

**SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
OUTREACH AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE**



PRESS CLIPPINGS

Enclosed are clippings of local and international press on the Special Court and related issues obtained by the Outreach and Public Affairs Office

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Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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Charles Taylor, Liberia and Sierra Leone

When the guilty verdict in the trial of Charles Taylor was announced on April 26th, traffic did not stop in Freetown, capital of Sierra Leone, where the former Liberian president is deemed to have abetted war crimes in a brutal civil war. People did not gather in the streets, nor did they crowd around their Chinese-made radios. A photographer scouring the city centre, looking for people watching the event on television, found barely a handful.

The views of Aminata Morkai, a 31-year-old selling clothes at a stall opposite the Libyan embassy, were typical. "The trial is not important for me, because it's none of my business," she said. "It has passed. We need to forget about it. We don't want to think of the past any more."

Several reasons made the verdict feel irrelevant to the people in whose name the prosecution was carried out. For one thing, the Special Court for Sierra Leone, a UN-backed tribunal set up to try those "most responsible" for the country's bloody civil war (1991-2002), heard its earlier cases in Freetown. But the Taylor trial was relocated to The Hague for reasons of security. Public consciousness

faded. Moreover, it is ten years since the war ended and six since Mr Taylor was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Special Court. With a general election scheduled for November and concern rising over the cost of living, many people have more pressing concerns.

The court's organisers presented the tribunal as a joint venture between the government of Sierra Leone and international bodies but foreigners dominated proceedings, not least because Sierra Leone's sclerotic bureaucracy could not have coped. For many Sierra Leoneans, the court seemed alien. After the verdict the information minister mused that the money the case cost might have been better spent renovating a local university.

Liberians felt a bit differently. Many of them had called Mr Taylor "Papay". Even if they disliked him, some felt bad about seeing their head of state facing prosecution, especially in a foreign court. On Tubman Boulevard in Monrovia, Liberia's capital, the blackboard that chalks up breaking news declared, "The conspirators v Taylor." Under the conspirators it listed the UN, George Bush, Tony Blair and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Aljazeera

Friday, 16 November 2012

Ghosts of civil war haunt Sierra Leone polls

Groups accused of deploying child soldiers, mass rapes and other war crimes are running in Saturday's election.

Travis Lupick



Freetown, Sierra Leone – Bashiru Conteh was one of thousands of child soldiers unwillingly drafted into a civil war that saw more than 50,000 people killed. It was 15 years ago and he was just a boy when he was forced to fight, but Conteh said that he remembers everything.

Ahead of elections on November 17, the young man recalled encounters “in the bush” with Eldred Collins, one of ten candidates running for president of Sierra Leone. During the war, Collins was the spokesperson for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the most notorious of several rebel groups that terrorized much of the country from 1991 to 2002.

The thought of Collins takes his mind back to the war, Conteh said.

“I see him with the red beret on his head, I see him in an open jeep, I see him with a couple of RUF fighters behind him, with their RPGs and their guns,” he recounted. “I still see him punishing fighters who refused to take commands. I see him giving orders to fighters to carry out attacks, and even commit atrocities like amputations, the burning of houses, and killings.”

Conteh, who lost his mother and father in the conflict, argued that the political manifestation of the RUF – the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUF) – has no place in the country’s fragile democracy. “It rekindles the bitterness, the pain, the agony that people went through during the 11 years of civil war,” he said.

From fighters to politicians

The political transformation of the RUF began in 1999, with the signing of the Lomé Peace Accord. That agreement between the government of Sierra Leone and the RUF granted the latter a role in the country’s transitional government. At the same time, it created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

The TRC’s final report catalogs crimes committed by every side in the conflict, but singles out the RUF as “responsible for the largest number of human rights violations.” Detailed are the RUF’s roles in “indiscriminate amputations, abductions of women and children, recruitment of children as combatants, rape, sexual slavery, cannibalism, gratuitous killings and wanton destruction of villages and towns.”

