaders, including Alassane Ouattara of the Rally of the Republicans (RDR). These issues came to a head during the presidential elections of October 2000.

The heated dispute over the results of those presidential elections resulted in violent clashes between the partisans of the two main contenders - General Gueï and Laurent Gbagbo. Subsequently, the Supreme Court declared Mr. Gbagbo the winner of those elections. Those clashes claimed the lives of over 50 people, however, and a mass grave was subsequently discovered near the northern Abidjan suburb of Yopougon.

Despite an alleged coup attempt in January 2001, which was blamed on foreigners and resulted in large numbers of immigrant workers from Burkina Faso leaving Côte d'Ivoire, scheduled municipal elections were held in March 2001. The municipal elections marked an important turning point for Côte d'Ivoire, as all political parties were allowed to field candidates for the elections. Mr. Ouattara's RDR party won in the largest number of communes. Following those elections, President Gbagbo pursued a policy of national reconciliation and sought to decentralize State authority by organizing provincial elections.

In October 2001, the President organized a forum for national reconciliation to address the issues that had polarized the Ivorian people, including the questions of nationality, land ownership, the disputed legitimacy of his government and the conditions of service of the security forces. The forum culminated in a summit meeting attended by President Gbagbo, Mr. Bédié, General Gueï and Mr. Ouattara on 22 and 23 January 2002 to settle their differences and consider the recommendations of the forum. The four leaders subsequently issued a final communiqué in which, among other things, they agreed to oppose undemocratic avenues to power, and to professionalize the security forces and improve their conditions of service. They further agreed to create a broad-based national electoral commission and a national body to address the question of land ownership.

The leaders also addressed the issue of the legitimacy of the current government and agreed to form a new government of national unity. In July 2002, President Gbagbo held a further meeting with Mr. Ouattara and Mr. Bédié in Yamoussoukro, which led to the formation of a broad-based government on 5 August 2002. All of Côte d'Ivoire's main opposition political parties were included in the new cabinet, 20 portfolios being allocated to the ruling Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) and 4 to Mr. Ouattara's RDR, while 7 went to Mr. Bédié's former ruling Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI), 2 to the Ivorian Workers Party (PIT) of Francis Wodié and 1 to General Gueï's Union for Democracy and Peace in Côte d'Ivoire (UDPCI). The long-standing controversy over Mr. Ouattara's nationality, which had become a major source of political tension and instability, was also finally resolved when a court delivered a nationality certificate to him on 26 July 2002. Unfortunately, not all of the recommendations of the forum for national reconciliation were implemented.

Current crisis

Regrettably, these encouraging steps towards national reconciliation and reducing tensions in Côte d'Ivoire were disrupted by the current crisis, which erupted on 19 September 2002. The crisis started with simultaneous attacks on military installations in the capital, Abidjan, and the second largest city, Bouaké, and in the northern town of Korhogo by some 800 soldiers, ostensibly to protest against their planned demobilization early in 2003. Most of those soldiers had been recruited during the military regime of General Gueï.

While loyalist security forces quickly regained control of the situation in Abidjan, the rebels retained control of Bouaké and Korhogo and subsequently seized other towns in the northern and western regions of the country, as other disgruntled soldiers and civilians swelled their ranks. General Gueï, together with several members of his family, as well as the Minister of the Interior, Emile Boga Doudou, were among the people killed during the incidents in Abidjan. Although the initial attacks were widely believed to be a mutiny, there were also allegations that the rebellion was an attempted coup d'état supported by foreign elements, which prompted widespread harassment of foreigners, including migrant workers from neighbouring countries, as well as refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone, whose dwellings in shanty towns in Abidjan and San-Pédro were burned down by the security forces. In Abidjan, the destruction of squatter settlements displaced some 20,000 people.

