



## Exams take off in the north

Tens of thousands of students in zones controlled by the Forces Nouvelles began sitting end-of-cycle exams on Monday 27 February, after being unable to do so for over two years due to the political crisis dividing the country.

[The end-of cycle exams are the Baccalaureat, BEPC and CEPE, taken at the end of the senior secondary, junior secondary and primary school cycles respectively.]

The impartial forces – UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) and the French Licorne Force - are providing logistical support and security for the exercise. They have been transporting examination papers under lock and key from Abidjan to the four main centers in the FN-controlled zone - Bouaké, Man, Odienne, Korhogo. From there they transport the papers to each school where the examinations are given.

UN police (UNPOL) have been stationed at the various examination centres. UNOCI civilian staff and officials of UN agencies (World Food Programme, UN Children's Fund, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UN Population Fund, UN Development Programme) have also been sent to the exam locations to assist as observers.

The exams are scheduled to end on 5 March 2006. UNOCI is responsible for picking up the completed scripts, transporting them to a centre where they will be made anonymous (names will be replaced by numbers) and then redistributing them to correction centres in the north.

During the correction period the completed exam scripts will be stored each night in a UNOCI or Licorne compound. Once all have been corrected, they will again be transported to the centre, made personal (numbers replaced by names) and sent back to the original exam sites. The results will be announced at the end of March.

The Ministry of Education of Côte d'Ivoire is responsible for the exams, and only its agents will touch the actual papers. ONUCI and Licorne will be responsible for their security and will also assist with security in the examination centres.

The operation is a major one. The logistics of transport alone - dropping one UNPOL at each location (there are some 50 sites just for the Baccalaureat and BEPC)- are a nightmare. "Since Friday we have been working day and night to meet our obligations," Miguel Iraola, the Chief of UNPOL for Sector East, said at the weekend.

UNOCI chose the town of Bouaké for its centre of operations for this mission. This includes setting up a central communications hub and a special operations room where representatives of the various sections of the UN and Licorne will work together to coordinate the operation.

Education in the FN-controlled north has been disrupted over the past three years. After the crisis broke out in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002, some 90 percent of licensed teachers left the area. Many did not feel safe and, moreover, they could not receive their salaries as civil servants unless they moved to the government-controlled south.

For over two years, the Ministry of Education did not authorize the exams. This caused much concern in the north since children who had been going to school there were not given credit for their studies.

The organization of the examinations is a joint effort involving the Ivorian Government, UNOCI, the Licorne, regional education advisors, education inspectors, civil administrators, teachers, UN agencies and NGOs.



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