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**In-depth: Cote d’Ivoire crisis (2002)**

**COTE D'IVOIRE: Crisis bodes ill for country, region**

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Cote d'Ivoire 's economic capital, Abidjan

ABIDJAN, 21 November 2002 (IRIN) - Since 19 September, Cote d’Ivoire has been facing its worst crisis since independence from France in 1960. Long considered a haven of peace in troubled West Africa, it has joined the ranks of countries affected by insurgency less than three years after experiencing its first successful coup d’etat.   
  
For the first time ever, the state no longer controls the entire territory. Hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced. Many have fled to neighbouring countries.   
  
National unity has been affected and there are fears that, if it continues, the crisis could develop into civil war. The spectre of a regionalised conflict, as occurred in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has also been mentioned by some analysts.   
  
The instability in Cote d’Ivoire has dealt a severe blow to economic activity in that country as well as neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso. Job losses have been reported. Abidjan’s position as the main access to the sea for its landlocked northern neighbours has been eroded.   
  
**The crisis erupts**   
  
The crisis erupted on 19 September, when armed men staged an unsuccessful attack on the headquarters of the paramilitary gendarmes in the commercial capital, Abidjan, and others took over hinterland towns such as Bouake and Korhogo, 350 km and 634 km north of Abidjan respectively.   
  
The uprising was said to involve about 800 soldiers protesting against their impending demobilisation from the military. These were mainly soldiers who joined the armed forces during the military transition led by General Robert Guei that followed a December 1999 coup which toppled President Henri Konan Bedie.   
  
Interior Minister Emile Boga Doudou was killed in the mutiny. General Guei and his wife, along with some of his relatives and associates were also killed. Fearing for his life, the leader of the Rassemblement des Republicains (RDR), Alassane Dramane Ouattara, sought refuge in the residence of the French ambassador - which he left in late November and travelled to Gabon. Guei and Ouattara were accused of being behind the uprising, described as a mutiny by some sources, and as an attempted coup by others, including the government and some diplomatic sources.   
  
An attempt by loyalist troops to retake Bouake proved unsuccessful, while the insurgents extended their control to other parts of the north and centre. They also moved westward, taking the town of Vavoua and briefly occupying Daloa, 400 km northwest of Abidjan, which was quickly recaptured by loyalists.   
  
A truce brokered by Senegalese Foreign Minister Cheikh Tidiane Gadio was signed by the insurgents on 17 October, and accepted by the government. The ceasefire is being monitored by French troops pending the deployment of a buffer force by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which will initially comprise 1,254 men from Benin, Ghana, Niger, Senegal and Togo. The 17 October ceasefire paved the way for talks in Lome, Togo, between a governmental delegation and representatives of the insurgents.   
By this time the rebels, known as the Mouvement Patriotique de Cote d’Ivoire (MPCI), included civilians such as the MPCI’s secretary-general Guillaume Soro, a former student leader.   
  
**Negotiations stagnate after initial successes**   
  
The talks, brokered by Togolese President Gnassingbe Eyadema as head of a contact group set up by ECOWAS to help resolve the Ivorian crisis, yielded a first accord on 31 October. The two sides agreed to respect the ceasefire and to refrain from "the recruitment and use of mercenaries, enrolment of children, and violations of the accord on cessation of hostilities". They pledged to urge “their authorities to refrain from any bellicose acts such as abuses and violence [and] extra-judicial killings", according to a communique issued in Lome.   
  
The two sides also "acknowledged the need to preserve territorial integrity, respect of institutions, and constitutional legality".   
  
Further progress was made on 1 November, when the government agreed to submit to parliament a draft amnesty law involving the liberation of jailed members of the military, an end to proceedings against people accused of jeopardising state security, the return of soldiers from exile and their reintegration into the army, and other commitments.   
  
Since then, however, the talks have foundered. The MPCI originally demanded a review of the constitution, the resignation of President Laurent Gbagbo and new elections. The government insisted that they disarm and that they deliver on their agreement to respect the country’s territorial integrity and constitution. The MPCI later dropped its demand for Gbagbo’s resignation, but replaced it in late November with a call for a new political dispensation, including a transitional government that would prepare fresh elections, which the mediators and the governmental delegation rejected.   
  
