



Summary of press conference of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary- General for Côte d'Ivoire

(Abidjan, 20 December 2010)

UNOCI WILL CONTINUE TO WORK TO SERVE IVORIANS, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE Y.J. CHOI STRESSES

UNOCI will continue to do its work despite the hindrances and obstructions, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Côte d'Ivoire, Y.J. Choi, said on Monday in Côte d'Ivoire during a press conference on the mandate of the Mission.

«When you are going through hell, you keep going», he added, quoting Winston Churchill, to stress that one should never give up if faced with difficulties when you are working for a noble cause like peace.

After expressing regret over the current crisis resulting from the deterioration in the post-electoral situation, Mr. Choi highlighted the inaccurate interpretation by both parties of UNOCI's role regarding the organisation of marches by the *Rassemblement des Houphouetistes pour la démocratie et la Paix* (RHDP).

« One party believes wrongly that UNOCI had deliberately refused to provide it with military support. The other camp also wrongly claims that UNOCI had secretly provided military support to the opposing camp,» explained the head of Mission, who insisted that «UNOCI has been and will remain impartial in all aspects, including militarily».

To this end, the Special Representative also revealed that assurances were given to President Gbagbo's camp with regard to the Mission's impartiality concerning the marches. «UNOCI will remain impartial and no armed UNOCI element will leave Golf Hotel with the marchers, » Mr. Choi reiterated. «However, despite my assurances, President Gbagbo's camp suddenly started a negative press campaign against UNOCI on 15 December at 1p.m, » he said.

According to the Chief of UNOCI, the deliberate misinformation regarding UNOCI's position was the start of a concerted anti-UNOCI campaign which continues to date. To illustrate the hostile actions towards the international community, including the diplomatic corps, the Impartial Forces and UNOCI, the Special Representative cited among other things, reinforcement of roadblocks set up by the Defence and Security Forces (FDS) on the road leading to the Golf Hotel, refusing passage to trucks carrying provisions, water and food.

Such action, explained Mr. Choi, had deprived civilians and troops working at the hotel of water, food and medicines. He also recalled the attack against a patrol and UNOCI headquarters on the night of 17 to 18 December by assailants wearing military uniform, who fled when the guard responded.

In this regard, UNOCI's chief added that since 18 December 2010, President Gbagbo's camp had started sending armed young men to the homes of personnel of the United Nations who knock on their doors and ask them their date of departure or enter their residences under the pretext of looking for arms.

Such serious acts are a clear sign of lack of moderation in the exercise of power said Mr. Choi, who recalled the rules of engagement of the Mission, which allows peacekeepers to fire their weapons only when they are fired on. In this regard, he paid tribute to UNOCI's civilian, military and police personnel and the Force Licorne for their courage when faced with such difficulties and the excellent work that they do to serve Ivorians.

«Indeed, it takes a great deal of bad faith to describe this service and the impartiality of UNOCI's military as taking sides with one of the belligerents and a contribution to violence », he said.

Asked about the existence of a « mass grave » near Abidjan, the Special Representative said that UNOCI had received the same information and it will keep trying to go to the site in question despite attempts by the defence and security forces to block its patrols.

Responding to a question on the extension and reinforcement of UNOCI's mandate, the Special Representative said he had faith in the wisdom of the Security Council, the highest organ of United Nations, which is in charge of deciding such issues.

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