

Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission
and
Senate Human Rights Caucus

Briefing
on
Atrocity Prevention and Early Warning:
The U.S. Government Framework and Côte d'Ivoire

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Thank you to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and the Senate Human Rights Caucus for hosting this timely discussion on the U.S. Government's efforts to prevent atrocities abroad and the prospects for violence surrounding the forthcoming presidential election in Côte d'Ivoire. My name is Tomas Husted, and I am an analyst in African affairs at the Congressional Research Service, which provides nonpartisan research and policy analysis to the United States Congress.

Before we begin, I would note that today's panelists do not speak on behalf of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission or the Senate Human Rights Caucus, and that Members of the Commission and Caucus do not necessarily endorse all the viewpoints that will be expressed in the discussion that follows. The Congressional Research Service also does not endorse any views or recommendations that may be offered.

Congress has demonstrated an enduring interest in preventing atrocity crimes abroad. Today's discussion will partly center on the Trump Administration's recently published second report to Congress on U.S. Government efforts to prevent and respond to atrocities—a report that Congress required under the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-441), which made it U.S. policy to “identify, prevent, and respond to the causes of atrocities” worldwide. Our panelists will discuss the findings of this report in detail, and provide an overview of the tools that the U.S. Government may use to detect early warning signs of mass atrocities and to prevent the emergence of atrocity crimes abroad.

We will then turn to a consideration of Côte d'Ivoire and discuss the risks of large-scale violence surrounding the country's presidential elections, the first round of which is scheduled for this Saturday, October 31. Côte d'Ivoire has faced rising political tensions and sporadic violence ahead of the polls: more than 30 have been killed and dozens more injured in intercommunal clashes and confrontations between state security personnel and opposition supporters since mid-August.¹ Tensions stem, in part, from a dispute concerning the constitutionality of President Alassane Ouattara's decision to run for a third term following the death, in July, of his favored successor.² With pressures mounting as Ouattara's top

¹ Lassaad Ben Ahmed, “Côte d'Ivoire / Tensions pré-électorales : 16 morts dans les affrontements à Dabou August,” *Anadolu Agency*, October 25, 2020. The International Crisis Group (ICG) recorded 14 deaths in electoral violence between August 12 and September 29; on October 27, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reports that at least 20 people were killed in election-related violence between October 17 and 21. See ICG, *Côte d'Ivoire: An Election Delay for Dialogue*, September 29, 2020; OHCHR, “Press briefing notes on Côte d'Ivoire,” October 27, 2020.

² For detail, see CRS Insight IN11480, *Côte d'Ivoire's October 2020 Presidential Elections*, by Tomas F. Husted.

challengers have rejected the independence of the electoral commission and encouraged supporters to boycott the polls, some observers fear that rivalries within the political class could ignite volatile social and ethnic cleavages—reminiscent of Côte d’Ivoire’s contested presidential election in 2010, which resulted in a violent standoff in which an estimated 3,000 people died.³ A return to large-scale violence, or a protracted period of uncertainty, could undermine the considerable economic and security gains that the country has made since President Ouattara’s inauguration in 2011.⁴

³ See, e.g., Human Rights Watch, “*They Killed Them Like it was Nothing*”: *The Need for Justice for Côte d’Ivoire’s Post-Election Crimes*, October 5, 2011.

⁴ See, e.g., Ange Aboa and Aaron Ross, “A post-election crisis could scupper Ivory Coast's economic gains,” Reuters, October 29, 2020.