Côte d'Ivoire: Treatment of members of the Bete ethnicity by the authorities; whether there have been arbitrary arrests of members of the Bete (2010-July 2013)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Overview

The Bete ethnicity belongs to the Krou language group, which resides in the southwestern (MRG [2008]; L'aménagement linguistique dans le monde 28 Apr. 2013) and southern-central parts of Côte d'Ivoire (ibid.). L'aménagement linguistique dans le monde, a Université de Laval Internet site presenting the linguistic situation and policies in 195 countries (L'aménagement linguistique dans le monde n.d.), indicates that the Bete represent 5.7 percent of the Côte d'Ivoire population, which has about 60 ethnicities (ibid. 28 Apr. 2013).

Côte d'Ivoire is divided between the north, populated mainly by Muslims, and the south, where primarily Christian groups live (US 20 May 2013; Genocide Watch 25 Apr. 2012), in particular, some Betes (ibid.).

2. Post-electoral Violence

Former President Laurent Gbagbo is a member of the Bete (Newstime Africa 12 Dec. 2010; Professor 8 July 2013). Alassane Ouattara is a member of the Dioula ethnic group (Newstime Africa 12 Dec. 2010; Reuters 10 May 2011). According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in general, Muslims and people belonging to the ethnic groups in the northern and central parts of the country, including the Dioulas, are presumed to be pro-Ouattara, and the Christians and members of the ethnic groups in the south and west, including the Bete, are presumed to be pro-Gbagbo (UN 15 June 2012, 16-17).
Alassane Ouattara won the November 2010 presidential election, defeating the outgoing President Laurent Gbagbo (US 19 Apr. 2013; UN 15 June 2012, 5). Gbagbo refused to recognize Ouattara as the winner (ibid.; AI Mar. 2013, 5; Côte d'Ivoire July 2012, 7). Subsequently, supporters on both sides perpetrated acts of violence that did not immediately stop after the arrest of former President Gbagbo on 11 April 2011 (AI Feb. 2013, 10; US 19 Apr. 2013; UN 15 June 2012, 6). The conflict resulted in the death of about 3,000 people (ibid.; US 19 Apr. 2013; Côte d'Ivoire July 2012).

An Amnesty International (AI) document indicates that "while the pro-Gbagbo forces targeted the Dioulas, armed elements loyal to Alassane Ouattara attacked people belonging to southern ethnic groups, including the Bete, the Dida and the Guere" (AI Mar. 2013, 6). The report also states that the violence perpetrated by the pro-Gbagbo forces was mainly in Abidjan, and the Republican Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (Forces républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire, FRCI) "killed and tortured real or presumed supporters of Laurent Gbagbo, notably in the west of the country" (ibid., 4-5).

Residents of the Yopougon district in Abidjan told the UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) that, following attacks by the FRCI in 2011, people from certain ethnic groups, particularly the Bete and Guere, had no longer safe there (UN 3 June 2011). Similarly, a report by the National Commission of Inquiry on Côte d'Ivoire (Commission nationale d'enquête de la Côte d'Ivoire, FRCI) states that some populations from the west, particularly the Bete and the Guere, had to leave Yopougon for safer places when the FRCI arrived after "threats" made by some Ouattara "supporters" (Côte d'Ivoire July 2012, 17). Furthermore, the acting chief of the Human Rights Division of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire stated that, between 11 July and 10 August 2011, there were "serious human rights violations with regard to physical assaults, cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment, as well as deprivation of property" committed by FRCI members, particularly against some Betes, in Nakiaho, located about one hundred kilometres from Daloa (UN 11 Aug. 2011).

2.1 International Criminal Court

The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant against former President Gbagbo on November 23, 2011, and he was transferred to the ICC that same month (UN 15 June 2012; AI Mar. 2013, 6; ICC n.d.). Gbagbo was charged with four counts of "crimes against humanity" for his role in the post-electoral violence (ibid.; AI Mar. 2013, 6; UN 15 June 2012). A warrant was also issued by the ICC against Simone Gbagbo, the former president's wife, for four counts of "crimes against humanity" (ICC n.d.; AI Mar. 2013, 6), but in March 2013, she had still not been transferred to the ICC (ibid.).

3. Treatment of the Bete by the Authorities (2012-July 2013)

In 8 July 2013 correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of political geography at the Université Michel de Montaigne Bordeaux 3 in France, author of several works and articles on the Ivorian crisis, wrote the following about the treatment of the Bete:

[translation]

There does not seem to be any particular discrimination against the Bete group. However, since some members of this group engaged in acts of violence during the post-electoral crisis (December 2010-April 2011), some uncertainty did emerge regarding being held to account before justice.

In addition, the President of the Ivorian Human Rights Movement (Mouvement ivoirien des droits humains, MIDH), an "apolitical and non-confessional" organization founded in October 2000 that promotes and defends human rights in Côte d'Ivoire (MIDH n.d.), wrote the following in 8 July 2013 correspondence with the Research Directorate:
In Côte d'Ivoire ... no systematic violence is directed at any ethnicity. However, some members of the ethnicity (Bete) that is close to the Ivorian Popular Front (Front Populaire Ivoirien, FPI), the political party of former President Laurent Gbagbo, may at times have been concerned, either for political reasons or because of their known or alleged participation in the post-electoral violence of 2010 and 2011.

