

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This report is based on the proceedings of an international experts' workshop with the theme "Challenges of Peace Implementation in Côte d'Ivoire", held at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre from 31 May to 2 June 2004.

Côte d'Ivoire, once a stable and prosperous country in a generally unstable West African region, has been in a state of civil war since a failed coup attempt in September 2002. The period of actual combat was relatively short, and the levels of destruction and casualties suffered during the crisis have been low - indeed way below that suffered in the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, with which the Ivorian crisis has been linked. However, the war has effectively split the country into two, and has threatened a major humanitarian catastrophe, including, some fear, ethnocide on the scale of Rwanda.

Partly as a result of that fear, and also because of Côte d'Ivoire's importance in the region, international reaction to events in the country has been unusually swift. Shortly after the failed coup attempt, West African leaders, acting under the auspices of ECOWAS, visited the country and pledged support to its democratically elected President, Laurent Gbagbo. France, the country's former colonial master and its chief foreign backer, reinforced its permanent military presence in the country, and deployed to separate the warring factions. ECOWAS, the West African regional organization, also sent in troops.

Known as ECOMICI, the force was deployed in addition to and in co-operation with the French Licorne operation. Negotiations spearheaded by France and fully supported by ECOWAS led to the signing, by the warring parties, of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, which outlined a peace process that would lead to the disarmament of the belligerents, the reunification of the country, and fresh elections in October 2005. In quick order, the United Nations agreed to deploy a peacekeeping mission, which has now effectively subsumed the ECOWAS forces and which is operating in close collaboration with the French forces.

Discussions around the Ivorian crisis have focused almost exclusively on the supposed internal contradictions of the Ivorian state, contradictions that became glaring after former President Bedie, who replaced the country's long-term leader,

the patrician President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, enunciated the policy of Ivoirité. It has been argued that the long-simmering grievances among the relatively impoverished, and largely politically marginalized inhabitants of Côte d'Ivoire's northern regions against the more favoured inhabitants of the south, are among the most important causes of the present crisis. The Linas-Marcoussis Agreement itself was anchored on this interpretation. But while these grievances are real, the external factors that helped launch the rebellion and have sustained it since then are equally important. To overlook them will do little to advance the peace process in the country.

Three main principles govern the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement: (1) The need to maintain the territorial integrity of Côte d'Ivoire; (2) The creation of a Government of National Reconciliation, with a new Prime Minister; and (3) The need to conduct transparent and free elections in which people would not be excluded by means of churlish legislation. Implementation of the Agreement, however, has been slow because of a lack of political will on the part of the signatories, including the government of President Gbagbo. But the Agreement itself may be too ambitious, for implicit in it is a call for a radical change of the character of the Ivorian state. It also appears to give legitimacy to rebel factions which had striven for unconstitutional change.

The misgivings about Linas-Marcoussis notwithstanding, some gains have been made in the peace process. The Gbagbo regime has expanded the government to include some members of the anti-government groups; the security of these people has been assured; amnesty laws have been passed; laws protecting migrant workers are being legislated; and military personnel, including French, ECOWAS and UN troops, have been deployed around the country to protect civilians, and to oversee a disarmament process. The humanitarian catastrophe that was feared - the fear of an ethnic cleansing campaign has not happened, although parts of the country have suffered from shortages of basic necessities. A comprehensive programme of disarmament and demobilization of combatants has been worked out, and awaits full implementation.

Yet the peace process has stalled. The anti-government Forces nouvelles, accusing the Gbagbo government of bad faith, have refused to be disarmed ahead of the elections in 2005. The government on its part claims that logistical arrangements with respect to the electoral process are hampered by the fact that the rebels are holding on to half of the country, preventing officials from gaining unimpeded access to those areas. Similarly, humanitarian assistance to some parts of the country controlled by the rebel forces has been impossible because of logistical and security reasons. There is a marked reluctance on the part of both parties to

adhere fully to the provisions of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, but there is no alternative to the full implementation of the agreement if the peace process is to go ahead. The situation of 'No-War-No-Peace' that has resulted is a volatile one, threatening to unravel the hard-won gains of the peace process. This cannot be allowed to happen.

There is a need on the part of the international community - including the UN, the AU, ECOWAS and France - to vigorously re-engage all the parties involved in the conflict to make sure that the peace process is back on track. The basic principles governing the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement need to be reiterated and urged upon all the parties. Among the most important of these principles are the inviolability of the sovereign territory of Côte d'Ivoire. Any talk of secession by the rebel-held north of the country should be condemned and discouraged; the idea is non-negotiable. Similarly, the government of President Gbagbo should reiterate and act upon the commitment to an inclusive and functioning Government of National Reconciliation.