The RUF was also heavily involved in the illicit trade of so-called “blood diamonds,” largely through the support of former Liberian president Charles Taylor. On April 26, 2012, Taylor was found guilty at The Hague of aiding and abetting war crimes in Sierra Leone. The court’s verdict states that Taylor sold diamonds and purchased weapons on behalf of the RUF, and that his support for the rebel group contributed to the longevity and brutality of the war in Sierra Leone.



Eldred Collins, presidential candidate for the Revolutionary United Front Party and a former spokesperson for the RUF during the war which left some 50,000 dead [Travis Lupick/Al Jazeera]

At an upscale hotel in Freetown, Eldred Collins maintained that the RUF fought the war with the specific objective of bringing democracy to Sierra Leone. That that goal was achieved, he said.

“When the truth comes out, you will know that most of the things that have been said about the RUF are wrong,” he said. “It is because of the RUF that we have democratic parties in Sierra Leone.”

Collins argued that the two leading parties – the incumbent All People’s Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP), which led the country from 2002 to 2007 – have been slow to bring development and have failed the country’s youth. If the RUF were elected, Collins continued, it would bring free education for children and training for youth in sciences and technology.

“2012, we are going full-swing into the election,” he emphasised. “We want power. We want to give the people what they need.”

'Most parties have blood on their hands'

The RUF remains on the fringe of Sierra Leone politics. It failed to see a single representative elected in both the 2002 and 2007 elections, and this year, is expected to garner no more than three percent of the

vote. However, 2012 has seen the RUF expand party infrastructure across the country. According to statistics supplied by the organizations headquarters in Freetown, the RUF now boasts an estimated 8,000 members – the most since its inception. It's also opened party offices in 10 of 14 districts, and is running 56 candidates for seats in the country's 124-member parliament, plus 81 aspirants for local councillorships.

Where the RUF could see its voice amplified is in the situation of a runoff election, which many expect will be required after the vote on November 17. If neither the APC or SLPP secures an absolute majority, the RUF's percentage of the vote could go far in helping one of the larger parties secure the 55 percent of the electorate needed for a victory.

Despite the RUF's atrocities committed during the war, most Sierra Leoneans are content to see them take part in elections.

Kabba Williams was captured by the RUF in 1991, when he was just six years old. He said he has little doubt that Collins committed war crimes. Yet in the next breath, Williams mounted a strong defense for Collins right to participate in elections.

"Most of these parties have blood on their hands," he explained. "But the reason why we are encouraging them to participate is because we have talked about the need to forgive and forget. To make the peace more sustainable, let's involve them."

Amputations

At a community outside Freetown called Amputee Village, three men with "long sleeve" cuts below their elbows told the sorts of stories for which the war in Sierra Leone is so well known. They recounted being organised into lines and, one by one, subjected to crude amputations. Two said that they walked through forest with severed limbs that went without medical attention for several days.

The mention of the RUF led Mohamed Tarawallie to shift his gaze to the ground. "We're not ready for them to exist again in this country," he said. Tawarwallie has never met Collins, but recalled hearing his voice on the radio during the conflict. "Of course we all remember him," he said.



An RUF is unlikely to win a significant number of votes in Saturday's election [Travis Lupnick/Al Jazeera]

Yet Tarawallie and other victims of the RUF's amputations defended the political party's right to take part in elections. The men said that they didn't want to see the RUF have a say in government, but argued that the former rebel group's inclusion is crucial to maintaining peace in Sierra Leone.

Memunatu Pratt is head of peace and conflict studies at Sierra Leone's Fourah Bay College. She emphasized the significance of the "backdrop of social malaise" from which the RUF emerged.

“The history of the RUF is a history that came about as the result of economic, social, and political decadence of the state of Sierra Leone, right from 1967 up to 1991,” she explained. “There was a need for change to the extent that Sierra Leoneans were saying that if they did not fight for their country, there would never be change.”

Pratt recalled that one of the key factors that gave rise to the RUF was the exclusion of groups from politics. She argued that the same mistake should not be made twice.