**Talking peace, preparing for war**   
  
A diplomatic source told IRIN in mid-November that it was a struggle for the international community to keep the two sides talking.   
  
"We are doing our best to encourage both sides to follow the path of negotiations,” the diplomat said. “War is not a viable option. But we have the perception that both sides want to go to war. They are only restrained by international pressure from the US, Britain, France and ECOWAS.   
  
“They are bringing in reinforcements and new equipments,” he said, adding: “War means Sierra Leone and Liberia all over again. We are pushing for a negotiated settlement of the crisis, but it is very hard. The two sides are too far apart. However, the alternative is disaster for everybody. We do not believe either side can win the war. The government can retake Bouake but the rebels would move to [the western towns of] Danane, Man - Guei's territory.”   
  
The state announced in October that it had imported arms, ammunition and vehicles needed by its troops, but originally denied claims that it had hired mercenaries. However, in late November, the spokesman of a French buffer force monitoring the ceasefire pending the deployment of troops from ECOWAS said that a column which participated in an offensive in the west included whites and English-speaking blacks.   
  
Regional sources told IRIN that mercenaries, including Sam Bockarie, an ex-commander of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF - a former Sierra Leonean rebel group), had passed through a neighbouring country to join the rebellion.   
  
“Many of the mercenaries came over from the DRC conflict,” Dr Abdel Fatau Musah of the Soros Foundation in Dakar told IRIN. “Since the crisis there is moving towards a resolution, they are finding new markets,” said Musah, who has been doing research on mercenary activity in Africa.   
  
He feels the war is becoming more regionalised as had happened in the DRC. “This is very explosive for the subregion,” added Musah. Guinea is likely to implode soon, he said. “All the factors are there,” he added. “If the conflict in Cote d’Ivoire is not curtailed soon, it can become a springboard. If Cote d’Ivoire were to become a warlord zone, the implications are worse than what Liberia became for the Mano River zone.” The Mano River area comprises Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.   
  
**Parallels with other rebel wars**   
  
Another analyst agreed that there were parallels with other wars in Africa. At least one neighbouring country has massed troops near the border and, he said, should exactions be committed on a large scale against their nationals, that country and others could invoke the need to protect them, as Rwanda did in 1998.   
  
In October, reports that Malians, Burkinabe and northern Ivorians were hunted down and killed after the recapture of Daloa drew strong protests from the authorities of the two countries.

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| http://www.irinnews.org/images/1642.JPG Photo: [IRIN](http://www.irinnews.org/) [http://www.irinnews.org/images/design/magnify.gif](http://www.irinnews.org/PhotoDetail.aspx?ImageId=1642) |
| Forest in southwestern Cote d'Ivoire |

The parallels do not stop there. As in Sierra Leone’s war (1991-2002), the original belligerents - loyalists troops and insurgents - have been joined by traditional hunters, called Kamajors in Sierra Leone and Dozos in Cote d’Ivoire and neighbouring Sahelian countries. However, while Sierra Leone’s Kamajors fought with the government forces, the Dozos have joined up with the Ivorian rebels. Like the Kamajors, the Dozos are believed to have supernatural powers, thus providing a psychological boost to their allies.   
  
In a new development reminiscent of Liberia’s first rebel war (1989-1997), characterised by a multiplicity of armed groups, the number of insurgent factions in Cote d’Ivoire has started to increase. Since the end of November, the MPCI has been joined by two groups, the Mouvement populaire ivoirien du Grand Ouest (MPIGO - Ivorian Popular Movement of the Greater West) and the Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix (MJP- Movement for Justice and Peace).   
  
Any increase in the number of actors could complicate the peace negotiations. Moreover, the advent of these new groups has added a new element to the Ivorian crisis. While the MPCI is generally considered to draw the bulk of its members from among northern Ivorians, its leaders are from various ethnic groups and it has not portrayed itself as a northern force. On the other hand, MPIGO identifies itself with a given region. The Greater West is the area from which Guei and his ethnic group, the Yacouba (also called Dan) come. The new rebel groups have vowed to avenge Guei’s death. At least one of them reportedly includes young people from the Liberian side of the border.   
  
