

**Testimony by Deputy Assistant Secretary William Fitzgerald,
Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Subcommittee on African Affairs
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“Reconstruction and Reconciliation in Cote d’Ivoire”**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking member Isakson, and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today on Cote d’Ivoire. The post-election crisis in Cote d’Ivoire sharpened international focus on democracy and good governance in sub-Saharan Africa. The resolution of the crisis in favor of democracy sends a clear message to would-be dictators and anti-democrats across the continent that neither Africans, nor the international community, will stand for ignoring the people’s voice as expressed through the ballot box. Democracy does not begin or end at the ballot box, but it is an important step to building accountable governance. The United States and its international partners must now step forward to work with the newly elected government to rebuild a Cote d’Ivoire for all Ivoirians.

First, let me express our concern for the very real human tragedy that has befallen the Ivoirian people as a result of the political crisis. The road to democratic elections was a long and turbulent one. The fall 2010 presidential elections were the culmination of nearly 10 years of international community engagement to broker peace in Cote d’Ivoire. The post-electoral political crisis

involved gross abuses of human rights, wounded the country's once-vibrant economy, exacerbated existing divisions among Ivoirians, and allowed armed groups to take advantage of weakened security institutions. The international community must remain engaged in Cote d'Ivoire to help as the Ivoirian government takes on the challenge of rebuilding and reconciling a fractured nation. Moving forward, we will work with our international partners to support the Ivoirian government as it addresses national reconciliation, economic recovery, and security sector reform, and as it responds to the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

President Ouattara has pledged to make national reconciliation a primary focus of his presidency. He recently created a Dialogue, Truth, and Reconciliation Commission (DTRC), and named former Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny as chairman. The DTRC's specific plan of action has not been finalized, but President Ouattara has indicated that the Commission will also include two religious leaders (a Christian and a Muslim.) As a vehicle for a national dialogue and reconciliation process, the DTRC can shed light on the events in the post-election period and also be a forum for Ivoirians to participate in a reconciliation process after a decade of instability and intermittent armed conflict. To achieve lasting results, reconciliation efforts must be Ivoirian-led, with support from the international community as needed. As we await details on how the DTRC will

operate, we are encouraging President Ouattara and his government to embrace good governance and transparency to create a wider culture of reconciliation.

Ensuring accountability for those who committed serious human rights abuses in the post-election period will be an important aspect of national reconciliation. The United States co-sponsored a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council that created a Commission of Inquiry to investigate allegations of abuses and violations of human rights committed by both sides since November 28. The Commission is currently in Cote d'Ivoire, carrying out its mandate to "investigate the facts and circumstances surrounding the allegations...in order to identify those responsible for such acts and bring them to justice." President Ouattara has repeatedly promised to cooperate with the Commission of Inquiry's findings, regardless of whether his forces or former President Gbagbo's troops or militiamen were involved. We will hold him to that promise and ensure there will be no impunity.

Former President Gbagbo remains under house arrest in northern Cote d'Ivoire under the joint protection of United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire and President Ouattara's Republican Forces. President Ouattara's government is currently investigating what, if any, charges can be brought against Mr. Gbagbo and his coterie domestically. Ouattara has also said that he supports the International Criminal Court's role in investigating alleged abuses since the

November elections. We remain concerned about abuses allegedly committed by Ouattara's Republican Forces since the November elections, and will press for full accountability for all human rights violators.

Accountability and a meaningful reconciliation process will be essential not only for Cote d'Ivoire's future, but for regional stability in the wake of the Ivoirian crisis. With some 200,000 Ivoirian refugees in Liberia and other neighboring countries, President Ouattara must create a stable and peaceful environment to allow them to return. Restoring law and order to parts of the country where it has been absent for years will be central to this effort, and will not be easily achieved. Rebuilding trust between the Ivoirian people and the security sector – both military and police – will be challenging, particularly in the western regions where lawlessness and insecurity were commonplace even before the political crisis.

Security sector reform is critical for Cote d'Ivoire's long-term stability, and the success of other programs in the short-term. Reestablishment of UN programs for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of militia on both sides of the conflict will be an important factor in stabilizing the more volatile regions. The UN is completing a technical assessment mission to Cote d'Ivoire, which will provide recommendations to the UN and UN Security Council on how to best adjust UNOCI mission priorities to contribute to critical post-conflict tasks. Restoration of state authority and law and order throughout the country presents a

very immediate challenge for the Ouattara government, and support from the UN and international community will be critical. Broad security sector reform, including reform of the military, police and gendarmeries, and professionalization writ large, will require intensive international community coordination and support. As President Ouattara outlines his vision for the security sector organization and structure, we will work with our partners in the international community to coordinate assistance efforts in line with that vision.

Given Cote d'Ivoire's regional importance and the negative impact of its instability on neighboring countries, there is a role for regional actors and institutions to play in helping Cote d'Ivoire achieve lasting stability and peace. The Ivoirian political crisis demonstrated the important role that regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union can play in building international consensus on difficult issues. These organizations must remain actively engaged in helping Cote d'Ivoire avoid a return to instability. ECOWAS has already pledged humanitarian assistance for Cote d'Ivoire, and the African Union has promised to remain engaged in coordination with the international community to promote peace and genuine national reconciliation among Ivoirians.

Currently, U.S. assistance to Cote d'Ivoire is limited to humanitarian programs including disaster relief and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS

Relief; many other programs are currently subject to foreign assistance restrictions that were triggered well before President Ouattara took office. We are exploring the process for lifting or waiving those restrictions, as appropriate, in order to broaden the types of assistance we can provide, and will consult with Congress in that effort. As we move through the process of addressing those foreign assistance restrictions, we have already begun careful coordination with our international partners to ensure that our efforts in supporting political reconciliation, economic recovery, and security sector reform are not duplicative.

We remain committed to working with President Ouattara and the Ivoirian people to help re-establish Cote d'Ivoire as the beacon of stability and economic prosperity it once was. A prosperous and peaceful Cote d'Ivoire is an asset to the region and the continent, and we look forward to playing a part in the hopeful future that lies ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and I welcome any questions you may have.