

PUBLIC

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Fear for safety/ Death threats

4 May 2004

COTE D'IVOIRE

Amourlaye Touré, (m)] human rights defenders
Mamadou Fofana,(m)]

Amnesty International is concerned for the safety of the two human rights defenders named above. Both are members of *Mouvement Ivoirien pour les Droits de l'Homme* (MIDH), the Ivorian Movement for Human Rights and have been subjected to acts of intimidation and death threats. It is feared that the men are being targeted in an attempt to silence independent voices which call for a respect for human rights in Côte d'Ivoire.

Amourlaye Touré, the president ad interim of the MIDH recently received death threats whilst in Geneva, Switzerland, where he was attending meetings organized during the April session of the UN Commission on Human rights. Mr Touré is currently in France and will return to Abidjan, the capital of Côte d'Ivoire on 6 May. Human rights defender and member of the MIDH, Mamadou Fofana, has been forced to go into hiding following acts of intimidation against him. On 25 and 26 April, his home was visited by a group of civilians who accused him of "selling Côte d'Ivoire to foreigners" (*vendre la Côte d'ivoire aux étrangers*).

On 28 April, the MIDH published a report on human rights violations that took place in Abidjan following the excessive use of force by the security forces against unarmed peaceful demonstrators on 25 March. A few days before the demonstration, President Laurent Gbagbo issued a decree banning all marches until the 30 April 2004, and the security forces warned they would use all the means at their disposal to prevent any demonstrations from taking place.

On 25 March, demonstrators attempted to reach the city centre, but were fired upon by the security forces. In the days and nights that followed, many arrests and extrajudicial executions took place, especially in the district of Abobo. The authorities initially denied that any arrests were taking place but later acknowledged the seriousness of the situation. They claimed that "parallel forces in uniforms" were responsible for the abuses but did not provide any further details.

The UN Security Council has expressed grave concern about the events surrounding 25 March and the UN Secretary General has asked the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to take the lead in the establishment of an international commission of inquiry. The commission has compiled a report which has not yet been made public, but *Radio France Internationale* (RFI) was able to obtain a copy which denounces the "indiscriminate killing of innocent civilians and the committing of massive human rights violations" and specifies that "the march became a pretext for what turned out to be a carefully planned and executed operation by the security forces".

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In recent weeks, outspoken journalists and human rights defenders in Côte d'Ivoire have also been subjected to acts of violence. At the end of April 2004, a Franco- Canadian journalist, Guy-André Kieffer disappeared in Abidjan. He had been investigating allegations of corruption facing some members of the government. Foreign and Ivorian journalists have been threatened and held for questioning for short periods of time. The most serious incident took place in October 2003 when a *Radio France Internationale* (RFI) journalist, Jean Hélène, was shot in cold blood by an Ivorian police sergeant. The latter was sentenced to 17 years imprisonment with no remission, but Amnesty International publicly expressed concern at the military court's recognition of "*mitigating circumstances*". Since the armed uprising by the *Mouvement Patriotique de la Côte d'Ivoire* (MPCI), Patriotic Movement of the Ivory Coast in September 2002, attacks on freedom of expression and information have taken other forms, such as the jamming by the authorities of foreign radio stations, including RFI, BBC and Africa No. 1. All of this indicates that some Côte d'Ivoire government's

officials have been taking measures to prevent journalists and human rights defenders from carrying out their work, so that the security forces can commit atrocities far from prying eyes.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in French, English or your own language:

- calling upon the government to state publicly that it will take immediate steps to ensure the safety of human rights defenders Amourlaye Touré, Mamadou Fofana and their families;
- calling for an inquiry into the harassment of Amourlaye Touré and Mamadou Fofana and asking that those responsible be brought to justice;
- expressing concern that Amourlaye Touré may be at risk of human rights violations by members of the Ivorian security forces when he returns to Côte d'Ivoire on 6 May 2004;
- calling on the Ivorian authorities to give the security forces strict orders to respect human rights and protect human rights defenders;
- reminding the Ivorian authorities of the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, notably Article 3 which sets out that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person".

APPEALS TO:

President

Monsieur Laurent Gbagbo
Président de la République
Présidence de la République
BP 1354, Abidjan 01
Côte d'Ivoire

Telegram: Monsieur le Président, Présidence de la République, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire

Fax : +225 20 21 14 25

Salutation: Monsieur le Président

Minister of Security

Monsieur Martin Bléou
Ministre de la Sécurité
Bloc Ministeriel
Bvd Angoulvand
BP V121, Abidjan
Côte d'Ivoire

Telegram: Ministre de la Sécurité, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire,

Fax : +225 20 32 12 24

Salutation : Monsieur le Ministre

COPIES TO: to diplomatic representatives of Côte d'Ivoire accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 June 2004.