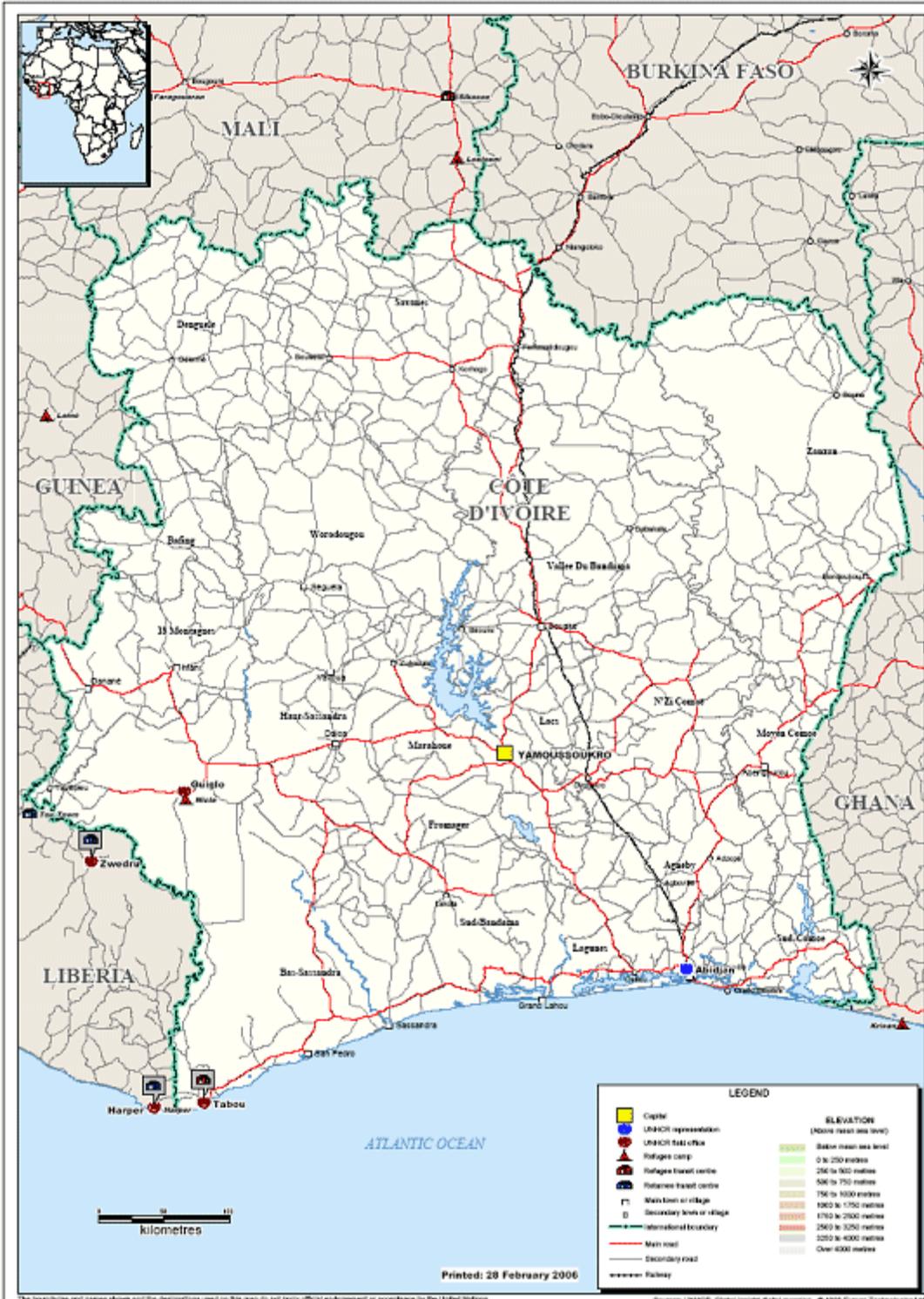9 October 2006

Côte d'Ivoire: IDPs face deepening protection crisis as political tensions rise again

