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PRESS RELEASE

UNOCI CHIEF RECEIVES KINGS AND TRADITIONAL LEADERS

Abidjan, 31 May 2011....The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Côte d'Ivoire, Y.J. Choi, on Tuesday, 31 May 2011, received a delegation of the High Council of Kings and Traditional Chiefs of Côte d'Ivoire, led by His Majesty, Agnini Bilé II, King of Djablin, who came to express their recognition and gratitude to the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) for "having saved democracy in the country".

The secretary-general and spokesman of the Council, Nanan Dodo Ndepo Didas, paid tribute to the head of UNOCI, whom he congratulated and praised for his patience, endurance, dedication and courage, "in the face of all sorts of difficulties which emerged around the second round of the Ivorian presidential election".

"Despite all the pressure from different sides, you stood firm and the victory of the ballot boxes, which was that of the people, saved democracy in Côte d'Ivoire," he said. Recalling the many actions for development taken by UNOCI, especially the provision of logistical support which allowed the kings and traditional chiefs to meet one another, the spokesman outlined the many training seminars organised for members of the Council.

For his part, the Special Representative said that Côte d'Ivoire was able to come out of the crisis thanks to the devotion and work of the Ivorian people. He said that the future challenges were great, especially with regard to security, national reconciliation and relaunching the economy, as well as organising the legislative elections. He reiterated UNOCI's support, saying "UNOCI is ready to work with you to meet these challenges".

On the issue of security, particularly in Abidjan and the west, UNOCI's Force Commander, General Gnakoudé Béréna, appealed to the kings and traditional chiefs to play their part by sensitising people on the importance of handing in their weapons to the relevant authorities, including UNOCI. "Security is everybody's business and the insecurity in Abidjan and the west is due to the fact that a lot of weapons are in the

possession of people who should not have them,” explained General Béréna, asking Mr. Choi’s visitors to help ensure that the number of arms in people’s possession be significantly reduced.

On the same subject, the director of the UNOCI’s Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) Division, Sophie Da Camara, stressed the important role of the kings and traditional chiefs can play in the return to civilian life of militias. “We are counting on your support to encourage militias members to come out of hiding and return to civilian life,” she said.

At the end of the meeting, participants unanimously expressed their wish to work together for a return to lasting peace in Côte d’Ivoire.

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