He also wrote the following:

The Côte d'Ivoire security forces are a mosaic of ethnicities. They include all components of the different regions and political sensitivities in Côte d'Ivoire. The treatment of citizens of all persuasions is not based on their origin. However, some elements deviate from this, especially the army (FRCI), but this is not systematic. (MIDH 8 July 2013)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

However, the UNHCR stated in June 2012 that the ethnic groups in western Côte d'Ivoire, who are presumed to be supporters of Gbagbo, were still at risk of mistreatment by certain elements of the FRCI, by the Dozos (traditional hunters who supported Alassane Ouattara during the post-electoral crisis) and by unidentified armed men (UN 15 June 2012, 5, 19). Similarly, according to the 2013 AI annual report,

Members of ethnic groups (including Betes and Gueres) who were generally accused of being supporters of former President Gbagbo were targeted on ethnic grounds, notably in the west of the country where Dozos reportedly prevented returning internally displaced people from accessing their land or imposed arbitrary payments.

3.1 Arrests

The MIDH President stated the following regarding the arrests of the Bete:

...some close supporters of former President Laurent Gbagbo are...detained or in supervised residence, according to political authorities, because of their alleged roles in the post-electoral crisis. ... In addition, the persons concerned are not specifically Betes-many ethnicities are involved.

However, some supporters of the former president are detained in secret locations. (8 July 2013)

In 15 July 2013 correspondence with the Research Directorate, the MIDH President added that some supporters of Laurent Gbagbo were detained in locations that were not revealed to the members of their family or to their lawyer. An Amnesty International report stated also that some people arrested by the FRCI and the military police "have often been detained, in unrecognized places of detention, for long periods incommunicado, without access to their families, to a doctor or to their lawyers" (AI Feb. 2013, 19).

The report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Côte d'Ivoire indicates that following August 2012 attacks by armed individuals against the positions of the FRCI, the gendarmeries and the police stations in Abidjan, Akouédo and Dabou, at least
382 people were arrested, 250 of whom were still "arbitrarily detained" on 30 October 2012 (UN 7 Jan. 2013, para. 26-33). The report also indicates that some people underwent "cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment," that two people died after acts of "torture," and that some people "detained secretly or beyond the legal time frames of detention were never brought before a judge" (ibid., para. 32-33).

Similarly, a report published by Human Rights Watch indicates that hundreds of young men were arrested by the Ivorian security forces following attacks, in particular, in Abidjan, Akuédo and Dabou at the start of August 2012 (Human Rights Watch Nov. 2012, 16-18, 26). Many people were allegedly detained at the military police base of Adjamé for "extended periods", without being charged or appearing before a judge (ibid., 27). Some former detainees interviewed by Human Rights Watch stated that the detention rooms were full of people from certain ethnic groups, including the Bete (ibid.). According to the Human Rights Watch report, in Yopougon, "members of the Republican Forces responded with mass arbitrary arrests often done apparently on the basis of little more than the person's ethnicity" (ibid., 41). Inhabitants of the Yopougon district told Human Rights Watch that "any group of young men from pro-Gbagbo ethnic groups outside after 8 p.m.-whether at a restaurant, a bar, or walking along the street-was likely to be arrested" (ibid., 46).

Amnesty International also pointed out that, according to the statements made by the detainees and former detainees in Abidjan and in the western part of the country, some of whom were arrested following the attacks in Abidjan and Akuédo in August 2012, "the FRCI clearly justified their arrest and mistreatment of these persons by the fact that they were political opponents and members of ethnic groups presumed to support the former President Gbagbo" (AI Feb. 2013, 23, 24, 27). Amnesty International also indicated that the FRCI arrested some Betes for their presumed pro-Gbagbo allegiance, and that they were "tortured" and mistreated (ibid., 26-28).

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


Mouvement ivoirien des droits humains (MIDH). 15 July 2013. Correspondence from the President to the Research Directorate.

_____. 8 July 2013. Correspondence from the President to the Research Directorate.


_____. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). 15 June 2012. Interim Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers From Côte d'Ivoire. (hr/c/eg/civ/12/01) <http://www.refworld.org/docid/4fa7c1c92.html> [Accessed 8 July 2013]


Professor, Université Michel de Montaigne Bordeaux 3, France. 8 July 2013. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.
Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Attempts to contact representatives of the Ligue ivoirienne des droits de l'homme were unsuccessful.

**Internet sites, including:** Abidjan.net; Africa Confidential; *Africa Research Bulletin*; African Court Coalition; Afrik.com; AllAfrica; Avocats sans frontières; British Broadcasting Corporation; European Country of Origin Information Network; Factiva; Fédération internationale des ligues de droits de l'homme; Freedom House; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; Institute for Justice and Democracy; International Crisis Group; *Jeune Afrique*; Ligue ivoirienne des droits de l'homme; *Political Handbook of the World 2012*; Reporters sans frontières; United Kingdom – Border Agency; United Nations – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Development Program, Refworld.

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