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Côte d'Ivoire: Information on the "Association ivoirienne pour la défense des droits des femmes" (AIDF); date of foundation; structure of the organization; name of the presidents (current and past); role of the AIDF within the state apparatus and how it is viewed by the state and the populace (February 2006)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

The "Association ivoirienne pour la défense des droits des femmes" (AIDF) was created in 1992 through the initiative of women [translation] "struggling against the violence of which they are victims and the fight for their basic rights" (*L'inter* 23 Oct. 1999). In October 1999, the AIDF, with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), launched an intensive campaign to fight against against [translation] "all traditional practices [deemed] degrading to women" (*ibid.*).

According to the Ashoka Website, an organization fostering growth of the citizen sector through social entrepreneurship, the AIDF was founded by Constance Yaï "to bring together the activism of some three hundred advocates from a wide diversity of backgrounds" (1998). The Ashoka Website also indicated that the AIDF

[was] structured around the following axiomatic objectives: to raise public awareness of domestic violence, to function as a political lobbying group for legal reform, and to provide battered women with emotional support. Its strategy [was] threefold: first, to mobilize women into political associations with specific reformist objectives; second, to organize community discussions and training with chieftains and perpetrators of genital mutilation; third, to set up a shelter for battered women (1998).

A survey conducted by AIDF in July 1998 (*Afrol.com* n.d.) in Côte d'Ivoire found that nearly "ninety percent of interviewees had experienced violence in the home. In response to this study, AIDF collected 18,000 signatures on a petition to force the government to enact stronger domestic violence laws" (UN 21 Feb. 2006). According to UNIFEM, AIDF was also "engage[d] in activism regarding FGM [Female Genital Mutilation] and underage marriage" (*ibid.*).

The 2001 *Report on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Female Genital Cutting (FGC)* indicated that the AIDF

[w]ork[ed] with local women's committees, religious leaders and the government to raise awareness of the health issues related to the practice. It h

[eld] seminars that include[d] both women who perform[ed] the procedure and anti-FGM/FGC activists, as well as seminars to educate national and local political and administrative authorities, traditional chiefs and police officers and gendarmes on the negative consequences of this practice (US 1 June 2001).

In January 2000, Constance Yaï, president of the AIDF, was appointed Minister of Family and the Promotion of Women (ibid.). While she was Minister, Constance Yaï

used every opportunity, such as the inauguration of economic projects, to talk to women and local authorities about the negative impact on women of harmful traditional practices. The Minister also initiated a basic management training and small economic projects implementation program for excisors willing to abandon the practice (ibid.).

In July 2000, "AIDF established a national committee with members of national and international institutions in Abidjan [whose goal was] to define programs and actions to reduce social inequalities and to make recommendations on combating violence against women" (San Diego State University n.d.). In October 2000, Henriette Lagou replaced Constance Yaï as the Minister of Family, Women and Children's Affairs (AFP 28 Oct. 2000; see also San Diego State University n.d.). *Country Reports 2001* indicated that on 28 February 2001, "Constance Yaï, former minister and women's rights activist [and president of the AIDF] told Agence France Presse (AFP) that police harassed her family because she called for charges against security forces who allegedly raped several girls during the December 2000 demonstrations" (4 Mar. 2002, Sec. 1.d and Sec. 5).

Representatives of the AIDF reported that during 2003, "spousal abuse (usually wife beating) occurred frequently and often led to divorce" (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 5). In 2003, the AIDF operated a shelter for battered women, which, it was reported, received nearly 18 arrivals weekly (ibid.).

A December 2005 news article posted on the Abidjan.net Website about the desecration of the tomb of Hadja Nabintou Cissé, mother of the former prime minister Alassane Dramane Ouattara, mentioned that Korotoumou Diaby was appalled by the act, referring to her as the President of the AIDF (*Nord-Sud* 21 Dec. 2005).

No information on the role of the AIDF within the state apparatus, how it is viewed by the state and the populace nor whether Constance Yaï combined the role of AIDF President and government minister could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts made to contact the "Association ivoirienne pour la défense des droits des femmes" (AIDF) were unsuccessful.

Internet sites, including: *Africa Confidential*, Afrique-Express.com, AllAfrica.com, Amnesty International (AI), Factiva, Freedom House, Genre en Action, Human Rights Internet, Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Jeune Afrique*, Marche mondiale des

femmes, ONG Femmes actives de Côte d'Ivoire, Peace Women, ReliefWeb, S.O.S. Violences Sexuelles, World Organisation Against Torture.

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