

**United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Valerie Amos
Statement to the Press on Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia mission
New York, 7 April 2011**

I have just returned from a deeply troubling visit to Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia.

Over the weekend in Liberia I visited a transit site for some of the newly arrived refugees from Côte d'Ivoire in Grand Gedeh County on the border.

This past Monday and Tuesday, I traveled to both Duékoué and Man in the west of Côte d'Ivoire and saw for myself the terrible impact that the violence which is still taking place in the country is having on ordinary people.

In Duékoué, I saw evidence of what must have been terrible violence. Burned and destroyed buildings, looting, and destruction. I saw a site where more than 200 people were taken from Carrefour, after the part of the city in which they lived was attacked and destroyed.

People are immensely traumatised. They have witnessed terrible violence, and many have been directly targeted.

Women told me stories of witnessing their husbands being executed. Hundreds of children have been separated from their parents, and women and girls have allegedly been kidnapped.

I spoke to women who had hidden in a swamp for three days, hiding from militias.

I heard claims there are hundreds if not thousands of people still hiding in the forests. I also heard claims that militias are hunting people with dogs.

Around 40,000 people have found refuge at the Catholic mission in Duékoué, which is being protected by UN peacekeepers.

Some of them walked 200 km or more through the bush to reach relative safety there.

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They are ordinary people who have fled some of the worst violence seen anywhere in recent years, and are now too afraid to leave the overcrowded compound, which I saw, where water and food are running out.

Despite the terrible conditions they are living in now, they are still grateful because they have some security – although militias are getting into the camps and I heard several reports of rape and other abuse.

Across the border in Liberia where over 120,000 Ivorians have fled, people were glad to be alive, but sad and fearful about what was happening in their country.

Some had walked for days in search of safety, fleeing their homes with almost nothing. Many are women and children, who ran from actual or potential violence. It was especially sad to meet the children, who have been through such an ordeal.

The Government of Liberia and the Liberian people deserve much credit for the welcome they have given the refugees. An overwhelming majority of them are staying in host communities, and some families have taken in dozens of refugees, sharing their homes and their supplies.

Liberian authorities, UN agencies and our partner NGOs are doing their utmost to ensure that the response is adequate. But we still have a long way to go. With more money, we can deliver more food, provide shelter, offer better medical treatment to those who are sick, and much more.

And I am concerned that when the rainy season starts, which is not too far away, getting the aid in is going to be even more difficult than it is now because there are serious logistical and transportation problems. We have only 26 percent of the money we need. We must not let Liberia down.

The underlying problems behind what has happened in Côte d'Ivoire are not new. Côte d'Ivoire and especially the west of the country have seen violence for many years now.

However the events of the last weeks are a wakeup call to the international community that if we are serious about preserving the hard-won peace and stability that have prevailed in West Africa in recent years, we must address what is happening now.

There must be no impunity for the perpetrators of these terrible crimes.

While we don't yet know the full extent of the atrocities that have been carried out, they clearly add up to extremely serious human rights violations.

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Investigations, including a UN investigation, in Duékoué have already started. But I heard reports that there may have been other similar incidents elsewhere in west and central Côte d'Ivoire.

A sustained process of facilitating reconciliation is going to be needed throughout the country, and that needs to start now.

And humanitarian aid needs to be provided now. To alleviate the worst suffering; to provide protection for people; and to help reduce the tensions which will only escalate as food and other basic essentials run short.

Some food, water and sanitation are already being provided, but not enough. Aid agencies are stepping up their operations, where security conditions allow.

I am also extremely concerned about the situation in Abidjan. Hundreds of thousands of people have left their homes, seeking safer areas. People who have remained are trapped in their homes by the fighting that has raged on around them for over a week.

Aid workers have largely been unable to move as well.

I will be working in the days ahead to make sure more aid workers go into the areas where they can and where they are needed throughout the country, so that they have the right supplies they need to do their essential work.

We will be making a new appeal in the days ahead. I hope the international community will respond quickly and favourably.

The important thing to remember here is it is ordinary people who are caught up in this violence. What they told me over and over again is they want is a safe and stable Côte d'Ivoire, so they can go on with their lives.

All parties to the conflict need to ensure that this happens.

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