

## **The recent UN arms embargo on Côte d'Ivoire in the light of the current developments in the country**

### **Ambassador Philippe Djangoné-Bi's opening statement**

I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to share with you this afternoon on the sad situation prevailing in Côte d'Ivoire, so that you can hopefully have a more balanced view on the question. But first, let me express my heartfelt gratitude to the National Press club (DC) and all those who made this event possible, especially H.E.Mr. Daouda Diabaté, our Ambassador to the United States.

The phrasing of the topic of the press conference is "The latest UN resolution imposing an arms embargo on Côte d'Ivoire". With your permission, I would rather like to make a broader presentation on the war situation in Côte d'Ivoire, which has led to the repression by French soldiers and the arms embargo on the country imposed by the UN Security Council.

As you all know, on November 15, the Security Council, under the leadership of France, the former colonial power of Côte d'Ivoire, took a resolution imposing an immediate arms embargo on the Country and possible individual sanctions as from December 15, 2004, against parties it will deem to be blocking the implementation of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, if no notable progress is made on the way to peace.

The legal authorities of Côte d'Ivoire consider this measure as unfair and biased, although they will respect it. Besides, France's attitude in the resolution of the crisis is absolutely unacceptable, since as the former colonizer, it has vested interests in this country and has anyway become a party to the conflict. It is well known, you cannot be judge and judged.

But before commenting further on these latest developments, let us move back in the past to put them into their proper perspective and context.

In the night between September 18 and September 19, 2002, targeted attacks took place simultaneously in Abidjan, Bouaké and Korhogo, with outside assistance. Although an appropriate counter-attack by defense and security forces repelled the assailants from Abidjan, the economic capital in the south, they spread their hold on other towns from the North.

What was presented at the beginning as a simple mutiny revealed itself later on as a carefully prepared coup attempt, with huge financial, logistical and military means from outside. Evidence carefully gathered on the ground prove it.

Besides, the sophistication of the weapons used, which are not part of the national army's arsenal (Anti-Aircraft Defense, Stalin's organ, MPK Gun, etc.), the logistical means (satellite telephones, 4 wheel drive trucks with machine guns mounted on the decks), and the nationalities of some assailants (Liberians, Malians, Burkina Faso nationals and Sierra Leonans) confirm this thesis.

Today, it is estimated that most of the rebels come from the surrounding countries (70%). Heading these rebels are soldiers having got into trouble with a succession of failed coups following the successful one staged by General Guéi in December 1999. After attempting to overthrow General Guéi in September 2000, some were prosecuted and condemned, in *abstentia* for most of them, who fled to neighboring Burkina Faso. On January 7 and 8, 2001, another coup was staged against the current democratically elected government of President Laurent Gbagbo, but failed. Again, most of the military elements involved took refuge in neighboring countries. It is these deserters who came back in September 2002, this time with the help of elements from neighboring countries.

The rebels accuse the administration of President Gbagbo of being illegitimate, exclusionist and unjust. Yet, President Gbagbo was elected on the basis of a consensual constitution adopted with a majority of 86.67%. Nothing therefore justifies this brutal aggression against Côte d'Ivoire, given the important efforts and realizations accomplished by the government, notably in the political, economic, social and diplomatic sectors.

The war has been terrible with thousands of casualties (dead and injured), atrocities committed by the rebels, more than two million displaced people in the south, no proper education, medical care, justice, not administration in the north, as the riches of the country continue to be looted in this region.

Negotiations took place with the rebels to find a peaceful solution to the conflict: in Lomé, Accra and Linas-Marcoussis (near Paris, France). The Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, signed on 23 January, 2002 while recognizing the Constitution and legitimacy of the President, provides for the formation of a government of national reconciliation including opposition parties and rebel groups, headed by a Prime Minister of consensus. The Agreement also recommends a certain number of political reforms as well as the disarmament of the rebel groups upon the formation of the government of national reconciliation.

The President of the Republic and the people of Côte d'Ivoire have made a lot of sacrifices for the sake of peace: the President appointed a Prime Minister of consensus in replacement of the one from his party, he appointed ministers from the armed rebellion and opposition parties, who now constitute the majority of the cabinet.

On the whole, out of the 16 amendments envisaged by the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, 7 have been adopted, 5 are being examined by the Parliament, and 3 are awaited by the Council of Ministers.

As for the rebellion, they constantly refuse to disarm, demanding that all the political reforms be realized before they do so. It became apparent to all observers that they were using delaying tactics, so that they can require that the President resign when the constitutional dates set for the elections are reached (October 2005). But this is a sad miscalculation because the Constitution provides that in case elections cannot be organized, the current President remains in power until such elections are held and the results thereof proclaimed (article 38), so as to avoid chaos and a power vacuum.

It is in this context of "neither war, nor peace" that on September 27, 2004, the Security Council urged the rebels to start the disarmament process, without preconditions, at the latest on October 15, 2004 as provided by the Accra III Agreement (30 July, 2004). On October 13, 2004, the Heads of the European Union missions in Côte d'Ivoire also urged the rebels to start the disarmament process, without preconditions on the set date of October 15, 2004.