“It is very difficult for people to associate with the RUF because of the trauma of the war and the legacy of the violence,” Pratt said. “But Most Sierra Leoneans you talk to are happy that the RUF is participating.” She added that support for the RUF is so low that it’s unlikely they’ll ever play a significant role in the politics of the country.

However, Pratt called attention to the possible role of a “third force” in the election. If a second round of voting is required for the APC or SLPP to win the presidency, the support of minority parties will be very important, she noted. And with the RUF strongest in the eastern districts of Kono and Kailahun, Collins’ support would be especially useful to the APC, which is based in the west of the country.

“The RUF could be valuable to the APC,” she said. “But I don’t think they have the numbers.”

Collins was more optimistic. “We know, come one day, we will take power through the ballot box,” he said.

BBC

Friday, 16 November 2012

Hague war court acquits Croat Generals Gotovina and Markac

A war crimes court in The Hague has overturned the convictions of two Croatian generals charged with atrocities against Serbs in the 1990s.

Appeals judges at the tribunal for the former Yugoslavia ordered the release of Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markac.

In 2011 they were sentenced to 24 years and 18 years respectively over the killing of ethnic Serbs in an offensive to retake Croatia's Krajina region.

Friday's ruling was welcomed by Croatia, but condemned in Serbia.

In Croatia's capital Zagreb, thousands of people - many dressed as war veterans - burst into applause after the verdict was announced.

In Serbia, Deputy Prime Minister Rasim Ljajic condemned the ruling, saying the tribunal had "lost all its credibility", Serbia's Beta news agency reported.
'Selective justice'

On Friday, presiding Judge Theodor Meron said the court had entered "a verdict of acquittal" for Gen Gotovina and Gen Markac, both aged 57.

Last years the two men were convicted of murder, persecution and plunder.

Judges at the time ruled that they were part of a criminal conspiracy led by late Croatian President Franjo Tudjman to "permanently and forcibly remove" the Serb civilian population from Krajina.

But on Friday, Judge Meron said there had been no such conspiracy.

The appeals judges also said the 2011 trial chamber had "erred in finding that artillery attacks" ordered by Gen Gotovina and Gen Markac on Krajina towns "were unlawful".

The two former generals have always argued that they did not deliberately attacked civilians.

Court officials also said prosecutors would not appeal against the ruling, describing it as "the final judgement".

Neither defendant showed emotion in court, but their supporters in the gallery hugged each other and clapped after the verdict.

In Zagreb's main square, thousands of people - who watched the proceedings live on giant TV - burst into applause.

"Our generals are heroes because they risked their lives to save our country and liberate the people," student Andjela Anic, 26, was quoted as saying by the AFP.

On Thursday, candle-lit vigils were held in Zagreb and Catholic churches around the country as war veterans and bishops asked supporters to "raise their voices against injustice".

In Belgrade, Mr Ljajic said the appeals decision was "proof of selective justice which is worse than any injustice".

He added that it was "a move backwards and the public opinion of the tribunal (in Serbia) will be worse than it already is".

Gen Gotovina and Gen Markac were last year convicted over the Croatian offensive in Krajina, which had been under Serbian control since the start of the war in 1991.

About 200,000 ethnic Serbs were driven from Croatia in 1995 and at least 150 were killed in a military offensive in Krajina known as Operation Storm.

The operation to retake the region was ordered by Mr Tudjman. The Croatian leader died in 1999 while under investigation by The Hague tribunal.

The aftermath of the war is a key issue both in Croatia's domestic politics and its external relations.

The European Union made it clear to former Yugoslav republics that they will not be considered for membership until war criminals were brought to justice.

Croatia is expected to join the EU in July 2013.

Tanzania Daily News (Dar es Salaam)

Monday, 19 November 2012

Tanzania: UN Tribunal Departure From Arusha - 'Keep Change,' but Brace for Changes

Opinion

Arusha — FOR business people and petty traders operating in Arusha, the presence of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal in the city has been a nearly two-decade long windfall.

