
CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

Population: 18.2 million (8.9 million under 18)

Government armed forces: 17,050

Compulsory recruitment age: 18

Voluntary recruitment age: 18

Voting age: 21

Optional Protocol: not signed

Other treaties ratified (see glossary):

CRC, GC AP I and II, ILO 138, ILO 182, ACRWC

Children, including former child soldiers from the Liberian conflict, were recruited for use in pro-government militias and the armed opposition group Forces armées des Forces nouvelles (FAFN) at least until late 2005. Active recruitment of children appeared to have stopped from October 2006, but by late 2007 children reportedly continued to be associated with both militias and the FAFN, despite concerted efforts at demobilization.

Context

The conflict in Côte d'Ivoire began with an attempted coup against President Laurent Gbagbo in September 2002, and led to the country being divided into two territories. The south was controlled by the government and the north by the opposition New Forces (Forces nouvelles), which had been formed out of the Côte d'Ivoire Patriotic Movement (Mouvement patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire, MPC), and two other armed opposition groups, the Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West (Mouvement populaire ivoirien du grand ouest, MPIGO), and the Justice and Peace Movement (Mouvement pour la justice et la paix, MJP). The January 2003 Linas-Marcoussis agreement, signed by all parties to the conflict and aimed at bringing them all within a transitional government of national reconciliation, was only partially and reluctantly implemented.¹

Interests within neighbouring countries fuelled the conflict. The Liberian government of President Charles Taylor reportedly supported armed opposition groups in western Côte d'Ivoire, which included fighters from armed groups in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and Liberian fighters and Liberian nationals recruited from refugee camps in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana fought in both pro-government militias and armed opposition groups.²

In April 2004 a UN peacekeeping force (United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UNOCI) was deployed. Also present in the country were

French troops, initially sent in September 2002 to protect foreign nationals, whose presence had subsequently been endorsed and clarified by UN Security Council resolutions.³ The international troops patrolled a buffer zone, known as the "zone of confidence", between the north and south of the country.

A number of agreements, including the Accra Agreement III of July 2004⁴ and the Pretoria Agreement of April 2005,⁵ were reached with international mediation, but political stalemates, disagreements about implementation and outbreaks of violence hindered the peace process.⁶ Presidential elections originally scheduled for October 2005 were postponed several times. In November 2006 UN Security Council Resolution 1721 extended the transitional government's mandate and tasked it with completing the peace process by October 2007.

In March 2007 President Gbagbo and the leader of the Forces nouvelles, Guillaume Soro, signed the Ouagadougou peace accord, under which Guillaume Soro was named prime minister.⁷ The agreement included provisions for creating a new transitional government, merging the Forces nouvelles and the national defence and security forces within an integrated command centre, disarming combatants, granting amnesty for all crimes relating to national security committed since September 2000, and organizing a presidential election.⁸ As a supplement to the agreement, in April the president signed a decree, applicable to both sides, granting amnesty for crimes committed during the armed conflict. However, contrary to the Ouagadougou agreement and the 2003 amnesty law, which excluded from amnesty "crimes constituting serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and crimes listed in Articles 5–8 of the Treaty of Rome on the International Criminal Court", the amnesty decree did not expressly exclude crimes under international law, such as the recruitment and use of children as soldiers.⁹

In April 2007 there were reports that demilitarization in the zone of confidence had led to an increase in violence, including rape, against people living in the region.¹⁰ The fragility of the peace process was highlighted in June by a rocket attack on Prime Minister Soro's aircraft. He escaped uninjured but four of his companions were killed.¹¹

Many aspects of the conflicts in Liberia and in Sierra Leone since the 1990s and in Côte d'Ivoire since 2002 were intricately linked, with operations across borders, including in Guinea, which bordered all three countries, and a complex web of governments and armed groups providing support to factions in neighbouring countries.¹² A migrant population of thousands of young fighters, including child soldiers, crossing the borders between Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, saw conflict

mainly as an economic opportunity. Many had first been forcibly recruited as children in one conflict, and then had willingly crossed borders to take up arms in another conflict, often with a different armed group. A 2005 study by Human Rights Watch found that most had been motivated by promises of financial gain, and many could not articulate the political objective of the group they fought with. The risk of re-recruitment was exacerbated by high rates of youth unemployment and corruption and deficiencies in the implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs.¹³ An August 2006 report by the UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA) noted that high levels of unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, across west Africa posed a risk to stability in the region. This was reiterated in a 2007 report by the UN Secretary-General which highlighted also the importance of reform of the security sector in countries in the region as a means of addressing it.¹⁴

Government

National recruitment legislation and practice

The Armed Forces Code of 7 September 1995 established a minimum age of 18 for compulsory and voluntary military service for men and women.