With the impossibility of holding elections by 31 October as scheduled, and the unwill-ingness of politicians to unblock the deepening impasse in the peace process, Côte d'Ivoire's 750,000 IDPs are increasingly in need of protection and assistance. Tensions have been rising across the country since the key processes of disarming both rebels and militia, and identifying and registering millions of voters, have failed to make progress amid violent protests and political wrangling. While President Laurent Gbagbo recently boycotted a meeting in New York aimed at putting the peace process back on track, and told UN peacekeepers that they should leave Côte d'Ivoire, it remains unclear what will happen at the end of October when his mandate runs out. At the same time both pro-government militia and rebels have been continuing to commit serious abuses against civilians with impunity, causing ongoing low-level displacement and hampering return, particularly in the volatile west of the country where ethnic tensions and violent inter-community clashes remain rife. The humanitarian situation of IDPs and other vulnerable groups has continued to deteriorate, particularly in the west and north of the country where access to basic social services is extremely limited. In rebel-held areas many public services are virtually non-existent, although in March 2006 school exams did take place in some districts for the first time in over three years. While the Ivorian government has taken encouraging first steps towards realising its responsibilities to IDPs – for example by assigning a focal point role to the Ministry of Solidarity and War Victims and the drafting of an IDP Action Plan – few concrete results have been achieved so far. Indeed the plight of IDPs will only begin to be addressed in a meaningful way once both government and rebels demonstrate genuine commitment to advancing the peace process and addressing the root causes of Côte d'Ivoire's conflict, which goes well beyond the mere holding of elections.

Côte d'Ivoire Administrative Map

As of February 2006

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

FICSS in DOS

Printed: 28 February 2006

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"Ivoirité" a root cause of the conflict

For more than three decades after independence from France in 1960, Côte d'Ivoire was a beacon of peace and stability in West Africa. The autocratic but tactical rule of the country's first President, Felix Houphouet-Boigny, ensured religious and ethnic harmony as well as economic prosperity until after his death in 1993. Houphouet-Boigny's successor, Henri Konan Bédié, sowed the seeds of ethnic discord in 1995 when he introduced the concept of "Ivoirité", or "Ivorian-ness". This was used to deny Ivorian citizenship to his main political rival, Alassane Ouattara, and thereby exclude him from running in elections held that year. Bédié insisted that Ouattara, a Muslim from the north of the country, was actually from Burkina Faso. Since that time there have been an increasing number of attacks on people of foreign descent (HRW, August 2001). About one quarter of Côte d'Ivoire's population of 16 million are immigrants, or descended from immigrants, many from neighbouring Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana and Niger.

The start of protracted political crisis was assured when the military, under the leadership of General Robert Gueï, overthrew the elected government of Konan Bédié in the country's first ever coup d'état, staged on Christmas Eve 1999. Although the coup was ostensibly prompted by soldiers' unhappiness over pay and conditions, it soon became apparent that, like Bédié, General Gueï was also ready to incite ethnic and religious rivalries in order to remove political opposition. Continuing the theme of "Ivoirité", Gueï introduced even stricter eligibility requirements for presidential elections held in October 2000.

General Gueï was however forced to flee by a popular uprising after he fraudulently claimed that he had won these elections. This left Laurent Gbagbo as the winning candidate. But the elections were marred by violence against civilians by all sides, and by "state-sponsored human rights violations, with a clear ethnic and religious focus" (HRW, 20 December 2000). Victims of the violence were, initially, supporters of both Gbagbo's Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) and Ouattara's Rally of the Republicans (RDR), but once Gueï had fled the country the main victims were suspected members of the RDR, foreigners and Muslims (HRW, August 2001). Gbagbo, just like his predecessors, made the issue of nationality central to his political agenda.

A regional displacement crisis

President Gbagbo failed to resolve the growing ethnic and religious divisions across the country. Then in September 2002, a failed coup by disaffected soldiers – the second attempt in just over a year – marked the beginning of the worst crisis in Côte d'Ivoire's post-independence history. Hundreds of thousands of Ivorians were displaced by fighting which left the *Mouvement Patriotique pour la Côte d'Ivoire* (MPCI) rebels in control of much of the predominantly Muslim north of the country, and government forces holding the largely Christian south. At least 200,000 people were estimated to have fled the rebel-held northern town of Bouaké, and several thousand were made homeless in the economic capital Abidjan by a government demolition policy aimed at root-

ing out dissidents (UN OCHA, 15 October 2002; UNHCR, 8 October 2002). The main targets of the demolition policy were West African immigrants whom the authorities accused of supporting the rebellion, although many Ivorians as well as refugees from neighbouring countries were also displaced, creating population movements that threatened the stability of the entire region.