Loyalist security forces launched several military operations to dislodge the rebel soldiers from the seized towns, without success. By the end of September, the rebel forces had consolidated their hold on the northern half of the country and were operating under the umbrella of a political movement calling itself the Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI). Through its spokesman, Guillaume Soro, a former student leader, the movement identified its key demands as the resignation of President Gbagbo, the holding of inclusive national elections, a review of the Constitution and an end to the domination of southerners in the affairs of the country. The conflict was further compounded by the emergence of two new armed groups, the Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West (MPIGO) and the Movement for Justice and Peace (MJP), who seized the towns of Danané and Man in November 2002. Both groups declared that their main objective was to avenge the death of General Gueï and they also demanded the resignation of President Gbagbo.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) took swift steps to search for a solution to the crisis. On 29 September the subregional organization convened an emergency summit meeting in Accra, which set up a contact group comprising Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria and Togo, together with the African Union, to promote dialogue between the rebels and the Government of Côte d'Ivoire, and to discuss a general framework to resolve the crisis. The summit was followed by a meeting of the ECOWAS Defence and Security Commission, which recommended that immediate arrangements be put in place to deploy ECOWAS troops to Côte d'Ivoire. The approved mandate of the ECOWAS force included monitoring a proposed ceasefire, ensuring the disengagement of the insurgents from the areas that had fallen under their control, and disarming the rebel groups.

The ECOWAS Contact Group on Côte d'Ivoire began its mediation efforts on 30 September 2002 with a meeting with President Gbagbo in Abidjan. On 3 October, members of the Group, accompanied by the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, and the Interim Chairman of the Commission of the African Union, Amara Essy, met with the leaders of MPCI in Bouaké. The mediation efforts continued until 6 October when the Contact Group left the country after the Government thrice postponed signing a ceasefire agreement, on the grounds that the agreement would result in legitimizing the rebel movement and partitioning the country. On 11 October, Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Senegal, which was then holding the chairmanship of ECOWAS, renewed the efforts to broker a ceasefire. The Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, together with my Special Representative for West Africa, Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, participated in Foreign Minister Gadio's talks with President Gbagbo in Abidjan and with MPCI in Bouaké. These efforts culminated in the signing by MPCI on 17 October 2002 of a ceasefire agreement, which was subsequently accepted by President Gbagbo in an address to the nation on the same day.

In accepting the cessation of hostilities, President Gbagbo announced that he had requested France to assign forces to monitor the ceasefire, pending the deployment of ECOWAS troops. As indicated in the letter dated 21 February 2003 from the Permanent Representative of France to the President of the Security Council, the forces of Operation Licorne were already based in Côte d'Ivoire under long-standing bilateral defence arrangements.

The Lomé talks

The ceasefire agreement of 17 October paved the way for negotiations on a political agreement between the Government and MPCI. The peace talks between the two sides began in Lomé on 24 October 2002 under the auspices of the President of Togo, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, who had been designated by the ECOWAS Contact Group to lead the negotiations. On 31 October, the Lomé talks yielded the first agreement, under which the two parties reaffirmed their commitment to the ceasefire agreement, pledged to refrain from human rights abuses, and acknowledged the need to preserve the territorial integrity of Côte d'Ivoire and to respect the country's institutions. A further agreement was signed on 1 November, under which the Government, among other things, agreed to submit to the National Assembly a draft amnesty law, which would include freeing jailed members of the military and permitting the return of exiled soldiers, who would be reintegrated into the army. The Lomé talks subsequently stalled, however, as MPCI insisted on the resignation of President Gbagbo, a review of the Constitution and the holding of fresh elections, while the Government demanded that the rebels disarm and honour their commitment to preserve the territorial integrity of the country.

Despite intensive efforts by the ECOWAS leaders to break the stalemate, including the submission of a compromise draft peace plan by President Eyadéma on 21 November 2002, and a series of meetings among the ECOWAS leaders in Kara, Togo, as well as in Abidjan and Dakar on 16 and 18 December 2002, the two sides would not return to the Lomé talks. At their meeting in Dakar on 18 December, the ECOWAS leaders decided that the ECOWAS Peace Force for Côte d'Ivoire (ECOFORCE) would be deployed by 31 December 2002. They also appointed General Papa Khalil Fall (Senegal) as the Force Commander of ECOFORCE and Raph Uwechue (Nigeria), as the Special Representative of the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS for Côte d'Ivoire. The leaders appealed to the African Union and the United Nations to step up their involvement in assisting ECOWAS to resolve the Ivorian crisis. They also requested the Chairman of ECOWAS, as well as France and the African members of the Security Council, to bring the issue of Côte d'Ivoire before the Council.

In a fresh initiative, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, Dominique de Villepin, visited Côte d'Ivoire on 3 and 4 January 2003 for consultations with the Government, political parties and the rebel movements, during which he secured the agreement of all Ivorian political groups to attend a round-table meeting in France. At the same time, the ECOWAS peace efforts yielded complementary progress when President Eyadéma brokered an agreement on cessation of hostilities between the Government and the two western-based rebel movements, MPIGO and MJP, who had not been part of the ceasefire agreement of 17 October 2002.