The UN-ICTR opened chambers here some 17 years ago in the aftermath of the genocide, which took place in Rwanda in 1994 when nearly one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus were butchered in cold blood. Tanzania was chosen by the United Nations to host the resulting trials.

Established in Arusha back in 1995, the court employed people from all over the world and these made the world-go-round here with fat salaries and larger-than-life remunerations that they spent generously in the town.

With the 'UN' employees having plenty of money to throw into the local circulation, traders were amply catered for, customer-wise and even more cherished with the 'Keep the change,' tag at the end of each of their transactions.

However, after dillydallying with the concept, now the UN-ICTR is seriously in the process of winding up its activities here and before knowing it, local traders who were used with 'Keep-thechange,' are realizing that it is high time they 'braced for changes!

"Business is slumping nowadays and this is because most of our customers used to be employees of the United Nations' International Criminal Tribunal and many of them have started to leave town ... "

... Arusha has always basked in the UN-ICTR glory, especially the money that the court used to pump into the town's circulation but at the moment, markets, hotels and shops have started to feel the pinch of the Tribunal's exit," says Ms Pamela James, who works for Manda Supermarket.

Ms Gladys Mosses, who works for the Via- Via (The Meeting Place), located just next to the AICC, where the Tribunal is based, said most of the joint's customers especially during lunch hours, have been the court's staff. However, of late the patrons have been disappearing because the UN-ICTR is reportedly winding up.

"Arusha is likely to suffer the court's absence in a bad way, employment vacancies will disappear, money will melt into thin air and a number of local joints in town are likely to fold up in the process," she stated. Mr Obeid Mollel, who works at the New Safari Hotel was of the view that Arusha's economy shot up when the UN-ICTR moved here in 1995.

From that time, even the town face started to change, more buildings came up, the number of financial institutions also increased along with modern hotels and other high class business outlets.

"Even the airport became busy but now the court is closing shop, many shops will also close, money circulation will drop and many houses that were previously rented as premium properties will remain empty and vacant," he pointed out.

But it is the vegetable sellers, who are likely to feel the pinch of UN-ICTR's vacuum. "If there are people, who will be affected by the ICTR exit then it is us the traders operating from the main Central Market in town," said Mr Augustino Vavai, a grocer at the Central Market.

"The tribunal people used to flock here to buy vegetables, fruits and other foodstuff at whatever prices displayed without bargaining but always leaving large tips as well as telling us to 'keep the change!'" he added. But then, almost everybody here in Arusha will eventually suffer once the last person closes the court's door and switches off its lights.

After 'keeping change,' during transaction it is time to 'brace for change,' in the transition. The fact that the African Court on People and Human Rights, the East African Community and the mushrooming institutes of higher learning are taking roots here is still no consolation to the good old 'keep the change,' tribunal days.

The Standard (Zimbabwe)

Sunday, 18 November 2012

Zimbabwe: UN Forces Govt to Hunt Down Rwandan Fugitive

Hague — THREATS of possible United Nations Security Council action against Zimbabwe forced the government to launch a manhunt for Protais Mpiranya, a former top Rwandan official accused of taking part in the 1994 genocide, it has emerged.

After years of denial, Zimbabwe recently admitted that Mpiranya, who is wanted by the United Nations' International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), was most likely hiding in the country.

Failure to co-operate with the tribunal could lead to the UN imposing sanctions and other measures against the country.

US ambassador-at-large of the Office of Global Criminal Justice, Stephen Rapp told The Standard at the on-going 11th session of the Assembly of State Parties of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on Friday that the ICTR prosecutor was forced to report Zimbabwe to the UN Security Council in June this year due to non-co-operation by the government.

Rapp, who is also in charge of the United States "Rewards for Justice" programme, which is offering a US\$5 million incentive for the arrest of Mpiranya, said Zimbabwe was obliged to co-operate with the Rwandan tribunal since it was a creation of the UN.

