

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

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31 July 2014

CIV104929.FE

Côte d'Ivoire: Treatment of members of the Bété ethnicity by the authorities; treatment of members of the Ivorian Popular Front (Front populaire ivoirien, FPI), including their family (December 2013-July 2014)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Treatment of Members of the Bété Ethnicity by the Authorities

No information on the treatment of members of the Bété ethnicity, of which former president Laurent Gbagbo is a member, could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. For information on the Bété ethnicity and how members were treated by authorities prior to July 2013, please refer to Response to Information Request CIV104515.

2. Treatment of FPI Members and Their Family

2.1 General Treatment

For further details on the 2010 post-election violence that took place in Côte d'Ivoire and the subsequent treatment of members of the FPI, Laurent Gbagbo's party, please consult Response to Information Request CIV104688.

According to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2013*, published by the United States Department of State, the opposition parties in Côte d'Ivoire were able to organize their activities without interference by the authorities, although some parties complained about the security force's intimidating presence at rallies (US 27 Feb. 2014, 15). In February 2013, the police reportedly dispersed a rally of the youth wing of the FPI and detained eight people for a few hours under the pretext that the rally was unauthorized (ibid.). According to Freedom House, since the end of the violence, negotiations for reconciliation between the FPI and President Alassane Ouattara's party, the Rally of the Republicans (Rassemblement des républicains, RDR), have stagnated (Freedom House 2014). Corroborating information could not be found by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.2 Exile of FPI Members

Country Reports 2013 states that, according to the United Nations (UN), in September 2013, approximately 77,400 Ivoirians who had left Côte d'Ivoire because of post-electoral violence in 2010 remained in nearby countries (US 27 Feb. 2014, 12-13). *Country Reports 2013* states in particular that "several loyalists to former president Gbagbo, some with pending criminal charges, remained in exile" (ibid., 13). *Country Reports 2013* states however that two "prominent" Laurent Gbagbo supporters returned to the country in September 2013, without incident, but the source does not identify them (ibid.). According to the UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), in January 2014, the former Ministers of Communications and Defence, as well as the former Abidjan port authority chief, all of them facing arrest warrants, had [UN

English version] "recently returned from exile without being taken into custody" (UN 30 Jan. 2014). According to IRIN, the Minister of the Interior stated in January 2014 that [UN English version] "not everyone" targeted by an arrest warrant will be tried upon their return to the country (ibid.).

2.3 Prosecution and Detentions

Sources state that supporters of former president Gbagbo have been disproportionately arrested and detained for the actions committed in the post-electoral crisis that shook the country in 2010-2011, compared with the supporters of the current president, Ouattara (ibid. 30 June 2014; *Le Monde* 24 Mar. 2014; Human Rights Watch Jan. 2014, 1). According to Human Rights Watch,

[Human Rights Watch English version]

[w]hile Ivorian authorities have investigated and charged numerous supporters of former president Laurent Gbagbo for their role in the post-election violence, there has been a near complete absence of accountability for serious crimes committed by President Ouattara's forces (ibid.).

According to some sources, approximately 150 leaders of the Gbagbo regime were charged following the post-electoral violence (ibid.; *La Croix* 15 June 2014). Human Rights Watch states that, according to the UN, in July 2013, only 3 of the 207 investigations opened relate to [Human Rights Watch English version] "perpetrators from pro-Ouattara forces" (Jan. 2014, 2).

In February 2014, *Country Reports 2013* stated that former president Gbagbo remained in detention at the International Criminal Court (ICC) (US 27 Feb. 2014, 17). An article in the newspaper *Le Monde* states that, on 22 March 2014, the ICC incarcerated Charles Blé Goudé, described as an important associate of the Gbagbo regime (*Le Monde* 24 Mar. 2014). The ICC also issued an arrest warrant against Simone Gbagbo, Laurent Gbagbo's wife (Human Rights Watch Jan. 2014, 3; US 27 Feb. 2014, 17). However, the Ivorian authorities announced that she would first be tried in Côte d'Ivoire (ibid.).

