

**Message of the Special Representative of the United Nations  
Secretary-General for Côte d'Ivoire, Bert Koenders, on regional  
and municipal elections of 21 April 2013**

(Abidjan 19 April 2013)

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you know there are just 48 hours before the holding of regional and municipal elections this Sunday, 21 April, and there are only a few hours remaining before the electoral campaign comes to an end at midnight tonight. These elections are local elections and are therefore important for each citizen. They provoke a lot of ideas and emotions on all sides. It is important to channel these ideas and emotions in a calm manner so that the elections are held peacefully. We are entering a crucial phase of the process and that is why I would like to send out the following messages, which to me seem opportune on the eve of the polls.

I would like to first of all renew my encouragement to the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in its efforts to organise free, transparent, peaceful and credible elections in accordance with international norms and standards. I would also like to renew my support and that of UNOCI to the national authorities in providing a secure and safe electoral environment.

The United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) has been closely following the different stages of the electoral process in Abidjan and the different regions of the country, in accordance with its UN Security Council mandate, even if it is not directly involved in terms organisation and certification of the forthcoming polls. UNOCI's Force and the United Nations Police are ready, in their respective deployment areas, to support and assist the national authorities in providing security for the regional and municipal elections. Our peacekeepers will support the national security forces. We are working closely with the Ivorian authorities to this end. Our Electoral Cell is constantly liaising with the IEC in an effort to share its expertise in the

electoral domain and in particular in planning, and our 20 field offices have been mobilised to follow the voting process as part of our support to the national monitoring and rapid alert mechanism.

Ladies and gentlemen, as the election campaign draws to a close, UNOCI has observed that it has provoked real debate in different areas. Unfortunately, there have also been some regrettable incidents, including unacceptable intimidation in certain constituencies.

In addition, I would like to reiterate my urgent appeal to all political actors. Candidates, political groups, parties and their associates, in the presence of the United Nations Secretary-General, in 2008, you freely signed a code of electoral conduct. You made a commitment to respect it strictly knowing that an electoral competition can only have one winner for each seat. Keep your promise. The success of the current process is in your hands. I appeal to your sense of higher responsibility in order to avoid all types of manipulation and problems. I urge you to respect the choice of the voters and the rule of law by peacefully resolving any disputes or challenges through the competent authorities.

I would also like to renew my solemn appeal to all the actors concerned that they must play a republican role of absolute neutrality in the process : IEC agents, security forces, the FRCI, police, gendarmerie and other authorities – they must adopt a responsible and exemplary attitude before, during and after the polls. We expect you to be committed, without reserve, in guaranteeing transparent, free and fair elections held in a calm environment without intimidation or violence. Respect for voters' right and choice on the one hand and raising any disputes and challenges with the competent authorities on the other, will be determining factors for a peaceful and serene electoral environment.

I would like to assure you that UNOCI will continue to closely follow the election process. I would also like to remind those who incite hatred, intimidation, violence and any other action which prevents the peaceful holding of the elections, that they will be brought before the competent authorities to give account of their actions.

Côte d'Ivoire has come far and has made significant progress. The way in which these elections are organised will be an important barometer for each of you individually and globally for Côte d'Ivoire. I would therefore like to once again appeal to your sense of civic duty and responsibility. I would also like to appeal to the candidates and their supporters to show mutual respect, tolerance and fair play towards each other. I would now like to address the men and women of the media and ask them to positively support the democratic process for the good of the country, all Ivorians and all those who live in Côte d'Ivoire.

Finally, permit me to share with you what I have noticed and felt during these last few months while going around Côte d'Ivoire : a strong will on the part of the population to live in peace and an ardent desire to continue the consolidation of the process of establishing state authority throughout the country after the post-electoral crisis period. As a result, I have confidence in the commitment of all the actors to ensure that the elections are fair, transparent, free and peaceful, which will in turn contribute to the advancement of Côte d'Ivoire, on the road to stability, normalisation and a real democracy.

Thank you for your attention