

International Crisis Group

Côte d'Ivoire: Halfway Measures Will Not Suffice

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OVERVIEW

The Ivorian people will not elect a new president, as they should have done, on 30 October 2005. The government of national reconciliation has neither reconciled anyone nor prepared credible elections for the end of President Laurent Gbagbo's constitutional mandate. Gbagbo had stated his intention to stay in office until election of a successor. Opposition parties and the Forces Nouvelles (FN) ex-rebels, still armed, demanded his departure, and the confrontation seemed headed toward bloody street battles. The African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council's 6 October adoption of a post-30 October transition plan (even when combined with the national team's morale-building qualification for football's World Cup) is not enough to break the impasse. Unless the UN Security Council on 13 October strengthens the AU measures and mandates an ambitious twelve-month rescue plan, disaster remains on the horizon.

When war broke out in Liberia in December 1989, no one guessed the window of opportunity for durable peace would take sixteen years -- until this month's historic elections -- to open. The risk that Côte d'Ivoire could follow the same self-destructive path has not been enough to bring the principal actors in the conflict to their senses. President Gbagbo's supporters and sworn enemies appear ready to destroy Abidjan in their quest for power. The political class has distilled the rhetoric of hate to the point where many believe the "other", defined by ethnic group, regional origin or political affiliation, is a mortal enemy. Inter-communal tensions have already played out with machetes in the West. Internal divisions in the security forces, muted until now, could soon turn violent.

Even a reinforced, combined peacekeeping force from the UN (UNOCI) and the French "Licorne" contingent would be hard pressed to protect civilians if the explosion comes. It is time to impose a collective rescue strategy in Côte d'Ivoire.

On the basis of the recommendations of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its own deliberations, the AU has left Gbagbo as head of state for a maximum of one year from 31 October, and required him to name a new prime minister acceptable to all parties that signed the 2003 Linas-Marcoussis Accords and to create an International Working Group (IWG) more responsive to the peace process than prior follow-up mechanisms. The UN Security Council now needs to adopt the following reinforcing measures to give peace a last chance:

- Announce that the existing institutions -- the presidency, government of national reconciliation, prime minister, National Assembly and Constitutional Council -- will be dissolved by 31 October 2006 and that if there has been no presidential election, the Security Council in consultation with the AU will appoint a new government composed exclusively of members of civil society who will have participated in a National Forum and not been part of the preceding government.
- Extend the mandate of the UN High Representative for Elections, furnish all human and material resources necessary to organise credible elections, and charge him with overseeing the application of all laws recently promulgated regarding nationality, naturalisation and the identification of the population by a mixed team of Ivorian civil servants and international experts.
- Apply individual sanctions authorised by Resolution 1572 (2004) to ensure that all signatories respect the 6 April 2005 Pretoria Accord and the 29 June declaration,

- including FN disarmament and dismantling of loyalist militias.
- Publish the report of the International Commission of Inquiry on human rights violations since 2002 and encourage the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to monitor the situation closely for purposes of deciding whether to open a formal investigation and, as part of that exercise, conduct a mission to Côte d'Ivoire before the end of 2005.
 - Organise by 1 February 2006 the National Forum conceived by the AU Peace and Security Council as a platform for the free expression of Ivorian civil society, rather than another meeting of the old, failed political class, and encourage donors to provide political, financial and logistical support.

This plan may appear overly ambitious and difficult to apply, but halfway measures have not worked. It was partly the lack of international audacity that cost millions of lives in Rwanda, the Congo and Sudan in the past decade. ECOWAS states realise that their own citizens would be targeted in new Côte d'Ivoire violence, which could start a mass movement of refugees and returnees. If the UN Security Council does not use the twelve-month transition to impose shock therapy, the machetes and AK-47s will soon be put to use again.

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