In October 2006 the UN reported that there was at that time no tangible evidence of children participating in the regular armed forces (Forces nationales de Côte d'Ivoire, FANCI), but that children were evidently associated with armed militia groups close to the ruling party, the Popular Ivorian Front (Front populaire ivoirien, FPI).¹⁵

Armed groups

Children were associated with armed groups on both sides of the conflict, in pro-government militias and the Forces armées des Forces nouvelles (FAFN).¹⁶ By August 2007 the UN reported that there had been no substantiated evidence of the active recruitment and use of children by armed groups since October 2006.¹⁷ Anecdotal reports from the west of the country indicated that children continued to be used as servants and that girls were sexually abused by the FAFN. The environment continued to be unstable, and delays in the disarmament of militias and the FAFN and in the establishment of a joint military structure made children vulnerable to re-recruitment and use by these groups.

Pro-government militias

According to reports, scores or even hundreds of Liberian children who had been reunited with their families following their demobilization in Liberia were re-recruited in Liberia between late 2004 and early 2005 to fight alongside pro-government militias in the west of Côte d'Ivoire. Most of these children had originally been forcibly recruited by various armed groups during the conflicts in Liberia and Sierra Leone.¹⁸ In late 2004 around 20 child members of the *Lima force supplétive*, a militia operating alongside the Ivorian armed forces, were reportedly recruited from a camp for Liberian refugees in western Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁹ In September and October 2005, in Liberian counties bordering government-controlled areas of Côte d'Ivoire, Liberian children, alongside hundreds of other former fighters in the Liberian conflict, were recruited into pro-government militias in western Côte d'Ivoire in anticipation of renewed fighting with opposition forces.²⁰

At least four pro-government militias operational in areas under the control of the government in the west of the country – the Liberation Front for the Great West (Front pour la libération du grand ouest, FLGO), the Patriotic Alliance of the Wè People (Alliance patriotique du peuple Wè, APWE), the Patriotic Resistance Union of the Great West (Union patriotique de résistance du Grand Ouest, UPRGO) and the Ivorian Liberation Movement for the West of Côte d'Ivoire (Mouvement ivoirien de libération de l'ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire, MILOCI) – reportedly continued to maintain child soldiers in their ranks in late 2006.²¹ These four groups were among the parties listed by the Secretary-General in February 2005 and October 2006 as recruiting or using children in situations of armed conflict.²²

The Young Patriots (Jeunes Patriotes), a pro-government party, used children in violent demonstrations. In one such demonstration in Guiglo in January 2006, during which UN peacekeepers were also attacked, five Ivorians, including two children aged 14 and 16, were killed.²³

Forces armées des Forces nouvelles (FAFN)

In November 2004 demobilized Liberian children in Bong and Nimba counties in eastern Liberia were believed to have been recruited to fight with the FAFN in Côte d'Ivoire. Former Liberian commanders were identified as being involved in the recruitment.²⁴ Six hundred children in Danané, near to the Liberian border, who in 2006 were reported as having self-demobilized, had received military training from pro-FAFN Liberian fighters.²⁵

In February 2006, pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1572 (2004), the UN Security Council imposed a travel ban and an

assets freeze on several individuals for serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in Côte d'Ivoire. Among them was a FAFN commander, Martin Kouakou Fofié. According to the Security Council, forces under his command had, among other abuses, engaged in recruitment of child soldiers.²⁶

The FAFN was one of the parties listed in reports of the Secretary-General in February 2005 and October 2006 as recruiting or using children in situations of armed conflict. The FAFN was also named as being responsible for rape and other grave sexual violence.²⁷ The Secretary-General's report of October 2006 indicated that while children continued to be associated with the FAFN, they had committed to an action plan in November 2005 to demobilize children.²⁸ The FAFN leadership had objected to their continued inclusion on the list stating that it was not their policy to recruit children, although children might be found around their camps in search of basic assistance such as food.²⁹

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)

The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process, which under the Accra III Agreement was due to start in October 2004, was delayed in its implementation, at times because the FAFN were not willing to disarm in the absence of the implementation of other agreed reforms,³⁰ and later on because pro-government militias were unwilling to hand in their arms.³¹

In 2004 the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (Commission nationale de désarmement, démobilisation et réintégration, PNDDR) estimated that 30,000 ex-combatants would participate in the program, including 26,000 FAFN (of whom 3,000 were children), and 4,000 FANCI personnel recruited since September 2002.³² A later estimate was that just over 48,000 would benefit from the DDR program, including 5,500 FANCI and over 42,500 FAFN.³³

By June 2007 UNICEF indicated that it had helped 1,900 of an estimated 4,000 child soldiers to be reinserted into their communities, but concerns remained that instability in the country could lead to the re-recruitment of these children.