Cote d’Ivoire’s crisis has also led to an increase in the number of civilians bearing arms. In government-held areas, armed youths have constituted self-defence groups which protect their areas and man checkpoints on major roads. In the north, youths have been enrolled in rebel ranks. This has added to the proliferation of weapons in Cote d’Ivoire, which worries small-arms watchers such as Napoleon Abdulai of the Program for Coordination and Assistance on Security and Development" (PCASED), based in Bamako, Mali.   
  
Small arms should be included in the Lome negotiations, Abdulai says. “We need to know how many there are, what types, who is importing what,” he told IRIN. “We need to be able to estimate the quantity when the time comes for DDR [disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration]. In that way we can avoid the pitfalls of Liberia, when weapons were hidden. We need to make sure that the excess weapons in Cote d’Ivoire are taken away and destroyed.”   
  
This is especially true against the background of the ethnic and religious animosity that has developed in Cote d’Ivoire around political issues, especially that of Ouattara’s eligibility for top state posts in Cote d’Ivoire.   
  
**Eligibility and identity**   
  
Ouattara was barred from contesting presidential and legislative elections in October and December 2000 on the basis of constitutional clauses limiting eligibility to Ivorians of Ivorian parentage who have never held another nationality. Ouattara’s detractors claim he is Burkinabe. His disqualification led the RDR to boycott both elections.   
  
On 25-26 October 2000, protest demonstrations by RDR supporters calling for a rerun of the presidential polls led to clashes with supporters of Gbagbo’s Front populaire ivoirien (FPI - Ivorian Popular Front) supported by gendarmes, according to reports by a UN team and international human rights groups. The protests had come on the heels of demonstrations on 24-25 October 2000 that forced Guei to vacate power after proclaiming himself winner of the 22 October 2000 elections. Protests by the RDR against the exclusion of Ouattara from the parliamentary elections were also repressed.   
  
Some 300 persons were killed in the October-December 2000 upheavals, many of them by security forces. Eight gendarmes accused of involvement in the 25-26 October killings were acquitted. No one else has been convicted.   
  
During the 2000 upheavals, many northerners and Muslims people were targeted by security forces because they were automatically assumed to be RDR supporters, according to human rights groups.   
  
While the leadership of Cote d’Ivoire’s main political parties is multi-ethnic, each tends to be viewed on the ground as linked to a given region. Many see the FPI as a party supported mainly by people from western and southwestern Cote d’Ivoire and the former ruling Parti democratique de Cote d’Ivoire (PDCI - Democratic Party of Cote d’Ivoire) by people from the centre and east. The bulk of the population in these areas are Christians.   
  
The RDR is seen as drawing most of its support from the north, whose populations are predominantly Muslim and often speak the same languages as their neighbours on the other side of the border in Burkina Faso and Mali.   
  
**Perceived disenfranchisement**   
  
Another contentious issue that has been the perception by a section of the population that its members have been disenfranchised. This issue, which cropped up at the negotiations in Lome, is linked to an ongoing problem regarding identity cards.   
  
This has been a sensitive issue since 1990, when the then Parti democratique de Cote d’Ivoire (PDCI - Cote d’Ivoire Democratic Party) government attempted to allow foreigners to vote in elections. This was refused by the opposition, which subsequently accused the government of circumventing its refusal by giving foreigners national ID cards to allow them to vote.   
  
During the military transition, some political parties, the media and one human rights group also charged that national ID cards were being fraudulently issued to foreigners.   
  
Muslim leaders later complained that their community was the main target of suspicion. In May 2000, the Higher Council of Imams said complained that security forces had been abusively withdrawing ID cards from Muslims and destroying them.   
  
In regional elections held this year, many people were unable to vote because the old style identity cards were withdrawn and replaced with new ones. The issuing of the new cards was suspended at one point and resumed only one week before the polls. Some groups, including the RDR, complained that many people did not obtain the new cards, and the election turnout was low: about 30 percent.   
  
In a policy brief issued on 6 November 2002, the West Africa Network for Peace-building (WANEP) noted that Cote d’Ivoire had split along ethnic lines following elections, and that the present conflict was “adding a religious dimension to the ethnic divide”.   
  
Writing in the 30 October 2002 edition of Le Nouveau Reveil, a daily close to the Parti democratique de Cote d’Ivoire (PDCI - Cote d’Ivoire Democratic Party), legal expert N’Dja Boka linked Cote d’Ivoire’s crisis to the fact that key issues had not yet been fully resolved despite a reconciliation forum held in 2001.   
  
