



TESTIMONY

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Committee on Foreign Relations
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Isakson, and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today on Côte d'Ivoire. I will give you a brief update on the current situation in Côte d'Ivoire, the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) efforts in the aftermath of post-election violence, and what capabilities we have that might be brought to bear in the future.

Côte d'Ivoire was once one of the most prosperous states in West Africa, but political instability in the past decade has taken a heavy toll on the population and the economy. In late November 2010, the country held the second round of the long-awaited Presidential elections, which pitted incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo against former Prime Minister Alassane Dramane Ouattara in a run-off.

The Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) declared Ouattara the winner, with 54 percent of votes cast in his favor, and the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire certified these results. The Ivoirian Constitutional Court, however, in a highly questionable move, annulled votes from several pro-Ouattara regions, and overturned the CEI's ruling by declaring Gbagbo the winner with 51 percent of valid votes. Despite international community recognition that Ouattara was the duly elected President of Côte d'Ivoire, Gbagbo refused to step aside peacefully.

Following the disputed presidential election, increasingly intense fighting between forces loyal to the two sides caused at least 500,000 people to flee their homes, including some 180,000 who fled to neighboring Liberia. The number of deaths reported varies, but has been reported in the thousands. Brutal massacres and killings along ethnic and political lines appear to have been committed by both sides of the political divide.

Despite former president Gbagbo's arrest on April 11, unresolved land tenure conflicts, long-standing tensions over ethnicity and national identity, and fear of potential retaliation by forces loyal to either former president Gbagbo or President Ouattara all contribute to an uncertain security situation in Côte d'Ivoire.

CURRENT HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Our reports from the field indicate that destruction and displacement are widespread. In western Côte d'Ivoire, whole villages have been burned, destroyed and stand virtually empty. In some villages, the destruction appears more targeted, which is likely based on the ethnic and political tensions that have intensified since 2002. Hospitals have been looted and essential services are non-existent.

To help describe the magnitude of the displacement, let me provide an illustrative example. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reports that there is severe destruction in Côte d'Ivoire near the border with Liberia between Zouan Hounien-where the fighting began-to Toulepleu to Bloulequin. Before the recent violence, the town of Toulepleu had a population between 40,000 to 50,000 people. ICRC reported in March that only about 3,000 people remained while the rest fled.

Security in Côte d'Ivoire is gradually improving, allowing greater humanitarian access to affected areas. That said, armed combatants continue to cause random insecurity. Earlier this month, insecurity forced health officials to delay a polio vaccine campaign in Bas Sassandra, a southern region where at least three people have recently contracted polio.

According to Human Rights Watch, sexual violence has been increasingly prevalent in Côte d'Ivoire over the past decade, and the United Nations reports that gender-based violence, especially rape, has increased in most areas since the recent conflict began. All who have lived through the conflict have witnessed horrific events, further deteriorating trust levels between ethnic groups and political rivals.

In western Côte d'Ivoire and eastern Liberia, there are simultaneous displacements and returns, which are inhibiting efforts to determine the actual number of refugees and returnees. Fear of possible reprisal attacks and inter-ethnic violence, coupled with ongoing insecurity, continue to prompt Ivoirians to flee into Liberia. Grand Gedeh and Maryland counties, along the border with Côte d'Ivoire, are receiving as many as 250 refugees per day. Most who fled their homes left with nothing but the clothes on their back, and they are in need of food, basic household and hygiene items, and health care.

Most of the displaced, whether in Côte d'Ivoire or in Liberia, are not located in camps but are instead residing with host families. Between 90 and 95 percent of the refugees are staying with Liberian host families, depleting already scarce resources in host villages. Many host families are sheltering more than one displaced family, further stretching already scarce resources such as food and health supplies. USAID met with one household in far western Côte d'Ivoire that was hosting three families, for a total of 51 people in the household.

While refugees have been welcomed into Liberian homes and villages, the situation must be closely monitored to assure that basic needs of refugees and host families are met so tensions do not rise. There are also reports of Liberian mercenaries and Ivoirian militias crossing the border into Liberia, which further heightens security concerns. The onset of the rainy season has prompted concerns that the poor condition of roads and bridges in southeastern Liberia will hamper food distributions in the coming months, further exacerbating the situation.

In this current crisis, refugees and IDPs cite security as a major factor in deciding whether to return to areas of origin in Côte d'Ivoire. Nearly all refugees and some host families in Liberia continue to request seeds and tools for the current May to October farming season, suggesting that refugees plan to remain in the country for at least six months. Traumatized by the violence they have witnessed and the repeated losses during the current and previous conflicts, many of the displaced told USAID that they are waiting to see security restored before they return home.

After the 2002 civil war in Côte d'Ivoire, upwards of a million people were displaced. Insecurity, coupled with long-standing political and ethnic divides, hindered timely returns. By mid-2010, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that some 519,000 Ivoirians remained internally displaced. That figure only accounts for people in the west and not from other areas of displacement so the number of Ivoirians who were displaced when this current crisis began is likely greater than 519,000.

The needs are great, and the United States Government continues to find ways to provide assistance that is mindful of the fragile situation.

CURRENT HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Since the recent crisis began, the United States—primarily through USAID and the Department of State—has been working to provide life-saving humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, whether they remained in country, fled into Liberia or are serving as a host family for those who fled.

The immediate priorities for our humanitarian assistance are to assure that conflict-affected populations have access to food and adequate health care. We are also working to provide access to clean water and appropriate sanitation and hygiene, as well as assuring that vulnerable populations are adequately protected.

Based on our recent assessments, USAID will focus the majority of our humanitarian assistance in Côte d'Ivoire in the west, where widespread destruction and the general lack of law and order and social cohesion will pose significant challenges to recovery. As a complement to the work of the U.S. Department of State's Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (State/PRM), USAID will continue to provide support to the refugees as well as host families in Liberia.

