



## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS TO THE PRESS CONFERENCE

**By YJ Choi, SRSG, UNOCI**

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As the post electoral situation in Côte d'Ivoire is, to our great regret, deteriorating into a crisis, confusion has risen regarding the role of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). Today, I would like to clarify this role.

As it stands now, UNOCI is focusing on two fundamental aspect of its mandate: the certification of elections and the maintenance of peace, which includes the protection of civilians and the Golf Hotel.

My certification role covers the safeguarding of the result of the elections; let me repeat, "safeguarding the result of the elections." This aspect was made public more than one and a half years ago in my press conference on 27 May 2009. In this occasion a brochure explaining the terms of reference of my certification was widely distributed, containing this aspect. With a view to avoiding any controversy or contest, this principle of certification was explained in my letter dated 2 June 2009 addressed to the Ivorian leaders, including President Gbagbo. In my briefing to the Security Council on 28 September 2010, I also reemphasized this certification principle of safeguarding the result of the elections:

*"I intend to safeguard the results of the elections with commitment, honour and determination. I will ensure that the results are respected, the winner being in fact the person who wins the election".*

How do we safeguard the result of elections, in other words, the will of the people? On this score, the role of UNOCI has been somewhat misconstrued by both camps: one camp wrongly believes that UNOCI is by choice refusing to help it with military force; the other camp equally wrongly says that UNOCI is helping the other camp militarily. Both camps are mistaken. UNOCI has been and will continue to remain impartial in all aspects, including the militarily one.

Within this perspective, UNOCI explained as early as 13 December to the RHDP organizers of the marches on 16 and 17 December the incompatibility between UNOCI's support of this idea and UNOCI's mandate. On 15 December the United Nations Secretary-General issued a press statement expressing, among others, his reservation regarding this idea, asking the Ivorian actors to "*refrain from any actions that could, accidentally or deliberately, provoke violence.*"

In the meantime, with a view to avoiding any misunderstanding, I conveyed UNOCI's position to President Gbagbo's camp: "UNOCI will remain impartial and no UNOCI armed elements would be leaving the premises of the Golf Hotel with the marchers." This assurance was given to President Gbagbo's camp on no less than three occasions, in the evening of 14 December, during the night of the same day, and at around noon of 15 December.

Despite my assurances, President Gbagbo's camp suddenly began a negative press campaign against UNOCI from 1:00 pm on 15 December. It issued a press statement announcing that "UNOCI has conspired to support the RHDP marches." This statement was not issued by accident or mistake. Neither was it a onetime event.

A decision to deliberately begin distorting UNOCI's position was made deep inside President Gbagbo's camp. This decision was the mother of all the ensuing anti-UNOCI campaign actions that still continue. Most of the time, they use press statements that "revealed" this or that UNOCI action or position, which were not founded on facts. Why? The reason was made known to us three days later on 18 December: President Gbagbo's camp needed those pre-planned untruthful cases to ask for the departure of UNOCI and Licorne.

The clashes between the RHDP marchers and the military forces of President Gbagbo's camp on 16 December and their aftermath resulted in numerous casualties. Our tentative estimates count at least 50 deaths, 200 injured and 470 arbitrarily arrested and detained. Many cases of disappearances have also come to light. UNOCI is collecting information and examining the circumstances of these cases. Those who have committed these acts shall be held accountable.

As from 15 December, President Gbagbo's camp began to increase hostile acts against the international community, including the diplomatic corps, the Impartial Forces, and UNOCI.

I am not in a position to describe the nature of difficulties that other entities suffer. I would like to express my solidarity towards them as a fellow sufferer. However, I would like to share with you a few cases of hostile acts of President Gbagbo's camp towards UNOCI.

Since 16 December, President Gbagbo's camp began reinforcing the checkpoints established at the access road to the Golf Hotel. It began blocking UNOCI's vehicles, including an UNOCI ambulance carrying medical personnel. Moreover, the checkpoints have begun, on and off, denying access to food and water supply trucks to the Golf Hotel, depriving civilians and blue helmets of water, food and medicines.

During the night of 17-18 December, one of our patrol convoys was followed by a civilian car carrying six military uniformed young men. They fired at our patrol vehicle as it returned to UNOCI HQ around 1:00 am. They continued to fire at our sentry along the wall, who fired back. They fled.

Since 18 December, President Gbagbo's camp began sending armed young men to the domiciles of some UN staff, knocking at the door and asking them their departure date or entering their residence under the pretext of looking for weapons. Their preferred time for such visits so far has been during the night.

Such serious acts are a clear sign of lack of moderation that is essential in the exercise of power.

UN staff members are blocked and harassed. But most of the essential staff keep sleeping or coming to the office to do their job. UNOCI is carrying out its military and police patrols across the country. Our patrols are intended to monitor, observe and dissuade acts of violence and human rights violations. Our rules of engagement allow us to fire only when we are fired at. In the performance of their duties, UNOCI's military and police are increasingly placing themselves in harm's way since 15 December.

I would like to pay tribute to UNOCI staff, civilian, military and police and the Licorne forces, for their courage under duress and for their excellent work at the service of the people of Côte d'Ivoire.

Indeed, it takes a great deal of bad faith to describe their service and their military impartiality as taking side with one of the belligerents and contributing to violence.

However, all these acts will not deter UNOCI from doing its job as we remember one of Winston Churchill's maxims: "if you are going through hell, just keep going."

UNOCI shall keep going, doing its job.

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