“The identity problems of some Ivorians have not been resolved” he said. “The political and military problems encountered by Ivorians from the north of the country have not been resolved.”   
  
He also noted that the local government elections had been flawed.   
  
A list of recommendations proposed by Boka for resolving the crisis included the establishment of a transparent policy of national identification accepted by the majority of Ivorians, measures to guarantee the independence of the national elections commission and the organisation of early general elections that are free and fair, open to all political currents and supervised by the international community.   
  
However, he noted that whatever the grievances given sectors may have had, these do not justify taking up arms against the state. Musah agrees. He feels the stand taken by the African Union (AU), which came out clearly against any attempt to take power by violence ... must not be undermined.”   
  
The MPCI, he said, must be given a strong ultimatum “to lay down its arms so as to pave the way for a two-year transitional government of national unity that would pave the way for fresh elections when stability is restored.”   
  
The mutiny should not be allowed to continue, whatever its merit may be, he says. “Its first objective was fighting against demobilisation and suddenly its struggle took on a political dimension. Were they to obtain power there would likely be further changes in its direction. The insurrection, therefore, has to be stopped now”. At the same time, the authorities in Abidjan should be persuaded “to form a government of national unity to hold the fort and end the military aspect of the conflict.”   
  
**Prolongation of conflict would cause humanitarian crisis**   
  
As the crisis drags on, its effects are being felt by hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people, not least the some 250,000 to 350,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees and evacuees (migrants forced by the insecurity to return home).   
  
Humanitarian agencies are bracing for a much larger population displacement in the event of a deterioration of the situation. In that case, about 11 West African countries whose nationals make up the bulk of the over four million foreigners (1998 figure) in Cote d’Ivoire could be affected. These are Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, Benin, Niger, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Togo, Senegal and Mauritania.   
  
"So far, we do not see a humanitarian crisis,” the diplomatic source told IRIN. “But if the situation continues as it is for another two months, there will be a crisis. We will have crossed the line. There is already hunger in the northern parts of the country, but people are not starving. They are down from 3 meals a day to 2, but there is no malnutrition yet. Part of the reason we do not have a crisis yet is because this is a rich country with a great coping capacity, in spite of it being a developing country.   
  
The World Food Programme (WFP) has also warned that there are pockets of vulnerability, and has appealed for US $3 million to feed 100,000 affected persons in Cote d’Ivoire and neighbouring countries.   
  
Other effects of the crisis include the closure of schools in areas occupied by the rebels. According to UNICEF, about 22 percent of school children may have stopped going to school as a result of the upheavals. Many teachers have been displaced. UNICEF’s first priority, according to Georgette Aithnard, its country director for Cote d’Ivoire, is to help get children back into school. The UN agency is also worried about the recruitment of minors in the conflict and has appealed to all parties concerned to do whatever is necessary to end this.   
  
Other areas of concern for the humanitarian community include health: some hospitals and pharmacies in rebel-held zones are short on medicines and staff. In many cases, people depend heavily on medical services provided by the Red Cross and NGOs such as Medecins sans Frontieres.   
  
Reports of human rights abuses, both in rebel-held areas and those that have remained under government control, have also caused concern. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have condemned extrajudical killings and other abuses in reports issued in October and November respectively.   
  
Local human rights groups have also reported abuses. In late November, officials of the Mouvement ivoirien des droits de l’homme (MIDH - Ivorian Human Rights Movement) told IRIN they were extremely worried by the operations of “death squads” in Abidjan. Similar concern was expressed by another human rights group, the Ligue ivoirienne des droits de l’homme (LIDHO - Ivorian Human Rights League), according to media reports. The MIDH also published a list of over 100 persons whom, it said, had been detained since 19 September.   
  
**Economy begins to feel the strain**   
  
On the economic front, the effects of the crisis are beginning to be felt. “The coping capacity of the economy is beginning to reduce,” one source said. “In Abidjan, families are losing jobs (…) At the family level, more people are being taken in by individual families.   
  
“This is reducing the ability of the families to cope. Within a few weeks, the capacity of many families in Abidjan will break down,” the source predicted.   
  
Cote d’Ivoire is the world’s largest producer of cocoa. Some of the main cocoa-growing areas are close to the frontline and the crisis has led to increases in international cocoa prices.   
  
