

Summary of the UNOCI weekly press conference

(Abidjan, 30 December 2010)

UNOCI PREVENTED FROM LOOKING INTO MASS-GRAVE ALLEGATIONS

A team from the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) was prevented, for the second time running, from conducting an inquiry in N'Dotre, just outside Abidjan, into allegations that bodies had been dumped in the locality, the head of UNOCI's Human Rights Division, Simon Munzu, said on Thursday.

"On Tuesday 28 December, the mission of inquiry was stopped and prevented from continuing by elements of the security forces in N'Dotre and we were forced to come back to Abidjan without being able to complete our mission," Mr. Munzu said at UNOCI's weekly press conference.

The UNOCI team only saw a building where, according to information received, the bodies in question, said to number between 60 and 80, were reportedly placed, according to Mr. Munzu, who said he regretted that "we continue to be refused access".

He said UNOCI should be able to investigate these allegations so that it can say, in the end, whether they are true or false since national and international opinion would supposedly be more convinced by UNOCI's observations than by repeated denials on state television by President Laurent Gbagbo's Interior Minister.

Giving an overview of the human rights situation during the week, Mr. Munzu said there had been a sharp reduction in rights violations in Abidjan compared to the week of 16 to 23 December.

Over the past week, six deaths, three disappearances, 20 abductions or arrests and 11 cases of persons being wounded were registered, Mr. Munzu said, adding that these figures related to cases that UNOCI was able to verify and confirm. "That does not mean that those were the only cases noted during the week," he added. According to Mr. Munzu, the reduction was due to a lessening of political tension.

With regard to the situation of women and children, he stated that so far UNOCI had not registered any abuses that could be termed gender-based violations.

This is a relief since “very often women are subjected to abuses of all types in such circumstances, » said the head of the Human Rights Division. In this regard, he highlighted preventive measures taken by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNOCI. “We planned for 41 centres for medical, psycho-social or legal assistance based in 19 localities countrywide, » he said. « Thus far, we have not had any need to use these centres because we have not registered any specific cases in which women were targeted.»

With regard to the situation of children, Mr. Munzu said the sole case was that of an 11-year-old boy shot in the leg by a stray bullet in the Attécoubé neighbourhood on Wednesday 29 December. “He was first given medical attention in UNOCI’s hospital before being transferred to a better equipped clinic,” Mr. Munzu disclosed. “His life is not in danger.”

In order to improve the protection of the population, Mr. Munzu announced the setting up of a call centre that is open around the clock and operated by 27 UNOCI staff members, in order to reinforce an existing hotline. “It was necessary to increase our capacity to take care of the calls that were pouring in from all over the town of Abidjan,” the Human Rights chief said.

Asked about accusations by a section of the press of a fatal shooting by Blue Helmets on patrol in the Abidjan neighbourhood of Abobo, mission spokesman Hamadoun Touré rejected the claims. “The patrol had been surrounded by a hostile crowd; the Blue Helmets began a discussion and it’s then that they heard shots coming from a nearby building,” he said. “They then fired shots in the air so as to be able to pass and they returned safe and sound to the base. Once again, the patrol did not shoot anyone,” he stressed, adding that the peacekeepers had received the support of the Ivorian Defence and Security Forces, namely the CECOS, a special crime-fighting unit, and the Republican Guard.

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