

8 of 403 DOCUMENTS

Agence France Presse -- English

October 20, 2000, Friday

Gbagbo urges Guei not to be a Milosevic in I Coast vote

BYLINE: Caspar Leighton**SECTION:** International news**LENGTH:** 1075 words**DATELINE:** ABIDJAN, Oct 20

Ivory Coast's socialist opposition leader Laurent **Gbagbo** says he can beat General Robert Guei in Sunday's presidential poll and urged the military ruler not to behave like Yugoslavia's former despot Slobodan Milosevic.

Gbagbo, presidential candidate for the Ivorian Popular Front (FPI), is the only serious opponent standing against Guei since the Supreme Court barred 14 of 19 presidential hopefuls from running.

At a campaign rally Thursday, **Gbagbo** drew on two foreign examples of governmental change, Senegal and Yugoslavia.

Senegal's presidential election in March saw Abdou Diouf, who had ruled since 1983, step down in the face of electoral defeat by long time opponent Abdoulaye Wade.

Gbagbo made a call for Guei to behave in the same manner: "God has told you, you must be like Abdou Diouf, because if you do not want to be like Diouf, then you will have to be like Milosevic and you will flee your country, I do not wish my brother to flee the country, so at midnight on October 22 I will be expecting your call."

On Thursday night, Guei, who has ruled Ivory Coast since coming to power in a coup on December 24 and now presents himself as the "people's candidate", said that he would step aside if defeated in Sunday's vote.

"Rest assured of one thing, dear compatriots, if I am beaten in the election, it is as the rightful heir to (late) president Felix Houphouet Boigny and as a convinced and sincere democrat that I will transfer power, in accordance with the law, to the new president freely chosen by the Ivorian people," Guei said.

"Unless there is blatant electoral fraud, it is not possible for the junta to win the elections," said FPI legal expert Emile Boga Doudou, at a press conference Wednesday.

The FPI leader extended the the Yugoslavia comparison in a **speech** on Thursday night, saying his supporters would take to the streets if a rightful victory was taken from them.

"We will invade every town, that is the only weapon we have," **Gbagbo** said. "I hope it does not come to that."

The presidential candidate said he would congratulate Guei if properly beaten, adding that Sunday's elections would be taking place in better conditions than in 1990 or 1995.

"I am not sure we can eliminate fraud 100 percent," said **Gbagbo**.

The vote will be cast using a single ballot paper, which is seen to be a surer way of guaranteeing voter confidentiality than having one paper per candidate.

With multiple ballot papers, unscrupulous parties putting pressure on voters or promising financial reward for voting a certain way can ask voters to produce the papers of the candidates they did not vote for as proof of whose paper went into the ballot box.

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The FPI says it has a parallel computerised vote-counting system, aided by another innovation, the distribution to candidates of a copy of the official results from each polling station.

Guei was at pains to stress that the vote would be free and fair in his Thursday night address.

"All measures have been taken, and others will follow, so that the people of Ivory Coast can freely express themselves on October 22 and choose without constraint and in total transparency who will lead them towards their new destiny," he added.

But in fact the only concrete measures Guei announced was the nocturnal closure of the country's borders and airports from Friday until Tuesday morning.

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Apart from General Robert Guei, Ivory Coast's military ruler, and veteran socialist politician Laurent **Gbagbo**, three minor candidates are running for office in a presidential election next Sunday:

Francis Wodie: prominent unionist, second fiddle politician

Francis Wodie, 64, secretary general of the Ivorian Workers' Party, is standing at the polls for the second time, but has never scored more than a handful of votes.

Wodie's political activism started with the Federation of Black African Students in France (FEANF), where he was arrested in 1961 and sent back to Ivory Coast, to be imprisoned until 1962.

He did not yield to pressure from president Felix Houphouet Boigny's regime and formed one of Ivory Coast's most powerful unions, the National Union of Higher Education and Research (SYNARES).

In 1973 he went into voluntary exile in Algeria and on his return went to the Abidjan law faculty. A founding member of the Ivorian Human Rights League, he was head of the Ivorian section of Amnesty International from 1985-89.

He founded the Ivorian Workers' Party (PIT) with the introduction of multiparty politics in 1990 and became the sole PIT deputy in the national assembly.

In a 1995 election he stood against president Henri Konan Bedie, the only opposition candidate not to boycott that poll, when he and won 3.8 percent of the vote.

He lost his national assembly seat later that year and the PIT has not had a seat since, though Bedie made him higher education minister.

Wodie has kept a low profile since the coup that brought Guei to power on December 24 coup. When the Supreme Court early this month disqualified 14 of 19 candidates he called on the barred parties to rally around him, a call which seems destined to be ignored.

Theodore Mel Eg: the self-confessed lightweight

Theodore Mel Eg, at 48, is the youngest of the five presidential candidates and has focussed his campaign on the concerns of the "new generations".

Formerly a member of the ruling Ivory Coast Democratic Party (PDCI), he left after the PDCI lost its 39-year hold on power in last December's military coup and formed the Ivory Coast Democratic Union (UDCI).

"I am the balance between the old and the new," is how he explains his split with the "old party".

He is mayor of the exclusive Cocody district of Abidjan.

He is regarded as a lightweight, a label he has not tried to shrug off, saying "I am a lightweight candidate with lightweight problems as opposed to a heavyweight candidate with heavyweight problems".

Nicolas Dioulo: independent -- and almost unknown

Nicolas Dioulo, 58, is a virtual unknown, having spent decades abroad working for the UN Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

Formerly a member of the PDCI, he is running as an independent candidate and promoting a "new alliance" with the Ivorian people.

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He returned to Ivory Coast after 30 years at the end of 1999, just after the coup.

He is offering Ivorians a "new social contract" without regional, ethnic or religious distinctions.

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LOAD-DATE: October 20, 2000

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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