Hotel occupancy rates have plunged. Bars and restaurants have been feeling the effects of the downturn in visitors coupled with a curfew that begins each night at 19:00 GMT/local time, and ends at 06:00 hours.   
  
The Mouvement des Entreprises de France (MEDEF -French Business Association) complained in November that as a result of the crisis, many small and medium-sized French enterprises in Cote d’Ivoire had suspended their operations while larger ones had cut back. It added that the Ivorian crisis had also had worrying repercussions on French-speaking countries of West Africa and companies based there.   
  
The Ivorian chamber of commerce reported, for its part, that some companies located in, or dependent on raw materials from, the hinterland had had to close their doors temporarily. It said the worst-hit sectors included wood-processing, livestock rearing and especially textiles, in which about 1,000 jobs had been lost to closures. Cotton is grown mostly in the north and official sources have said that, should the crisis persist, some 60,000 cotton farmers could be deprived of their means of livelihood.   
  
**Burkina Faso hard hit by Ivorian crisis**   
  
The interruption of transport between Cote d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso has led to increases in the prices of meat, most of which comes from northern Cote d’Ivoire or Burkina Faso. It has also deprived Burkina Faso of the largest market for its beef, goats and sheep.   
  
A railway company that operates between the two countries has sent 900 of its 1000 employees in Cote d’Ivoire and 600 in Burkina Faso on technical leave. The company, Sitarail, has been losing an estimated 75 million CFA francs (US $113,000) per day, according to a report in the November-December issue of ‘Navire’, the organ of Cote d’Ivoire’s port and maritime community.   
  
Other companies in Burkina Faso have also been affected. A textile mill that has Cote d'Ivoire as the main market for its cotton thread was forced to lay off 78 out of 164 employees.   
  
The crisis stands to affect Burkina Faso in another way, too. Its nationals in Cote d’Ivoire remit about 80 billion CFA (roughly US $120 million) each year and “if those billions stop coming it will be felt like a economic crisis by the government in the long run,” economist Jacques Gueda noted recently.   
  
Burkina Faso is dependent on Cote d'Ivoire’s ports for 80 percent of its exports and 60 to 70 percent of its imports. The interruption of traffic between the two countries has caused shortages of raw materials such as wheat, latex and iron.   
  
The crisis has forced Burkina Faso to accelerate efforts it began over three years ago to reduce its dependence on Ivorian ports by using the ports of Tema, in Ghana, and Lome, in Togo. As a result of the diversification, the goods traffic between Burkina Faso and Tema increased from 29,670 mt in 1998 to 120,000 mt in the first nine months of 2002, according to the November-December edition of ‘La Lettre Economique du Burkina’ an economic newsletter in Burkina Faso.   
  
When the crisis broke out, about 30,000 mt of Burkinabe goods blocked at Abidjan port had to be rerouted to Lome, Tema and Cotonou (Benin), La Lettre Economique du Burkina quoted the Director-General of a Burkinabe transit company, the SNTBC as saying.   
  
However, re-routing is likely to increase transport costs by 10 to 20 percent, according to some estimates. Burkina Faso’s Chamber of Commerce has asked the government to think of building a new road that would give operators in southwestern Burkina Faso, which includes the economic capital, Bobo Dioulasso, direct access the ports of Tema and Takoradi in Ghana. At present they have to pass through Ouagadougou. Such a move would reduce the distance by about 400 km and also reduce dependency on Cote d’Ivoire, the chamber suggested.   
  
**Damage to Ivorian economy would be regional catastrophe**   
  
Any damage to Cote d’Ivoire’s economy is “catastrophic for the subregion,” Gueda said. Cote d'Ivoire accounts for 40 percent of the gross domestic product of the countries which make up the Union economique et monetaire ouestafricain (UEMOA - West African Economic and Monetary Union).   
  
Damaging the economy and jeopardising the country’s development is what the war is about, Ivorian government officials have charged. “...The war imposed on Cote d’Ivoire is aimed solely at undermining the bases of its development at a time when the country has put in place an economic recovery plan supported by our development partners,” one state official said recently.   
  
State and ruling party officials have repeatedly pointed a finger at French interests, which they accuse of being alarmed by moves by the government to throw the economy open and end the monopoly some French concerns enjoy in key sectors.