# Former IMF economist installed as Ivory Coast president

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On May 6, five months after declaring Laurent Gbagbo the winner of last fall's run-off presidential election, the Ivory Coast's Constitutional Council contradicted its earlier findings and declared former IMF economist Alassane Ouattara the winner of the election, swearing him in immediately.

Ouattara's installation as president of the world's leading cocoa-producing nation comes after a military assault in April on the economic capital of Abidjan, in which Ouattara's forces were directly assisted by French and UN troops and air support. Some two million Ivorians and hundreds of thousands of migrant workers attempted to flee the violence, creating a humanitarian catastrophe for masses of people.

The UN Humanitarian Coordinator issued a report stating that food and physical security remain immediate challenges to stability in the Ivory Coast, with conditions in the west being such that no aid has reached communities there. Outside of the capital of Abidjan, food shortages and market closures are widespread, creating social misery for millions of Ivorians. Some 256,000 internally displaced refugees remain in the Ivory Coast and another 200,000 Ivorians remain in Liberia, creating fears of a "spillover" effect into that country.

According to UN figures, roughly 2,000 people were killed in the April fighting.

This week the Ouattara regime met with a delegation of IMF officials to arrange for emergency funding for the Ivory Coast's economy. It is set to contract 7.5 percent this year, from growth of 2.6 percent in 2010, according to IMF statistics. The IMF delegation is expected to remain in the Ivory Coast for two weeks.

Finance Minister Charles Diby Koffi told reporters in Abidjan, "The consequences of the crisis are huge for all sectors of the economy. We called on the donors for help."

Meanwhile, reports have emerged of discoveries of mass graves across the Ivory Coast, some from killings that occurred as recently as early May. Rupert Colville, spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, told reporters in Geneva the "Human Rights Division [of the UN peacekeeping mission in Ivory Coast] has received allegations on the existence of a mass grave as well as the possible killing of civilians in Yopougon by both sides".

Ouattara spokesman Patrick Achi claimed that 220 people were killed and 17 injured in the fighting in Yopougon. He blamed the casualties on forces loyal to Gbagbo.

Al Jazeera reports that various human rights groups such as Amnesty International are looking into reports of mass killings and other crimes against perceived supporters of Gbagbo regime by Ouattara's forces. One mass grave containing hundreds of people has been discovered near the western town of Duékoué, where some 28,000 refugees have sought shelter in a Catholic mission.

One only need look at the composition of the regime of Ouattara, himself a former deputy director at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and a former governor of the Central Bank of West African States, to see that it is not one of a democratic character in any sense. It is composed of well-connected members of international finance, allied with the country's UN- and French-backed warlords.

Ouattara's choice to head the national truth and reconciliation commission to investigate war crimes and in the country can only mean a whitewash of massacres of civilians during the conflict. Announcing the commission at a press conference last Wednesday—standing next to former UN Secretary

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General Kofi Annan, Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu, and former Irish president Mary Robinson—Ouattara announced that Charles Banny would head the commission to investigate crimes "on both sides".

Banny—also a former governor of the Central Bank of West African States, where he succeeded Ouattara—is an economist who served as Prime Minister under former president Gbagbo, after being appointed to the position by the UN in 2005 as a consensus figure. He was succeeded in 2007 as Prime Minister by the warlord Guillaume Soro, considered the strong man behind the newly installed Ouattara regime.

Banny led investigations in 2006, after an incident in which a Dutch-chartered cargo vessel unloaded waste slop at the port in Abidjan containing large amounts of hydrogen sulphide, a chemical agent used as a weapon by British forces in World War I. The slop was then discarded into the city's eight open-air dumps. Fumes from the slop resulted in the deaths of ten people and sickened tens of thousands, overwhelming the city's hospitals.

Banny responded in his capacity as prime minister by sacking a number of low-level district officials, and accepting a settlement with the company. The company went on to say that the settlement was no admission of guilt.

In an indication that Ouattara is struggling get control over the Ivorian militia forces which helped bring him to power, there were reports of fighting between two camps of Ouattara-allied warlords in the port city of San Pedro. These required UN military intervention to stop the fighting, after rocket fire was reported in the business district.

This was followed by the assassination of Ibrahim Coulibaly, head of the 5,000-strong "Invisible Commandos", by forces loyal to Ouattara in the shanty town area of Abobo in Abidjan. Also known as I.B., Coulibaly was the former head of security for Ouattara's wife, Dominique, owner of the real estate company AICI which made millions managing the estate of former Ivorian president and French parliamentarian Félix Houphouët-Boigny.

Coulibaly's forces were central in the initial stages of Ouattara's offensive on Abidjan, but reportedly had refused to immediately disarm after calls from the new government to do so. Coulibaly had a well-known rivalry with Guillaume Soro, with some saying Soro wouldn't have Coulibaly as part of the regime.

Ouattara publicly ordered all military and rebel fighters back to their barracks, saying paramilitary police forces would take over security in the country. However, some forces did not immediately heed Ouattara's call.

Commander Sofi Dosso, leader of the rebel group made up of traditional hunters widely reported to have committed war crimes during the offensive on Abidjan, said his forces were "ready to help disarm those who disobey the president's commands" at a rally in Abobo, seemingly in defiance of Ouattara's orders.

On Friday the UN Security Council unanimously extended the UN military mission in the Ivory Coast (UNOCI) another two months, from forces which were formerly assigned to the UN military mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The US representative in the Security Council warned however that the United States would veto any further extension of the deployment of UN resources into the Ivory Coast which were previously assigned to Liberia.

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