"Since the prosecutor [Rwandan tribunal] complained to the security council in June, Zimbabwean authorities are now working with the tribunal. I hope full co-operation will be established soon," he said.

Rapp said the prosecutor had "strong" information that Mpiranya has been hiding in Zimbabwe for many years now.

"These leads need to be developed to determine whether he is still there," he said.

Rapp warned that Mpiranya was a security threat as the genocide suspect had a destabilising factor wherever he went.

He said although not much was being said about him, as commander of the Presidential Guard in 1994, he played a key role in the massacre of an estimated 800 000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus.

"It is the presidential guard that began the killing on the morning of April 7 [1994], including that of moderate Hutu President Juvénal Habyarimana and others actors (including President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi)," Rapp said.

He said this was the catalyst to the genocide that left nearly a million dead. Rapp said Mpiranya was later involved in civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo. "He is the kind of individual that continues, to cause problems if he gets an opportunity, so it is important that he be brought to justice," said the US ambassador.

He challenged Zimbabweans to take up the issue of the US\$5 million reward seriously, adding they stood to financially benefit from the arrest of the fugitive.

Police recently said Mpiranya could be using aliases Theophase Mahuku or James Kakule.

The Star

Friday, 17 November 2012

Kenya: ICC Witnesses Deported From Europe

Two witnesses of the International Criminal Court (ICC) who had been placed under protective custody in Europe have been deported back to Kenya by their host country.

It is not clear which of the four ICC accused the witnesses were to testify against over their role in the 2007-08 post-election violence, but both the deportees are residents of the Rift Valley.



Photo: Capital FM

Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta has vowed he will not be distracted in his quest for the presidency by charges he's facing at the International Criminal Court (file photo).

The four suspects facing crimes against humanity are Eldoret North MP William Ruto, journalist Joshua arap Sang, Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta and former head of Civil Service Francis Muthaura.

The two witnesses were deported back to Nairobi last week under unclear circumstances. One was returned along with his wife and three children.

One of the deportees refused to discuss why he was expelled by his hosts. "I am in the country at the moment as I plan what to do next," he said on the phone.

Sources indicated that the two had "misbehaved" in the countries where they were being hosted for protection. One of them reportedly fought a protection officer and "often engaged in behaviour which contravened regulations in the host country."

The ICC investigators had interrogated the two but it is not known if they were listed to appear in the cases facing the four Kenyans at The Hague. The trials are scheduled to start in mid April.

The witness deported with his family refused to be named saying it was risky for his family and that he was looking for a way to settle in the country away from his home in the Rift Valley.

He was taken out of the country two years ago. He has been demanding that the ICC give him written commitment on how long the court would continue to protect after he testified in the trial.

Human rights activist Ken Wafula has opposed to a proposal to relocate ICC witnesses from their hideouts in Europe to African countries.

"The African Union has declared that it does not support the ICC and its will be risky to have any of the people linked to the Kenya ICC cases relocated back to Africa," said Wafula recently.

Yesterday Wafula said the ICC should treat its witnesses with utmost compassion and care so that they are not exposed to danger or suffering.

"If they are treated in a way that exposes them to danger, that will undermine the ongoing cases," said Wafula who is the executive director of the Centre for Human Rights and Democracy.

The ICC has at the same time stepped up further investigations into the cases against the four Kenyans ahead of the trials.

ICC Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, who visited Kenya a couple of weeks ago, said her team was ready to proceed with the trials.

"We are not here for investigations but just to hear your views on the ongoing process," she told audiences at Kiambaa in Eldoret, Burnt Forest and in Eldoret town. Some of the speakers at the meetings questioned the ICC investigations but Bensouda said the process had already passed that stage.

However, the Star has learnt that several other people who are potential witnesses have been interrogated at a location in one of the African countries.

At least five people travelled to the African nation where they were separately questioned for more than a week.

Bensouda has applied to the court to allow her office to delay revealing the names of some of the witnesses until 30 days to the trials.