As you know, USAID does not have a Mission in Côte d'Ivoire. Our development assistance is managed primarily by the USAID West Africa Regional Mission in Accra, Ghana. USAID does maintain one staff member in Abidjan to oversee the daily management of the HIV/AIDS program as part of the larger President's Emergency Plan for AIDS

Relief (PEPFAR). That individual, like many of his Embassy colleagues, is on Ordered Departure. In the face of the current situation in Côte d'Ivoire, PEPFAR partners have led heroic efforts to keep life-saving programs running by prioritizing programs that provide essential services such as antiretroviral drug distribution, HIV/AIDS treatment services for existing patients, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission programs.

USAID's Office of Food for Peace is currently providing approximately \$16.4 million of emergency food assistance through the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) to meet the needs of vulnerable groups inside Côte d'Ivoire and in Liberia. In Côte d'Ivoire, USAID is supporting WFP's 'Emergency Assistance to Displaced Populations in Response to the Political Crisis in Côte d'Ivoire' program which is designed to address the food needs of displaced persons and people in host families in the western, center, northern and Abidjan regions. In Liberia, USAID is supporting WFP's 'Emergency Assistance to Ivoirian Refugees and Host Populations in North-Central and South-Eastern Liberia.' This program is designed to address the food needs of approximately 186,000 Ivoirian refugees and Liberian host community members in affected areas of Liberia. To date, WFP has provided life-saving support to over 80,000 IDPs and host community members in Côte d'Ivoire and to over 100,000 Ivoirian refugees and host community members in Liberia. USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance has provided more than \$5.4 million in emergency humanitarian programs that provide better health care, increase food security, promote economic recovery, protect vulnerable populations, provide clean water, and improve hygiene and sanitation.

For example, one program in Côte d'Ivoire provides clean water, access to sanitation and hygiene education at IDP camps, as well as providing household water treatment, hygiene kits and sanitation promotion for 50,000 host families. In Liberia, USAID is providing medical supplies and medical staff to clinics that have been overstretched by the large refugee populations.

To help survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, USAID provides psychosocial support and access to health care. We have also worked with communities to encourage them to identify risks to their community members, discuss the causes and consequences, and seek ways in which they can work to prevent harm, abuse, and exploitation.

In addition to the \$21.8 million in USAID support, State/PRM has provided \$21.1 million to assist conflict-affected populations. In Côte d'Ivoire, PRM is supporting the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to provide camp coordination and protection programs for IDPs. PRM is also supporting the International Committee of the Red Cross, working to protect and assist victims of conflict, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) which has provided emergency transport for people at risk. In Liberia and other neighboring states, PRM is helping UNHCR and partner agencies respond to the basic assistance and protection needs of Ivoirian refugees, including the provision of livelihoods support, medical care, clean water and sanitation, and family reunification.

The United States has responded generously to this crisis, but we know that our emergency assistance will not be durable unless the much larger underlying issues are addressed. The future course of the political transition is now in the hands of the Ivoirians. President Ouattara faces significant and multiple challenges, particularly in reaching across the political divide and giving all Ivoirians confidence in the new government.

LOOKING BEYOND EMERGENCY HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

USAID is currently in discussions with the U.S. Embassy in Abidjan about how we can best respond to the needs for additional humanitarian assistance as well as support post-conflict transition programs. We have developed a menu of response options in line with the State Department's strategic framework. USAID is prepared to support a range of programming options that are tailored to address the specific transition and post-conflict requirements in Côte d'Ivoire, building upon the foundations provided by our humanitarian assistance activities.

USAID stands ready to deploy experts for an in-country assessment of transitional needs including overall democracy and governance opportunities and challenges, as well as political reconciliation, transitional justice, and security sector reform.

USAID assistance could also provide skills-building and training to help enable all key stakeholders—from ordinary citizens, to the media and civil society, to the highest echelons of executive government—to support and demand peaceful political transitions as a matter of status quo for the upcoming legislative elections and reform measures. Working together, USAID's humanitarian and development experts can design highly effective programs based on assessment findings.

Reconciliation is a daunting task in the wake of the recent violence and heated political discourse. The Ouattara government has pledged to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, along with investigations of war crimes committed by both sides since the November election. Unless societal divisions and grievances are addressed, political divisions are reconciled, and perpetrators of violence are held accountable to their communities, our efforts will be ineffective. Ivoirians will need to build or restore mechanisms for peace and justice at both the national and

community levels. USAID brings capabilities to analyze the dynamics of latent conflict, grievance, and social resilience to tailor assistance appropriately to the present context and political climate.

Cote d'Ivoire is the world's largest producer and exporter of cocoa beans and a significant producer-exporter of palm oil, coffee and cashew nuts. Political instability since the end of the civil war in 2003 has continued to damage the economy, resulting in the loss of foreign investment and slowing economic growth. As Cote d'Ivoire gains stability, the revitalization of the economy and markets systems will be necessary to improve the long-term prospects for all Ivoirians.

Though the United States has the capabilities to help meet priority needs in Côte d'Ivoire, we cannot do it alone. We will continue to work alongside the international community to assure that gaps are filled and needs are met as quickly and efficiently as possible. And when possible, we will seek opportunities to engage the private sector, which can bring to bear new resources, ideas, and technologies that could be key components to the recovery in Côte d'Ivoire.

CONCLUSION

The hard work of governing a divided nation is just beginning for President Ouattara, and the humanitarian crisis is far from over. The United States stands by the Ivoirian people, and we appreciate the need to ensure our assistance is as long-lasting and sustainable as possible.

Thank you, and I look forward to answering your questions.