Pro-government militia groups

In 2005 the PNDDR estimated that there were 10,000 militia members, considered by the UN to be an underestimate.³⁴ By September 2005, 4,800 militia members had been formally registered but no weapons had been collected.³⁵ In early August 2006, when almost 1,000 had disarmed, the PNDDR suspended the disarmament of the militias because of the low

ratio of weapons to combatants and the high number of unserviceable weapons surrendered.³⁶

In late 2005 four pro-government militia groups had submitted a list of 150 children for DDR, but the UN noted that an effective end to the use of child soldiers by such groups would depend on being able to identify the groups, which required the full involvement and support of the government.³⁷ In September 2006 the four main militia groups in the west, FLGO, MILOCI, APWE and UPRGO, submitted action plans to the UN to end the association of children with their forces.³⁸ In April 2007, at militia-group focal points for child demobilization, the PNDDR and UNICEF began to identify children within these groups in areas near to the border with Liberia. A total of 204 children, including 84 girls, were registered for demobilization and were by August being assisted through UNICEF programs. The UN noted that there were particular challenges to identifying and reintegrating children in this process, arising from the fact that the combatants and associated children were not always based in camps but often dispersed within their communities.³⁹ The UN estimated in May 2007 that 1,100 militia members remained to be disarmed.⁴⁰

Forces armées des Forces nouvelles (FAFN)

The UN estimated a caseload of around 4,000 children for demobilization from the FAFN, although no exact figures were available.⁴¹ The first demobilizations of children by the FAFN took place in Bouaké between October 2003 and February 2004. Further demobilizations occurred in April and July–August 2004. In February 2005 demobilizations took place in Man, where by late June 87 children had been identified, the youngest being nine years old. Nine girl soldiers identified could not be demobilized at that time as there were no reception facilities for them.⁴²

In November 2005 the FAFN submitted to the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Côte d'Ivoire an action plan for preventing recruitment and releasing children associated with their forces, and made serious efforts with regard to implementation.⁴³ In October 2006 the Secretary-General stated that since July 2005, 327 children associated with fighting forces in areas under the control of the Forces nouvelles had been demobilized, in addition to 600 children trained by Liberian commanders who had self-demobilized in Danané. By October 2006 the Forces nouvelles claimed that no more children were associated with their forces in Bouaké and Katiola and sought assistance from UNOCI in identifying and demobilizing children in other areas under their control.⁴⁴ In August 2007 the FAFN (which under the terms of the March 2007 Ouagadougou agreement was to be merged with the national defence and

security forces, as the Forces de défense et de sécurité–Forces nouvelles) submitted a report on the implementation of the action plan which indicated that 85 children, including 27 girls, had been identified for release to UNICEF.⁴⁵

Developments

Côte d'Ivoire was among the conflicts designated by the UN Security Council for the setting up of a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on six grave violations of children's rights (including child recruitment and use) established by its Resolution 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict. The action plans by FAFN and pro-government militias for ending the use of child soldiers were the first such action plans to be negotiated by the UN under the framework established by Resolution 1612 (2005).⁴⁶

The UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict visited Côte d'Ivoire in September 2007. Although the Ouagadougou agreement made no explicit reference to children, the Special Representative obtained firm commitments from the government and non-government actors with regard to the protection of children associated with armed groups and armed forces. In particular, the government promised to create an inter-ministerial structure to co-ordinate work on these issues. The Special Representative also stressed the importance of ending the use and involvement of youths in political violence.⁴⁷

There were allegations of other serious violations of children's rights, including the trafficking of children and the use of child labour particularly in cocoa plantations.⁴⁸ In June 2007 UNICEF reported that it was working with the co-operation of the government and the Forces nouvelles, particularly along the borders, to curtail trafficking, and had intercepted 100 children.⁴⁹ Sexual violence against women and girls by members of, or persons affiliated to, government forces, armed groups and pro-government militias took place in a climate of widespread impunity.⁵⁰ There were also allegations of UN peacekeepers involved in sexual exploitation and abuse of women and girls.⁵¹

At a February 2007 ministerial meeting in Paris, Côte d'Ivoire and 58 other states endorsed the Paris Commitments to protect children from unlawful recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups and the Paris Principles and guidelines on children associated with armed forces or armed groups. The documents reaffirmed international standards and operational principles for protecting and assisting child soldiers and followed a wide-ranging global consultation jointly sponsored by the French government and UNICEF.

