



humanitarian news and analysis
a service of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

COTE D'IVOIRE: Former, current presidents address reconciliation forum

Abidjan, 14 November 2001 (IRIN) - Former Ivorian president Henri Konan Bedie called on all politicians in Cote d'Ivoire to condemn the coup that ousted him from power in December 1999 in his first public speech in Abidjan since returning from exile in France in mid-October. He spoke on Tuesday at a forum aimed at achieving national reconciliation.

Current President Laurent Gbagbo also addressed the forum on Tuesday but two other leading politicians, General Robert Guei - Bedie's immediate successor - and opposition leader Alassane Ouattara, declined invitations to do so. Both cited concern for their security among their reasons. Guei also invoked unfinished repairs to his home, which was ransacked in October, while Ouattara cited the fact that he had not been issued a certificate of nationality.

Bedie and Gbagbo each offered their analysis of the current political crisis in Cote d'Ivoire, where political division has heightened ethnic and religious tension, and proposed ways to resolve it. Bedie's speech was punctuated by references to the coup d'etat, which he described as the root cause of the crisis, but he played down the responsibility of the military, saying that it had been manipulated by politicians.

Bedie was overthrown on 24 December 1999 when what started as a protest over unpaid wages by former peacekeepers developed into the country's first coup d'etat. He went into exile in France where he lived for 22 months before returning to Abidjan on 15 October.

The former president also defended "ivoirite" (Ivorianness), a concept he invented but which, he said, had been wrongly interpreted for political reasons. 'Ivoirite' "translates a cultural project," he said. "There is no community without a cultural identity".

The concept, he added, was not an exclusionary or xenophobic ideology aimed at driving a wedge between nationals and foreigners as its adversaries claim, nor was it aimed at Ouattara, leader of the opposition Rassemblement des Republicains (RDR).

A dispute over Ouattara's nationality has divided Cote d'Ivoire's political class for years, culminating in the rejection of his candidature at presidential and legislative elections last year on the grounds that he had failed to prove that he was an Ivorian born of Ivorian parents, one of the conditions for eligibility. His detractors maintain that his parents were Burkinabe and that he has held Burkinabe citizenship, another reason given for the rejection of his candidature. The decision to declare Ouattara ineligible, made by the Supreme Court, led the RDR to boycott last year's elections.

Bedie said Ivorian law should be followed to resolve the Ouattara issue.

He also touched on rights abuses perpetrated during the December 1999-October 2000 military transition as well as the numerous land conflicts that have erupted between Ivorian communities and between nationals and foreigners in recent years. Land laws need to be respected in order to end such clashes, he said. He also expressed support for the creation of an immigration office to curb problems, which he said, were associated with the migration of foreigners into Cote d'Ivoire. The office is scheduled to be established early next year. According to the latest census, foreign nationals are a quarter of the country's 15.3 million inhabitants.

Gbagbo, too, referred to the Ouattara case and the related issue of the constitution which, he said, would not be revised during his term of office as the RDR has demanded. He added that a constitutional clause which bars anyone who has represented a foreign country from running for president or parliament had been created to avoid disputes such as the one surrounding Ouattara's election bid.

Commenting on the coup, Gbagbo said it was the culmination of a power struggle among "the heirs" of the late Felix Houphouet-Boigny, Cote d'Ivoire's first president. Houphouet-Boigny's death in 1993 triggered a power struggle between Ouattara and Bedie who, at the time, were prime minister and speaker of parliament respectively, while Gbagbo was leader of the opposition. Guei was also a supporter of Houphouet-Boigny.

The Ivorian president blamed the unrest that followed presidential elections in October 2000, in which hundreds of people died, on Guei's refusal to accept defeat and a call by the RDR for a re-run of the polls. Some of the deaths occurred when security forces fired on demonstrators who forced Guei to give up power a day after he claimed victory at the election. Others died in violence surrounding RDR protests against the polls in which, according to human rights groups, people from the north - considered the RDR's main support group - were targeted by members of security forces and supporters of rival parties.

Gbagbo told the forum that his aim was to build democracy in the country, not on compromises but by respecting the law and the rules of good governance. He also expressed regret at the absence of Guei and Ouattara. As president, he said, he had done everything he could to meet their demands so that they could be in Abidjan.

The forum, which opened in October is being attended by political, civil society and community leaders. It is scheduled to end on 10 December.

Theme(s): [Governance](#), [Conflict](#),

[This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations]

[Other OCHA Sites](#)



OCHA

[Donors](#)



DFID



Irish Aid
Department of Foreign Affairs
An Roinn Gnóthaí Eacnamaíche



[Feedback](#) | [Terms & Conditions](#) |  [News Feeds](#) | [About IRIN](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Donors](#)

Copyright © IRIN 2011. All rights reserved. This material comes to you via IRIN, the humanitarian news and analysis service of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The opinions expressed do not necessarily

reflect those of the United Nations or its Member States. The boundaries, names and designations used on maps on this site and links to external sites do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the UN. Republication is subject to terms and conditions as set out in the [IRIN copyright page](#).