According to *Country Reports 2013*,

[s]ome political parties and local human rights groups claimed that members of the opposition FPI party-detained on charges including economic crimes, armed robbery, looting, and embezzlement-were political prisoners, especially when charges for actions committed during the post-electoral crisis (ibid., 9).

According to *Country Reports 2013*, "[c]onditions for high-profile prisoners associated with the former Gbagbo government were better than for other detainees, but were still substandard" (ibid., 3-4). These detainees had limited access to legal assistance; some of them complained about imprisonment alongside "common" detainees and feared for their safety (ibid., 4). According to Human Rights Watch,

[Human Rights Watch English version]

[m]ilitary trials against several key military leaders under Gbagbo were set to start in late November [2013]. At this writing [published in January 2014], civilian courts had yet to begin trials for post-election crimes, meaning that most pro-Gbagbo defendants have languished in pre-trial detention for two and a half years (Jan. 2014, 2-3).

According to IRIN, to assist with reconciliation efforts, President Ouattara ordered, in January 2014, the temporary release of 24 suspects after being detained for more than 2 years (UN 30 Jan. 2014). IRIN states that

[UN English version]

[t]he majority of those on trial for murder, economic crimes, kidnapping and other serious offences are former senior army officers and top politicians close to deposed president Laurent Gbagbo (ibid.).

IRIN also states that [UN English version] "a dozen other detainees were freed provisionally between November 2011 and August 2013" (ibid.). Sources note that 14 pro-president Gbagbo defendants were provisionally released in August 2013 (US 27 Feb. 2014, 1; Human Rights Watch Jan. 2014, 3).

2.4 FPI Accusations Against the Authorities

Sources state that in early July 2014, Pascal Affi N'Guessan, FPI leader, accused the Ivorian government of detaining between 700 and 1,000 Laurent Gbagbo supporters (RFI 4 July 2014; *Jeune Afrique* 4 July 2014). According to *Jeune Afrique*, Pascal Affi N'Guessan explained that these supporters had been detained since the post-electoral crisis of 2010-2011 (ibid.). He stated that some of these detainees had been imprisoned in secret locations and were being [translation] "tortured" (ibid.; RFI 4 July 2014). According to Radio France internationale (RFI), [translation] "[i]t is not the first time that the FPI has reported the detention of its

supporters. But the party of former president Gbagbo has never given such a number," which was determined from surveys of the families and a review of the list of prisoners (ibid.). According to RFI, the authorities stated that these statements were [translation] "lies," and they requested evidence (ibid.).

2.5 Treatment of the Families of FPI Members

No information on the treatment of the families of FPI members during the period of this Response could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

La Croix. 15 June 2014. Laurent Larcher. "La CPI décide de juger Laurent Gbagbo." <<http://www.la-croix.com/Actualite/Monde/La-CPI-decide-de-juger-Laurent-Gbagbo-2014-06-15-1164903>> [Accessed 28 July 2014]

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact the following organizations and people were unsuccessful: Ligue ivoirienne des droits de l'homme; Mouvement ivoirien des droits humains; Professor, Université Michel de Montaigne.

Internet sites, including: Abidjan.net; Africa Confidential; Africa Research Bulletin; Africatime; Afrik.com; AllAfrica; L'aménagement linguistique dans le monde; Amnesty International; Atoo.ci; BBC; Cote-d-Ivoire.net; La Dépêche d'Abidjan; ecoi.net; Factiva; Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme; France – Cour nationale du droit d'asile; Genocide Watch Institute for War and Peace Reporting; International Crisis Group; Ligue ivoirienne des droits de l'homme; Minority Rights Group International; Notre Voie; Rumeurs d'Abidjan; United Kingdom – Home Office; United Nations – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Refworld.

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Date modified: 2014-06-11

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