International standards

In June 2007 Côte d'Ivoire ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

- 1 International Crisis Group (ICG), "Côte d'Ivoire", www.crisisgroup.org.
- 2 For a more detailed account see *Child Soldiers: Global Report 2004*.
- 3 Amnesty International (AI), "Côte d'Ivoire: clashes between peacekeeping forces and civilians: lessons for the future" (AFR 31/005/2006), 19 September 2006.
- 4 Second Report of the UN Secretary-General on the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2004/697, 27 August 2004.
- 5 Fifth progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2005/398, 17 June 2005.
- 6 See, for example, Reports of the Secretary-General on the UN Operation in Cote D'Ivoire, 2004.
- 7 ICG, above note 1.
- 8 Thirteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2007/275, 14 May 2007.
- 9 AI, "Côte d'Ivoire: Crimes under international law cannot be amnestied" (AFR 31/006/2007), 4 May 2007.
- 10 Médecins Sans Frontières, "Ivory Coast: Increasing violent attacks against civilians in the former Zone of Confidence", 25 April 2007.
- 11 "Des roquettes contre la paix ivoirienne", *Le Figaro*, 30 June 2007.
- 12 See entries on Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in this volume.
- 13 See Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Youth, Poverty and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa's Regional Warriors*, March 2005; Report of the Secretary-General on ways to combat subregional and cross-border problems in West Africa, UN Doc. S/2004/200, 12 March 2004; Report of the Secretary-General on inter-mission co-operation and possible cross-border operations between the UN Mission in Sierra Leone, the UN Mission in Liberia, and the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2005/135, 2 March 2005.
- 14 UN Office for West Africa (UNOWA), *Youth Unemployment and Regional Insecurity in West Africa*, 2nd edn, August 2006, www.un.org/unowa; Report of the Secretary-General on cross-border issues in West Africa, UN Doc. S/2007/143, 13 March 2007.
- 15 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2006/835, 25 October 2006.
- 16 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, UN Doc. A/61/529-S/2006/826, 26 October 2006.

- 17 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2007/515, 30 August 2007. See also Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, "Côte d'Ivoire: The Government is committed to give children an eminent place in the peace process", press release, 7 September 2007.
- 18 HRW, above note 13.
- 19 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, UN Doc. A/59/695-S/2005/72, 9 February 2005; Coalition correspondence with Office of UN Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, March 2005.
- 20 HRW, "Côte d'Ivoire: Government Recruits Child Soldiers in Liberia", 28 October 2005.
- 21 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 15.
- 22 Reports of the Secretary-General, above notes 19 and 16.
- 23 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 16.
- 24 HRW, above note 13.
- 25 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 15.
- 26 UN Security Council, "Security Council Committee concerning Côte d'Ivoire issues list of individuals subject to measures imposed by resolution 1572 (2004)", SC/8631, UN Department of Public Information, 7 February 2006.
- 27 Reports of the Secretary-General, above notes 19 and 16.
- 28 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 16.
- 29 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 17.
- 30 See, for example, Third progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2004/962, 9 December 2004, and Fifth progress report, above note 5.
- 31 See, for example, Tenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2006/821, 17 October 2006.
- 32 Third progress report of the Secretary-General, above note 30.
- 33 Fifth progress report of the Secretary-General, above note 5.
- 34 Fourth progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2005/186, 18 March 2005.
- 35 Sixth progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2005/604, 26 September 2005.
- 36 Eleventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2006/939, 4 December 2006.
- 37 Seventh progress report of the Secretary-General on the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UN Doc. S/2006/2, 3 January 2006.
- 38 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 17.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Thirteenth progress report of the Secretary-General, above note 8.
- 41 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 15.
- 42 Child Soldiers Coalition, *Child Soldiers and Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration in West Africa*, November 2006.
- 43 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 16.
- 44 Tenth progress report of the Secretary-General, above note 31.
- 45 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 17.
- 46 Report of the Secretary-General, above note 15.
- 47 Office of the UN Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, above note 17.
- 48 "Child cocoa workers still 'exploited'", BBC News, 2 April 2007.
- 49 UNICEF, "Child trafficking in Côte d'Ivoire: efforts under way to reverse a tragic trend", press release, 14 June 2007.
- 50 Al, *Côte d'Ivoire: Targeting women – the forgotten victims of the conflict* (AFR 31/001/2007), 15 March 2007.
- 51 UN News Centre, "Côte d'Ivoire: UN, Moroccan officials meet to address allegations of sexual abuse", 23 July 2007; "Des Casques bleus suspectés d'abus sexuels en Côte d'Ivoire", *Le Figaro*, 21 July 2007.