

## Africa News

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Cote d'Ivoire;  
Ecowas Confirms Mass Grave in West

**BYLINE:** UN Integrated Regional Information Networks

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on Monday confirmed the presence of a mass grave in Cote d'Ivoire's western village of Monoko-Zohi near Vavoua town.

In a communique, ECOWAS condemned extra-judicial executions and atrocities committed by parties to the conflict saying it was unacceptable in the sub region. The 15-member body said there would be an investigation to find the perpetrators who would in turn be punished for their crimes.

It appealed to all parties to the conflict to respect the Geneva Conventions in relation to war rights. It warned belligerents to stop violating the laws of the country and those involving civilian protection.

It also called on them to protect the populations and take appropriate measures to end crimes and violation which in long term could impact on the national unity and cohesion.

Villagers in Monoko-Zohi said that some 120 of their relatives were killed and buried in the grave after "men in uniform" invaded the village, news organisations had reported at the weekend.

Rebels of Mouvement Patriotique de Cote d'Ivoire (MPCI) had blamed government troops for the massacre and had threatened to pull out of the negotiations in Lome, Togo. The government has absolved itself from the killing in Monoko-Zohi. Conversely, the government accused the MPCI. MPCI secretary-general Guillaume Soro denied it.

Soro told IRIN from Lome on Tuesday that the group was "still engaged in finding a peaceful, political solution to the conflict".

He added that it was time for ECOWAS to take its responsibility with regards to the recent decisions by the [President Laurent] Gbagbo government, including the public call for enrolment of youth, which he says will drive the country towards a "civil war".

A national human rights group, Mouvement Ivoirien des Droits Humains (MIDH), on Monday condemned the discovery of the mass grave and asked that light be shed on the

killings. To the United Nations, MIDH asked that an international fact-finding mission be sent to Cote d'Ivoire and that culprit be prosecuted. It asked the government to seal off the site so to preserve any evidence and to commission an investigation team.

In a related development, Ivorian youth on Tuesday turned up in their droves in response to the defence ministry's call over the weekend that youth between 20 and 26 years old volunteer to join forces to fight in the west of the country.

News organisations reported that thousands of youth chanting slogans and asking for "uniforms" assembled at the defence ministry which said the youth would undergo selection tests, including running 5 km in 25 minutes before a six weeks training instead the usual three months.

"The army means discipline, we cannot send undisciplined young men to fight to the death," BBC quoted Lt-Col Jules Yao Yao as saying.

"After six weeks, they will know how to fight, but they will not necessarily go to the front. That will depend on the situation," he said. The government is looking for some 3,000 youth volunteers.

Meanwhile, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) plans to evacuate thousands of refugees from Cote d'Ivoire's western area once security and logistical arrangements can be worked out, UNHCR spokesman Kris Janowski told a media briefing in Geneva on Tuesday.

He, however, pointed out that the agency's efforts to draw up an evacuation plan suffered a setback on Sunday [8 December] when government forces destroyed a UNHCR river ferry in the south of the country by detonating three grenades wired to the boat.

The ferry, which had been used in the past for repatriation of Liberians across the Cavaly river, Prolo to Pelebo in Liberia could have been used to evacuate people to Liberia, he noted.

"We were told that the ferry was destroyed to prevent potential future intrusion of rebels into Cote d'Ivoire," Janowski said. "UNHCR is very concerned about the incident which affects the ability of the UN agencies to operate in a climate of safety and respect for the UN property guaranteed by various international agreements," he added.

An estimated 45,000 refugees were living in western Cote d'Ivoire in the area bordering Liberia before UNHCR lost contact with them more than a week ago. There were also 2,500 refugees in the commercial capital, Abidjan who had either lost their makeshift accommodation in the city shantytowns which had been razed by the government or fear for their general safety, he added.

Janowski said people continued to flee from Cote d'Ivoire to neighbouring countries, mostly to Liberia. Over the past 10 days some 32,000 people had crossed into Liberia.

The number include 22,000 Liberian forced to return be the fighting and 10,000 Ivorian nationals. He noted that the proportion of Ivorians fleeing to Liberia had increased in recent days, adding that an estimated 4,000 people had also fled to Guinea.

The International Office for Migration (IOM) on Sunday re-established contact with four staff members who had fled Cote d'Ivoire's western town of Danane, near the Liberian border, IOM's spokesperson Niurka Pineiro said on Tuesday.

According the Pineiro, all the four, who were working for the organisation's United States resettlement Programme (USRP) were now safely in Liberia and Guinea after having fled Danane on foot almost two weeks ago.

On 28 November two new rebel groups - Ivorian Popular Movement of the Great West (MPIGO) and the Movement for Peace and Justice (MPJ) captured the western towns of Man and Danane. In the successive two days they had captured Toulepleu and Touba in the same region, but government forces launched massive attacks to dislodge them particularly from Man and Toulepleu.

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