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United Nations Operation in
Côte d'Ivoire

Summary of UNOCI weekly press conference *(Abidjan, 24 March 2011)*

POST-ELECTORAL VIOLENCE CLAIMS NEW VICTIMS, SAYS UNOCI

“The total number of deaths since mid-December 2010 is now more than 462,” the deputy director of the Human Rights Division, Guillaume Ngefa announced in Abidjan on Thursday during the weekly press conference of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) in Seboko,

Giving an update of the human rights situation in the country, Mr. Ngefa said that the violence perpetrated in one week against the civilian population in certain neighbourhoods in the north of Abidjan had resulted in 52 deaths, including five children and seven women, as well as dozens of injured.

He said that Abobo had been bombarded with rockets by elements of the Defence and Security Forces from the commando camp in Abobo, as well as from nearby neighbourhoods like Angré and Plateau Dokoui. According to the deputy chief of Human Rights the rockets had killed 19 people on the night of the 17 to 18 March 2011. “The FDS, supported by young militias, invaded Adjamé, Attécoubé, Williamsville and Yopougon, firing and launching grenades indiscriminately on civilians they suspected of being pro-Ouattara,” said Mr. Ngefa.

He also said that Akekoi village, considered to be a pro-Gbagbo bastion in Abobo with the majority of its resident being of the Attié ethnic group, was attacked by armed youths on board a 4x4 vehicle. “At least one civilian was killed during the attack,” he said, adding that isolated cases of post-electoral violence had also been reported in Sinfra and Agboville.

“People in Abobo, Williamsville, Yopougon and other neighbourhoods in Abidjan continue to leave in huge numbers because of the fighting and the lack of access to food and medicines,” said Mr. Ngefa, reminding FDS officials, elements of the “Commando invisible” and other actors in the post-electoral crisis that systematic attacks against civilians could constitute crimes against humanity.

“In accordance with its mandate to protect civilians and within the limits of its capacity, UNOCI will continue to provide support to the population, through its dissuasive patrols, medical assistance to victims, as well as monitoring, documenting and conducting inquiries into human rights violations and abuse in an effort to fight against impunity,” he insisted.

Asked about the “statistics war” with regard to the number of deaths, Mr. Ngefa explained a human rights methodology which allows for the reporting of verified facts rather than rumours. In this regard, he said that due to the crisis, UNOCI had set up a 24-hour call centre which helps it to gather allegations of human rights violations and reports by politicians and human rights organisations. “We have a responsibility to confront these allegations by going on the ground to verify them, » added the deputy chief of the Human Rights Division. “In order to count the number of deaths,” he said “we must know the identity of the person, his age, the place where the victim was killed and the place where the body of the person was left as well as contacts. All this is necessary to avoid any repetition of cases,” he said, reaffirming that the 462 deaths had been verified.

Earlier, the Spokesman of the Mission, Hamadoun Touré gave an update of the military, humanitarian and social activities of UNOCI’s force. “UNOCI carried out 1,114 ground and air patrols in Abidjan during the past week,” he said.

Regarding humanitarian operations, UNOCI’s contingents had provided free medical care for 1,228 Ivorian patients and distributed 22,100 litres of potable water, representing an increase of 100% in the medical care provided and 10% in the amount of potable water supplied.

During the press conference, Mr. Touré also expressed UNOCI’s regret at the absence of some of the Ivorian newspapers at kiosks for the second time this month. “UNOCI urges all the parties concerned to create an atmosphere favourable to the work of journalists so that people can fully enjoy their right to diverse information,” he said.

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