At the end of November 2002 two new rebel factions emerged in western Côte d'Ivoire – the *Mouvement pour la Justice et la Paix* (MJP) and the *Mouvement Populaire Ivoirienne du Grand Ouest* (MPIGO) – who said they were not linked with the MPCI rebels but were fighting to avenge the death of former junta leader, General Robert Gueï. These troops included both Liberians and Sierra Leoneans, providing a chilling "déjà vu" of the brutal civil wars that wrecked both of those countries (BBC, 30 November 2002). Fierce fighting between the rebel groups and government forces and systematic human rights abuses against civilians displaced more than one million people, including some 150,000 who fled to neighbouring countries (IRIN, 29 January 2003).

The violence, in varying degrees, has so far eluded all military and diplomatic efforts to end it – including the deployment in 2004 of a 6,000-strong UN peacekeeping mission (UNOCI) on top of an existing contingent of 4,000 French peacekeepers, and a total of three peace agreements brokered from 2003-2005. Opposition parties, including rebel leaders (united into the *Forces nouvelles*) have consistently accused President Gbagbo of not fulfilling his obligations under the peace accord.

Political tensions erupted into violence in March 2004, when at least 120 people were killed by government troops and their allied militia during an opposition march in Abidjan. A UN report blamed government security forces for indiscriminately killing innocent civilians, and for specially targeting individuals from the north of the country and immigrants from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger (IRIN, 4 May 2004). Then in November 2004 government warplanes bombed the rebel stronghold of Bouaké in an operation to take the north, killing nine French peacekeepers. The ensuing violence spread to Abidjan, and thousands of foreigners were evacuated (IRIN, 7 November 2004). The UN Security Council subsequently imposed a 13-month arms embargo on Côte d'Ivoire, later renewed until December 2006 (UN SC, 15 December 2005). There have been several further violations of the ceasefire, such as the attack in March 2005 by pro-government militia against rebel positions in the north-western town of Logouale (IRIN, 2 March 2005). Inter-ethnic clashes, particularly in the cocoa-growing western region, have continued to cause death and displacement, notably around the town of Duekoué which saw a series of massacres in May and June 2005 (HRW, 3 June 2005), and in the zone of confidence near the town of Bangolo, where the security situation deteriorated sharply in September 2006, according to UN OCHA.

The seemingly intractable political impasse deepened yet further when it became clear that elections scheduled for 30 October 2005 could not go ahead. Disarmament of both rebel forces and pro-government militia failed to get underway; the parties continued to wrangle

over key legislative reforms relating to citizenship and land tenure (although President Gbagbo did issue a decree that would permit his main rival, Alassane Outtara, to stand against him in elections); and the opposition and rebel leaders rejected South African mediation on the grounds of bias towards the government (UN SC, 26 September 2005). Disagreement too on the transition period after 30 October further fuelled tension on the ground. The UN Security Council supported African Union proposals to allow Gbagbo to remain in power for up to 12 months beyond the end of his mandate, delegating certain powers to a new and more powerful prime minister – who was finally named as Charles Konan Banny, governor of West Africa's central bank, in December 2005. After weeks of wrangling, Banny formed a transitional government that was faced with the formidable task of organising disarmament, identification and elections within just ten months (ICG, 17 May 2006).

In January 2006, pro-government militia were largely responsible for orchestrating a wave of anti-UN violence which caused several deaths and widespread damage, and resulted in the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from the west of the country and the evacuation of humanitarian agencies (IRIN, 18 January 2006). The UN Security Council subsequently imposed sanctions on three key Ivorian political figures found to constitute a "threat to peace" in the country (IRIN, 8 February 2006). While Prime Minister Banny did well to ease tensions in the wake of the violence, the clear failure of both the disarmament and identification processes ahead of elections scheduled for 31 October 2006 once again caused tensions to rise (ICG, 7 September

2006). In September, the UN confirmed that elections would not take place as scheduled, although it remained unclear what would happened when President Gbagbo's mandate expires (BBC, 21 September 2006). At the same time the government resigned (and later reformed with few changes) over a toxic waste dumping scandal in Abidjan, which led to several deaths and tens of thousands of people seeking medical treatment, exacerbating political tensions yet further (IRIN, 18 September 2006).