The Linas-Marcoussis Agreement

As indicated during my briefing to the Security Council on 28 January 2003, the round-table meeting of the Ivorian political groups was held at Linas-Marcoussis, France, from 15 to 23 January 2003 with the participation of the Ivorian Popular Front, the Movement of Future Forces (MFA), the Movement for Justice and Peace, the Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire, the Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West, the Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire-African Democratic Party (PDCI-RDA), the Ivorian Workers Party, the Rally of the Republicans, the Democratic Union of Côte d'Ivoire (UDCI) and the Union for Democracy and Peace in Côte d'Ivoire. The round table was chaired by the Chairman of the French Constitutional Commission, Pierre Mazeaud, assisted by Judge Keba Mbaye (Senegal) and the former Prime Minister of Côte d'Ivoire, Seydou Diarra, as well as representatives from the African Union and ECOWAS and my Special Representative for West Africa as facilitators.

The round table resulted in the signing of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement (S/2003/99, annex I) on 23 January 2003 by all Ivorian political forces. It may be recalled that the principal provisions of the Agreement include the creation of a government of national reconciliation, to be headed by a Prime Minister appointed by the President in consultation with other political parties. The President would delegate substantial powers to the Prime Minister, whose mandate would last until the next national elections, which are scheduled for 2005. The Prime Minister would not be eligible to stand as a candidate in those elections.

The Linas-Marcoussis Agreement also defined the main tasks of the new government of national reconciliation, which include preparing a timetable for credible and transparent national elections, restructuring the defence and security forces, and organizing the regrouping and disarmament of all armed groups. An annex to the Agreement also set out a programme for resolving issues that constituted the root causes of instability in Côte d'Ivoire, such as the question of citizenship, the status of foreign nationals, eligibility to run for the presidency of the country, incitement to hatred and xenophobia by certain media, the creation of a human rights commission consisting of representatives from all parties, the drawing up of a voters roll, the independence of the justice system with respect to electoral disputes, and the implementation of a land tenure regime.

The peace Agreement provided for the establishment of a committee to follow up on the implementation of the Agreement (the Follow-Up Committee). The Committee will be based in Abidjan. It is composed of representatives of the United Nations, the African Union, ECOWAS, the European Commission, the International Organization of la Francophonie, the Bretton Woods institutions, the Group of Eight countries, the European Union, a military representative of the troop-contributing countries and France. A meeting of the heads of State of concerned African countries and France, which was held in Paris on 25 and 26 January 2003, endorsed the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement. During that meeting, President Gbagbo, in consultation with other Ivorian parties, appointed the former Prime Minister, Seydou Diarra, to head the new government of national reconciliation. In addition, during consultations conducted on the sidelines of the meeting, an understanding was reached on an arrangement for the distribution of cabinet posts among the Ivorian parties, under which the key portfolios of defence and the interior were allocated to the rebel movements.

Both the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement and the conclusions adopted by the heads of State in Paris on 26 January 2003 (S/2003/99, annex II) envisaged a United Nations role in the implementation of the Agreement, including participating in and chairing the Follow-Up Committee. The Agreement stipulated that the new Ivorian government of national reconciliation would seek assistance from ECOWAS, France and the United Nations in guaranteeing the reform and restructuring of the defence and security forces; international development partners are requested to cooperate with the new government in putting in place a programme for the reintegration of all armed elements. In their communiqué, the heads of State proposed the strengthening of the presence of the United Nations system in Côte d'Ivoire, in particular in the areas of security, humanitarian assistance and human rights, as well as the deployment of civilian and military observers, who would help to supervise the implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement. They also expressed the wish that the Security Council would endorse the peacekeeping operation launched by ECOWAS and France, and authorize that operation to take the necessary measures to ensure the freedom of movement and security of its personnel, and to guarantee the protection of civilians facing the imminent threat of violence.

Developments since the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement

The implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement encountered serious obstacles soon after the conclusion of the Paris summit. The newly appointed Prime Minister of the envisaged government of national reconciliation, Seydou Diarra, was unable to travel immediately to Côte d'Ivoire to take up his post as head of the new government, because of a series of massive and often violent demonstrations that erupted in Abidjan and other towns to protest against the allocation of the Ministries of Defence and the Interior to the rebel movements. During those demonstrations, French interests and installations in Abidjan were targeted and deliberately attacked.

