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Côte d'Ivoire : the militias urgently need disarming

The recent massacre of around 70 people in the region of Duékoué, in the west of Côte d'Ivoire, shows once again the need for immediate observance of the agreement concerning the disarmament of the combatants including the militias, signed on 14 May 2005 by the government of Laurent Gbagbo and the *Forces Nouvelles*, New Forces, which have controlled the north of the country since September 2002.

"This indiscriminate massacre of civilians must, under no circumstances, undermine the current disarmament process that is officially due to begin on 27 June" Amnesty International said today.

During the night of Tuesday to Wednesday, 1 June 2005, 47 people from the Guéré ethnic group (from the west of the country) were killed in the villages of Guitrozon (5km from Duékoué) and Petit Duékoué, by unidentified individuals armed with hunting rifles and knives. None of the people responsible for these acts have been caught.

These killings took place in a region under government control, located alongside the "*confidence zone*" controlled by the United Nations Côte d'Ivoire Operation (ONUCI). ONUCI immediately condemned the massacre, which it described as "*a setback for the reconciliation efforts under way for more than a month in this area and against the current dynamics of the peace process.*"

The following night (1-2 June 2005), a dozen people were shot or stabbed to death in the Belleville district, in the centre of Duékoué. It seems that this was a revenge attack against members of the Dioula ethnic group (generic name used to describe people with a Muslim name and from the north of Côte d'Ivoire or neighbouring countries).

This massacre occurred after worsening land conflicts between indigenous populations from the west of the country and non-indigenous populations who have come from other parts of Côte d'Ivoire and neighbouring countries to work on the cocoa and coffee plantations. In view of the increasing tension, a curfew was imposed on the town of Duékoué and the surrounding area at the end of May 2005.

"It is worrying that people have been killed without ONUCI or the Ivorian security forces being able to protect them, even though a curfew had been decreed in this region", Amnesty International said today.

Representatives of the two communities, indigenous and non-indigenous, have accused the

Ivorian military and United Nations “blue helmets” of “*passivity*” and “*not fulfilling their role*” of preventing or ending the violence.

“It is vital that the Ivorian security forces and the UN peace-keeping forces restore their credibility with the population by practical action and increased vigilance. In particular, they must take all necessary steps to find those responsible for these massacres and bring them to justice”, stated Amnesty International.

The organisation also calls on all national and international forces involved in the conflict to devote all their efforts to making a success of the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process, which is officially due to begin on 27 June and end on 19 August, and will involve the demobilisation of 48,000 combatants.

“With only a few months to go before the presidential elections scheduled for October 2005, it is essential that both sides are sincerely committed to disarmament in order to show that the crisis affecting Côte d’Ivoire for nearly three years can only be solved by peaceful means that respect the basic rights of all sectors of the population”, stated Amnesty International.

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