IDP survey in government zones

A UNFPA-funded survey, carried out by a governmental statistics institute (ENSEA) in late 2005 and published in March 2006, put the total number of IDPs in five government-held areas at around 700,000. This was later revised to 750,000 in the UN's mid-year review of the Consolidated Appeal (UN, 18 July 2006). Key findings of the survey include the fact that more than 90 per cent of IDPs live with host families, with only some 7,000 living in an established IDP camp in the western town of Guiglo. The commercial capital Abidjan hosts almost 70 per cent of IDPs included in the survey, for the most part West African immigrants or northern Ivorians, many of them living in deplorable conditions in shanty towns. Each host family has on average six IDPs living with them, putting an enormous strain on their resources (ENSEA, March 2006).

Yet the survey still does not give a full picture of internal displacement across the country, especially as it was not extended to rebel-held areas. Furthermore, the ongoing cases of new displacement combined with small-scale spontaneous return have resulted in highly complex

patterns of displacement. For example, the displaced Burkinabés and other "allogènes" (settlers) living in the Guiglo IDP camp say their plantations around the western town of Blolequin are now occupied by indigenous (or "autochtone") ethnic Gueré, who were in turn displaced from their land in the Zone of Confidence by other "allogènes" from the north. This makes the overall situation of displacement fluid and difficult to monitor effectively.

A protection crisis

Both the UN and human rights organisations have reported continuing human rights abuses against civilians, committed by government forces and their allied militia as well as *Forces Nouvelles* rebels, mostly with impunity. Abuses documented by the UN mission, UNOCI, include summary executions, disappearances and death threats, rape and sexual exploitation, human trafficking, torture, as well as interference with freedom of expression, freedom of movement and freedom of association (UN, 18 July 2006; UNOCI, February 2006). According to Human Rights Watch, government security forces routinely subject civilians – mainly nationals of neighbouring states and Ivorians from the north of the country – to extortion, robbery and physical attack, particularly at road blocks. *Forces Nouvelles* rebels are similarly guilty of extortion and harassment. The breakdown of the judicial system in the north of the country has exacerbated the problem of impunity that exists across the country (HRW, 25 May 2006).

Sexual and gender-based violence, particularly against displaced women and girls, is of major concern. Repeated dis-

placement and lack of access to education has resulted in rising levels of prostitution and domestic slavery. Sexual exploitation of displaced girls by the "impartial forces" (covering both UNOCI and French peacekeepers) has also been reported by humanitarian agencies in Côte d'Ivoire. More than one reliable source has given detailed information about the "procurement" of displaced girls for sex by peacekeeping troops, including inside temporary IDP centres (Interviews, Côte d'Ivoire, September 2005).

Due to the ongoing inflammation of ethnic and religious tensions, displaced Ivorians have been particularly vulnerable to abuse at the hands of armed fighters as well as local communities, particularly in the cocoa-rich western region. There, UNOCI's Human Rights Division reports almost constant inter-community clashes and displacements, particularly where IDPs no longer have access to their plantations. More than 4,000 people were displaced in June 2006 by ethnic disputes near the town of Bangolo in the zone of confidence (UN SC, 17 July 2006). Militant youth groups continue to be particularly active between Guiglo and Blolequin, towards the Liberian border, which saw an upsurge of violent attacks in September 2006, according to UN OCHA in Cote d'Ivoire.

Important protection issues have also been raised by the premature return of IDPs to their areas of residence in the western region. Although landowners have in some cases encouraged the return of IDPs to prepare for the start of the agricultural season, local populations have reportedly been alarmed and frightened by the return of "non-native" set-

tlers. Likewise, some IDPs are unwilling to return before disarmament takes place. In some cases where return has been encouraged, for example by the UN's pilot return project in the village of Fengolo, returnees have found their plantations occupied, resulting in dangerous inter-community tensions and urgent calls for local peace and reconciliation work (Interviews, Fengolo, 23 September 2005).

Humanitarian situation deteriorates further

Inter-ethnic violence and crime caused the humanitarian situation in the west of the country, particularly within the zone of confidence, to deteriorate yet further in mid-2006. The UN reports that while internal displacement continues, IDP return has been impeded by poor security conditions and the absence of public social services and utilities in areas of return. Meanwhile the overall level of poverty continues to grow (UN, 18 July 2006).