In addition to the demonstrations, the leaders of Côte d'Ivoire's defence forces wrote to President Gbagbo expressing their opposition to the participation of the rebel movements in the new government. The leaders of major political parties who signed the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement also rejected the allocation of the defence and interior portfolios to the rebel movements, while the incumbent Minister of the Interior asserted that the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement was "null and void". The situation was compounded by the apparently ambivalent position of President Gbagbo who, on his return from Paris, referred to the Agreement as "proposals".

In an address to the nation on 7 February 2003, President Gbagbo confirmed the appointment of Mr. Diarra as the new Prime Minister and requested him to propose a new cabinet. At the same time, the President asserted that he intended to retain all his constitutional prerogatives, and that he would not implement those provisions of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement he considered to be at variance with the Constitution of Côte d'Ivoire. In particular, he took exception to the provision making the appointment of the Prime Minister irrevocable, and to the proposed disarmament of the national armed forces. The President also rejected the allocation of the Defence and Interior Ministries to the rebel movements.

Despite the mixed signals emanating from the President, his address to the nation had the positive effect of calming the situation, as the street demonstrations in Abidjan ceased. In other encouraging developments, the leaders of the defence and security forces announced that they were no longer opposed to the participation of the rebel movements in a new government, provided the rebels renounced their claim to the key portfolios of defence and the interior. Seven political parties signatories to the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement also publicly expressed their support for the allocation of some posts in the new government of national reconciliation to the rebel movements. For their part, the three rebel movements and Mr. Ouattara's RDR party denounced what they perceived as President Gbagbo's departures from the Agreement.

Efforts by the ECOWAS Contact Group on Côte d'Ivoire to break the impasse on the implementation of the Agreement culminated in a summit meeting attended by President Eyadéma, together with the President of Ghana, John Agyekum Kufuor, and the President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, as well as the Interim Chairman of the Commission of the African Union, Amara Essy, and the Vice-President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, with President Gbagbo in Yamoussoukro on 10 February 2003. Mr. Diarra travelled to Yamoussoukro with the ECOWAS heads of State and was installed as Prime Minister on that occasion. The meeting explored alternative arrangements for the allocation of posts in the new government of national unity that could be acceptable to all parties. The rebel movements refused to attend, however, on the grounds that they did not wish to renegotiate the understandings already reached in Paris.

Following his installation, Prime Minister Diarra held extensive consultations on the composition of the government of national reconciliation with all concerned Ivorian parties, as well as the President of Ghana, the current Chairman of ECOWAS, and with other leaders of the region. However, the consultations were inconclusive, as the rebels continued to insist on having the defence and interior portfolios. In addition, President Gbagbo appeared reluctant to delegate the necessary authority to the Prime Minister, as required under the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, and insisted that he would have the final say on the composition of the new government. Mr. Diarra presented a provisional cabinet list on two occasions, but President Gbagbo drew up a different list. Consequently, following a meeting with the rebel movements in Bouaké on 3 March 2003, during which the movements refused to compromise on the sticking point of the defence and interior posts, the Prime Minister warned that he would consider resigning if his efforts to form the new government continued to encounter obstacles.

Some progress towards breaking the stalemate was finally made at a meeting of the 10 signatories to the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, which was convened in Accra from 6 to 8 March 2003 by President Kufuor as the current Chairman of ECOWAS. At that meeting the parties agreed to create a 15-member National Security Council comprising representatives of each of the 10 signatories, as well as the army, the gendarmerie, the police, President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Diarra, to oversee the functioning of the disputed posts of defence and the interior. They also requested the Prime Minister to submit candidates for the two ministries, who would be appointed by consensus, and they reached a new understanding on the allocation of the other cabinet posts. Subsequently, on 10 March, President Gbagbo issued a decree delegating authority to the Prime Minister to implement the work programme set out in the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, but only for a six-month period. In another positive development, which could contribute towards building confidence among the warring parties, on 11 March representatives of the rebel movements travelled to the Government-held city of Yamoussoukro and met with President Gbagbo for further talks on the formation of the new government. Efforts were also made to convene the new government at Yamoussoukro, on 13 March, but the Cabinet members nominated by the three rebel movements and Mr. Ouattara's RDR party refused to attend, citing security reasons.

[**CHRONOLOGY (March 2003 - April 2004)**](http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/minuci/chron.html)