According to Bensouda, there had been a "clean-up" that resulted in the killing of several members of the Mungiki group who had information that would have helped her prosecute the case against Uhuru and Muthaura.

She says four witnesses currently under protection were privy to the planning and execution of attacks in the election violence. She argues their lives and those of their families would be endangered if their identities were revealed prematurely.

Human Rights Watch

Monday, 19 November 2012

Press Release

Côte d'Ivoire: New Spate of Abuses by Military Forces Used Torture, Inhuman Treatment in Response to Recent Security Threats

(Paris, November 19, 2012) – Côte d'Ivoire's military was responsible for widespread human rights abuses in August and early September 2012, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today. The abuses included arbitrary arrests, illegal detentions, extortion, inhuman treatment, and, in some cases, torture.

The 73-page report, “‘A Long Way from Reconciliation’: Abusive Military Crackdown in Response to Security Threats in Côte d'Ivoire,” details the brutal crackdown that followed a series of violent attacks on military installations around the country in August. The attacks were allegedly committed by militants loyal to former President Laurent Gbagbo. The resulting crackdown recalled the grave crimes committed during the 2010-2011 post-election crisis, in some cases under the same commanders previously identified as responsible for brutal abuses, Human Rights Watch found. The government of President Alassane Ouattara needs to ensure the prompt investigation and prosecution of forces who committed serious human rights abuses, including torture and inhuman treatment, in response to these security threats, Human Rights Watch said.

“The security threats to Côte d'Ivoire are real, but widespread abuses by the military will fuel – rather than end – them,” said Corinne Dufka, senior West Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. “The government should quickly show the determination to bring to account the soldiers responsible for torture, inhuman treatment, and criminality.”

The report is based on a three-week mission to Abidjan in late August and early September, during the height of the military crackdown. Human Rights Watch interviewed 39 people who had been arrested and detained after the August attacks, as well as another 14 witnesses to mass arrests, beatings, and other abuses. Human Rights Watch also spoke with drivers of commercial and passenger transport vehicles, family members of people still in detention, leaders from Ivorian civil society, government officials, representatives of humanitarian organizations, representatives of the United Nations peacekeeping mission, and diplomats in Abidjan.

The seemingly coordinated and well-organized attacks on the military installations between August and October came on the heels of earlier assaults along the Liberian-Ivorian border. In a particularly high-profile raid on August 6, attackers killed at least six military personnel and stole a substantial cache of weapons from one of the most important military bases in the country. Since April, at least 50 people, including many civilians, have been killed during these attacks, which the Ivorian government has credibly blamed on pro-Gbagbo militants intent on destabilizing the country.

Ivorian authorities have the right and the responsibility to respond to security threats in accordance with Ivorian and international law, including by arresting and prosecuting suspects, Human Rights Watch said. The government has largely given that power to the country's military, the Republican Forces. Unlike the police and gendarmerie, the military has no legal basis for overseeing arrests, interrogations, and detentions – particularly of civilians.

The authority given to the Republican Forces is of particular concern in light of the atrocities in which certain soldiers and commanders were implicated during the 2010-2011 post-election crisis and the lack of accountability for these crimes in the period since the Ouattara government took power, Human Rights Watch said.

In August, members of the Republican Forces carried out mass arbitrary arrests of perceived Gbagbo supporters almost daily in the Abidjan neighborhood of Yopougon. Without arrest warrants or individualized evidence, soldiers arbitrarily arrested young men in their homes, at neighborhood restaurants, at bars, in taxis and buses, as they walked home from church, and at traditional community celebrations. Soldiers often arrived in neighborhoods in military cargo trucks and forced 20 or more perceived pro-Gbagbo youth to board. Hundreds of young men appear to have been rounded up and detained, largely on the basis of their ethnicity and place of residence.

Those arrested were often brought to military camps, which are not lawful detention sites for civilians under Ivorian law. Human Rights Watch focused on three detention sites controlled by the Republican Forces: the Adjamé military police camp; the BAE (from the French acronym for anti-riot brigade) camp in Yopougon; and the military camp in Dabou, a town 40 kilometers west of Abidjan and the site of an attack on the military on August 15.