In the north and west of the country basic social services are particularly inadequate if not non-existent. The main issues for concern include the lack of potable water, food insecurity, lack of access to health services and lack of access to education. Public infrastructure in the rebel-held north has deteriorated to the point that the region is at severe risk of epidemics caused by water-borne diseases, according to the UN (IRIN, 29 September 2006). An estimated 60 per cent of the general population has no access to basic healthcare facilities, according to UNICEF (IRIN, 5 September 2006). Malnutrition rates remain high, increasing to a high of 15 per cent in the northern region in late 2005 (UN, 18

November 2005). Poor nutrition and disease monitoring, and reduced immunisation coverage has contributed to a serious increase in child and infant mortality rates (UNICEF, 27 March 2006). Curable diseases have been on the increase, while the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate has reached at least 7 per cent – the highest in West Africa – which may increase further in the event of renewed population displacements (UN, 18 November 2005).

In rebel-held areas, many schools have not been functioning since the outbreak of the crisis in 2002, not least because large numbers of teachers (and other civil servants) remain displaced in major towns in the south. The UN estimated in 2005 that more than 700,000 Ivorian children, mostly girls, had been denied access to primary education since 2002 due to a lack of teachers and worsening living conditions (UN SC, 26 September 2005). This situation began to be addressed in February 2006, when the government announced a plan to allow more than 90,000 students in rebel-held territory to sit key exams for the first time in three years (UN, 18 July 2006; IRIN, 16 February 2006).

In and around the economic capital Abidjan, as many as 500,000 IDPs (according to the March 2006 IDP survey) are living an extremely precarious existence, many of them in shanty towns housing West African immigrants as well as Ivorians of predominantly northern ethnic groups. In the "Boribana" shanty town bordering the lagoon in the north of the city, more than 30,000 people (with an unknown number of IDPs among them) are crammed into a maze of squalid shelters separated by streams of open sewage. Families live with an

average of ten to a room. According to residents, some of whom have lived in the shanty town all their lives, the situation was bad enough before the crisis in 2002 but became much worse afterwards (Interviews, Boribana, 20 September 2005). Some estimates indicate that the overall population of Abidjan has grown by up to one million since the conflict began in 2002, making a total of nearly four million – completely overwhelming social and health services (IRIN, 5 September 2006).

With the destruction of many shanty towns in Abidjan by government forces and their allied militia in 2002-2003, the arrival of new IDPs added to the burden of making ends meet, while Boribana itself was only narrowly saved from destruction by the advocacy efforts principally of Save the Children (Sweden). Protection concerns remain high, with shanty town dwellers particularly vulnerable to abuse and targeting as political scapegoats during times of crisis. While Save the Children clearly focuses on child protection activities in Boribana and other shanty towns, primarily through developing the capacity of local social workers and supporting child protection committees in various activities, it is the only NGO active in these urban areas. Following some immediate albeit ad hoc emergency assistance by various agencies in the aftermath of shanty town destruction in 2002 and 2003, the longer term humanitarian needs of the urban displaced in areas like Boribana have been completely overlooked.

Constrained response

Since the start of Côte d'Ivoire's civil conflict in September 2002, the state response to the situation of internal dis-

placement in the country has been hampered by the fact that at both the policy and operational levels there is little knowledge or experience in tackling humanitarian crises in general. While several government ministries have worked in varying degrees on issues related to displaced persons – including the Ministry of Solidarity and War Victims, the Ministry of National Reconciliation and Institutional Relations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Reconstruction and Reintegration – the lack of a focal point at the central level has greatly hampered OCHA-led efforts to put in place a coordinated IDP response structure. By mid-2006, the Ministry of Solidarity and War Victims officially took the lead role on IDP issues, and drafted an action plan for IDP return which was discussed with international humanitarian agencies at the end of August 2006. While this may be a heartening first step, such a plan is still a long way from being implemented.

At the international level, UN response to the humanitarian crisis in Côte d'Ivoire is headed by the Humanitarian Coordinator, who is also the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, and is supported by UN OCHA based in Abidjan and other strategic locations. A key pillar of coordination is the inter-agency humanitarian coordination committee (IAHCC), consisting of numerous UN agencies, the Red Cross movement, IOM and international NGOs.

