

## **Cote d'Ivoire: UN report calls for fight against rape to be strengthened**

**GENEVA/ABIDJAN (11 July 2016)** – A UN report released today calls on the Ivorian authorities to intensify their efforts to prevent and punish rape, a crime that continues to claim many victims in the in the country.

The report, released jointly by the United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), details the trends from 1 January 2012 and 31 December 2015 regarding rape and attempted rape, the state of prosecution of alleged perpetrators and the main obstacles to bringing a prosecution.

The report highlights progress by the Ivorian authorities but also makes recommendations to the Government, non-governmental organizations and the international community on ways to strengthen rape prevention efforts and improve the fight against impunity for sexual violence, including tackling the persistent challenges in this area.

The report documents 1,129 cases of rape in Cote d'Ivoire between 1 January 2012 and 31 December 2015\* - some 66 percent of the victims are children.

*“Despite the end of hostilities since 2011 and the respite brought by the gradual stabilization, instances of rape, mainly committed by individuals, continue,”* says the report. The prevalence of rape was probably exacerbated by years of conflict in Cote d'Ivoire, *“which fostered a culture of violence due to the general climate of insecurity and which were marked by persistent impunity due to the lack of systematic prosecution,”* the report states.

The report highlights the progress made in the judicial response to these crimes and the fight against impunity, but stresses that such progress remains clearly insufficient. Although investigations were opened in 90 percent of rape cases documented in the report, less than 20 percent of them resulted in a conviction.

The report also stresses that all 203 cases that ended in a conviction were “reclassified”, a common practice of judging rape as a lesser offence and for which the sentencing is less severe. Although seen as a way for victims to access justice and facilitate a prompt judgement, this practice, according to the report, *“minimizes the gravity of rape”*.

The widespread recourse to settlements out of court, especially in cases of rape against children, is of particular concern. Carried out at the expense of the rights of the victims and usually without their consent, these arrangements are intended to “*preserve social cohesion, community reputation and prevent the alleged perpetrator from ending up in jail,*” notes the report, which stresses that such a settlement “*undoubtedly contributes to the trivialisation of rape and puts the victim in a position of weakness and vulnerability*”.

Slow procedures and court decisions, and various shortcomings in the conduct of investigations are also major obstacles in the fight against rape, as well as the stigmatization of victims, many of whom do not lodge complaints.

“*Cote d'Ivoire in recent years has recorded significant progress in terms of human rights, but the persistence of rape and impunity towards their perpetrators remain of serious concern and requires urgent action,*” said Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

“*Through the efforts they already deployed, Ivorian institutions have demonstrated that they are fully aware of the scale of the problem, but they must further strengthen their efforts to fight against sexual violence, particularly by implementing the National Strategy against Gender-based Violence, with the support of UN agencies,*” said the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Cote d'Ivoire, Ms. Aïchatou Mindaoudou.

As part of its conclusions and recommendations, the report stresses the importance of the National Strategy against Gender-based Violence and its implementation. It calls for urgent and targeted action to prevent abuse of children. The recommendations focus on the response of the justice system and the need to reform some practices and standards to strengthen the prosecution of rape, including the revision of the Criminal Code to include a definition of rape and other forms of sexual violence.

The report recommends that the Ivorian authorities “*ensure that all victims of sexual violence have access to justice, in particular by providing them with free legal aid*” and “*consider holding special sessions of the Criminal Courts (Cours d'assises) on rape crimes in order to effectively and promptly fight against such crimes*”.

Regarding capacity building, the report recommends to the Ivorian authorities that they “*organize and intensify national information and awareness-raising campaigns, including on the prevention and response to cases of rape, in particular against children and in rural areas; engage with community leaders and prefects on the fight against crimes of rape to outlaw amicable settlements and punish those who are involved in such practices*”.

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\* The report does not account for all cases of rape committed in the country during the period under review, but only those brought to the attention and documented by the Human Rights Division of UNOCI.

An executive summary of the report as well as key recommendations are available here.

To access the full report (in French), please go to:

[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CI/2016-07-11\\_Rapport\\_viols\\_Cote\\_dIvoire.docx](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CI/2016-07-11_Rapport_viols_Cote_dIvoire.docx)  
[http://www.onuci.org/aen.php3?id\\_article=14007](http://www.onuci.org/aen.php3?id_article=14007)

To access the summary and the recommendations (in English), please go to:

[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CI/2016-07-11\\_Summary\\_Recommendations\\_Cote\\_dIvoire\\_EN.docx](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/CI/2016-07-11_Summary_Recommendations_Cote_dIvoire_EN.docx)

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