Despite these clear calls, the "New Forces" (armed Rebellion) categorically refused to begin the disarmament process, arguing that all the political reforms envisaged by the Linas-Marcoussis and Accra III Agreements had not been entirely implemented by the President. On October 28, 2004, the rebel leader declared in a press conference held in the rebel stronghold that their forces will no longer disarm and that they are ready for war. So, the situation of "no peace, no war" that prevailed in the country for more than two years now, abruptly worsened after this deadline.

The rebels rejected not only any idea of disarmament, but decided to defy the international Community by expressing their intention to resume war, and started, for that purpose, to recruit troops of mercenaries and child soldiers.

In addition, for the two years that they have been occupying the northern part of our territory, the rebels opened sales offices of diamond in neighboring countries. They also plunder and sell coffee, cocoa and cotton harvests in these same countries. What could be done? Was the Côte d'Ivoire to stop functioning? Today, the effects of the war have become unbearable both in Côte d'Ivoire and in the sub-region.

One also recalls the attacks perpetrated against the offices of the Central Bank of West African Countries (BCEAO) of Bouaké, Korhogo and Man. By these attacks, our rebellion distinguishes itself from other rebellions, by its will to break all the economic springs of the West African community.

Faced with this impasse and with these persistent threats of this rebellion, the regular army began preparations in order to face any attack. The rebels estimated that these preparations were a provocation and the two forces entered

in confrontation. On Saturdays November 6, 2004, the defense and security forces of Côte d'Ivoire were conducting their last military air strike on rebel targets in Bouaké when the French military authorities announced that a bomb fell on their position causing the death of eight French soldiers and one American civilian.

Following this unfortunate accident (collateral damage), which we deeply regret, whereas no independent investigation had been conducted, the French Army resorted to reprisal actions by the destruction on the ground of all the war planes and helicopters of our army. They also destroyed two civilian planes of the presidential fleet. Some planes were destroyed with axes. The French also attacked the presidential palaces (in Abidjan and Yamoussoukro).

Informed, in the evening, by the French media, of these damages caused in cold blood, the populations' anger mounted and they massively took to the streets to express their frustration. Surprisingly, the French forces fired with live bullets from helicopters or tanks on the unarmed protesters, causing a number of casualties (64 dead and + 1300 injured, cf. attached photographs).

It is difficult to understand the reasons behind this excessive use of force by the French, with regard to UN Resolution 1528. These forces normally should come in support of the ONUCI forces. However, the French forces received their orders directly from their highest authorities, which is, from our understanding, in contradiction with the provisions of the said resolution of the Security Council.

The highest authorities of Côte d'Ivoire expressed their sincere regrets, since the accident caused loss of life. While paying tribute to their sacrifice and wishing a speedy recovery to those injured, we request that an independent commission of inquiry be set up to investigate and establish the facts and responsibilities. France now speaks on nine French soldiers and no American civilian, hence the need for an independent inquiry both for this accident and the killings that ensued as retaliatory measures. For Côte d'Ivoire, France is a friendly country and our forces of defense and security, at the time of their operations on Bouaké, did not have any reason to intentionally attack French soldiers.

As I said earlier on, on November 15, 2004, the Security Council adopted a resolution imposing an arms embargo on the country and, in the short term, from December 15, 2004, sanctions against the actors of the Ivorian crisis who would not implement the Linas-Marcoussis (January 24, 2003) and Accra III (July 30, 2004) peace Agreements. We take note.

However, I would like to make a few remarks, after this important decision taken by the Security Council.

In fact, once again, the Security Council has adopted a resolution on Côte d'Ivoire, initiated and presented by the French delegation, based exclusively on the information provided by France which, as you know, is now a party to the conflict.

In addition, the rules of procedures of the Council did not make it possible for the Ivorian delegation to bring to this body the necessary information likely to enable it to have a more balanced view on the question.

Besides, France has the de facto exclusivity of the initiative of statements and resolutions on Côte d'Ivoire. However, since this country left its attitude of neutrality in the crisis, this prerogative should have been withdrawn from it. It is well known, one cannot be judge and judged. That is one reason why a reform of the Security Council is called for by many Member States of our organization so that it can adapt to the new realities and facts of today's world.

Concerning the sanctions considered, recent history has shown the limits of such measures and, with time, the true motivations which guided the main sponsor of this resolution will be known to all.

I would like to conclude by saying that my government is appalled at the silence of the UN in the face of so much brutality from the French soldiers, acting deliberately outside the command of the UN forces present in Côte d'Ivoire. We demand that these forces be placed under the umbrella of the Operation of the United Nations in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI). We demand that an independent commission of inquiry be established to investigate into all the incidents and killings since November 6, 2004.

I thank you!

*(Washington, DC, November 23, 2004)*

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Ambassador  
Permanent Representative