In the past year, a certain measure of progress has been made in terms of IDP protection and assistance by the international humanitarian community in Côte d'Ivoire. The UNFPA-funded IDP survey, carried out in five government pri-

ority zones, fills an important information gap and may serve as a basis for improved response to IDPs' protection and assistance needs (ENSEA, March 2006). Various protection fora now exist, with varying levels of focus on IDPs. OCHA's Protection Network, developed in July 2005, has been an important advocate for IDP protection and assistance in line with the UN Guiding Principles, and has been coordinating the development of an inter-agency IDP strategy (OCHA-CI, 11 July 2006). The more recently created IDP Protection Cluster – under the leadership of UNHCR – is intended to bring greater accountability and predictability to overall IDP response, in line with global reform giving UNHCR sectoral responsibility for IDP protection, camp management and emergency shelter. So far, one of its main activities has been to develop a monitoring system to collect information on IDPs who wish to return to their areas of origin. Small-scale return of IDPs had already been facilitated to a number of locations in the west of the country on the basis of the UN Guiding Principles, mainly by international NGOs, including measures on social cohesion and reconciliation (UN, 18 July 2006). However, there still appears to be some scepticism about the implementation of the "cluster approach" – particularly by international NGOs in Côte d'Ivoire – some of whom see it as further encroachment on their humanitarian space.

Various constraints have hampered the response of international agencies to the needs of IDPs in Côte d'Ivoire. The lack of information about IDPs' numbers, needs and locations has been a fundamental obstacle to response, one which the UNFPA-funded evaluation should help to alleviate although it was only carried out in five areas in the government-held south of the country (ENSEA, March 2006). Humanitarian access has also been limited to varying degrees by the endemic insecurity in some areas of the country. Following orchestrated attacks against UN offices in various parts of Côte d'Ivoire in January 2006, which caused widespread destruction and forced the evacuation of hundreds of peacekeepers from the western town of Guiglo as well as most humanitarian agencies, IDPs and other vulnerable populations were left without assistance for several weeks (UN News, 26 January 2006; UN OCHA, 9 February 2006). Likewise, following the resumption of hostilities in November 2004, many humanitarian agencies were forced to suspend operations and personnel were temporarily evacuated. Agencies have at various times been harassed, blocked in their movements, or deliberately targeted with violence. Furthermore, the poor state of roads, particularly in the rainy season, has made access to remote areas in the north and west of the country practically impossible, according to WFP.

Another major constraint has been the acute lack of funding for humanitarian programmes, largely as a result of the belligerence of the parties to the Ivorian conflict and the lack of tangible progress in the peace process. A UN Consolidated Appeal (CAP) 2006 for Côte d'Ivoire was launched in November 2005, requesting just over $40.5 million in order to respond to the humanitarian needs of more than 3.5 million vulnerable people, including some 500,000 IDPs (as estimated at the time). According to the UN's financial tracking service at the end of June 2006, only 31 per cent of the requested amount had been received,

with the education, health and water/sanitation sectors particularly underfunded (the latter with 0 per cent funding). In July 2006, the UN carried out a mid-year review of the CAP, reiterating the primary goal of providing adequate protection and support to IDPs as well as relief assistance to vulnerable populations including host communities (UN, 18 July 2006). The chronic funding shortfall resulted in some immediate funds being allocated to IDP and refugee programmes in western Côte d'Ivoire from the new UN central emergency response fund, or CERF, in March 2006 (IRIN, 14 March 2006). The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Jan Egeland, who manages the CERF, allocated a further \$3million to Côte d'Ivoire in August 2006 (ERC, 17 August 2006).

Indeed, Jan Egeland's visit to Côte d'Ivoire in February 2006 helped to focus international attention on the humanitarian situation in the country, albeit briefly. Condemning the anti-UN violence in the country, Mr. Egeland said that "the humanitarians are hanging on by their fingernails in many areas due to decreasing humanitarian space" and that "international support is desperately needed if we are going to continue to help the Ivorian people" (UN OCHA, 17 February 2006).

High level advocacy on the situation of IDPs was also undertaken by Walter Kälin, the Representative of the Secretary-General on the Human Rights of IDPs, following a visit to the country in April 2006. Describing the situation in Côte d'Ivoire as "a protection crisis in terms of the human rights of the internally displaced", Kälin called on the authorities and humanitarian organisations to draft without further delay a comprehensive strategy to address the challenges of internal displacement in the country as well as a detailed plan of action to improve the current situation of the internally displaced. He also requested the donor community to support a long term strategy, which is the only option for durable solutions to the internal displacement crisis. Kälin further recommended that a law providing for indemnities be adopted as soon as possible (OHCHR, 25 April 2006).

Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's country profile of the situation of internal displacement in Côte d'Ivoire. The full country profile is available online [here](#) *.*

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Note: All documents used in this profile summary are directly accessible on the List of Sources page of the Côte d'Ivoire country page.

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.

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