Human Rights Watch interviewed five victims of torture who had been detained at the Adjamé camp. They said military personnel subjected them to beatings, flogging, and other extreme forms of physical mistreatment, generally during questioning related to the location of guns or alleged suspects, or to extract a confession. Several had scars allegedly from the physical abuse. They also said that other detainees had come back to their cells with bruised faces, severe swelling, and open wounds. The detention conditions described were grossly inadequate, including severe overcrowding, near complete denial of food and water, and humiliating practices like being placed in a room with excrement all over the floor as punishment.

A former detainee at the military police camp described his mistreatment: “I was there for a week, and they questioned me every day but the last one. Each day they pulled me out and took me to another room for questioning.... ‘Where are the guns?’ ‘I don’t own a gun, I’ve never held a gun.’ Whack! They’d wrap their belt around their hand and hit me in the head, the face, the side. The metal [ring] of the belt was on the end they hit you with, [I think] to inflict the most pain.... I had a lot of wounds, from when they’d strike you just right with the metal ring.”

Although it did not reach the level of torture, Human Rights Watch likewise documented cruel and inhuman treatment at the BAE and Dabou military camps, including frequent beatings. According to victims and witnesses, soldiers from these two camps also turned their security role into a lucrative scheme. During neighborhood sweeps and mass arrests, they stole cash and valuables such as cell phones, computers, and jewelry. Detainees also said the soldiers demanded money – as much as 150,000 CFA (US\$300) in some cases – to guarantee their release. Several former detainees told Human Rights Watch that they were not even asked for their names, much less questioned. They were simply held for days in miserable conditions and then forced to pay the soldiers for their freedom.

As Côte d’Ivoire tries to move past a decade of grave crimes, these abuses demonstrate how far the country still has to go, as expressed by a former detainee at the BAE camp interviewed by Human Rights Watch: “How does the government expect reconciliation when the FRCI (Republican Forces) steal from us, treat us all as militiamen, [and] do daily mass arrests? I have nothing left now, all my money was taken or [used to pay for my release].... When people have been stripped of everything, when all we are left with is hatred ... we’re a long way from reconciliation.”

In August and September, the commander in charge of the BAE camp and the Dabou military operations was Ousmane Coulibaly, better known as “Bin Laden.” Former detainees and other people with access to the BAE camp identified Coulibaly at the camp while abuses occurred. In an October 2011 report on the post-election violence, Human Rights Watch named Coulibaly as one of the Republican Forces commanders under whose command soldiers committed acts of torture and dozens of summary executions during the final battle for Abidjan in April and May 2011. Forces under his command have previously

been implicated in serious crimes by other international organizations and the US State Department. In late September, Coulibaly was named the prefect, or regional administrator, in charge of the tense area of San Pedro.

“The recurrent crimes committed under certain commanders should serve as a stark reminder of the consequences of impunity,” Dufka said. “Military commanders who oversee abuses should no longer be untouchable, or else Côte d’Ivoire will continue to be plagued by the grave human rights violations that have marked the last decade.”

While in Abidjan, Human Rights Watch briefed the Ivorian government, including the interior and human rights ministers, on its principal findings, and followed up with a letter to the Ivorian presidency detailing the report’s main conclusions and asking for an official response. In its answers, the government stressed the gravity of the security threat and the need for solidarity with the military in the face of the repeated, violent attacks. However, authorities also promised an investigation into the abuses documented by Human Rights Watch, indicating that anyone found responsible for torture or inhuman treatment would be prosecuted.

“The Ivorian government’s promises to ensure credible and impartial investigations into human rights abuses are a positive response, but the reality is that its forces remain largely above the law,” Dufka said. “Meeting its commitment to prosecute those involved in the abusive crackdown is an essential step toward promoting reconciliation and returning to the rule of law.”