



MISSION STORIES

Happy to serve in a very hospitable sister country

The welcome was warm. Orange juice “made in Morocco” flowed. The delicious fumes of couscous wafted through the air. No, this was not Fès or Marrakesh, but Bouaké, in the centre of Côte d’Ivoire, at the headquarters of the Moroccan battalion.

The Moroccan battalion’s 732 Blue Helmets [in June 2005] comprise the bulk of the UN peacekeepers deployed in UNOCI’s Sector East. They were under the command of *Colonel-Major* Ahmed Bezzani, who also headed the entire military force deployed by UNOCI in the sector.

Commander Mohammed Selloum was a key man in the Moroccan contingent. He was the officer in charge of operations. Selloum, who hailed from the region of Casablanca, was married and the father of two children who, he said, had been making a contribution in their own way to the Ivorian people since his departure for Côte d’Ivoire on 25 November 2004, because “it’s a bit of a sacrifice for all the families when we go on a peacekeeping mission far from them.”

It was his first peacekeeping mission and Commander Selloum was proud to serve under the UN and Moroccan colours in Côte d’Ivoire, “a very hospitable sister country”.

“The riches of Côte d’Ivoire are its people,” he said, lauding “the will of the Ivorian people, a very nice and educated people, to move ahead, something we notice every day in our contacts with the inhabitants of Bouake and the entire sector.” The Moroccan Blue Helmets had never encountered any reticence on the part of the population during their patrols, said Commander Selloum, whose role as head of operations was to organize these patrols around the clock.

“We also have to be in readiness to react to any emergency situation and that happens sometimes,” he said, adding that the role of the Blue Helmets deployed in Côte d’Ivoire by Morocco was not limited to patrolling. They also had to monitor the northern and southern borders of the zone of confidence and guard the airport as well as the headquarters of the Central Bank of West African States in Bouake.

“We also ensure the security of the quadripartite command post and provide escorts for personalities visiting Bouake,” he added.

His biggest regret? Leaving Côte d'Ivoire soon without seeing the results of the efforts he and his colleagues had made over the six previous months to help restore peace in Côte d'Ivoire. "I would have loved to be here for the final phase, that of the total restoration of peace in Côte d'Ivoire," said Commander Selloum, who added that he was ready to serve once again under UN colours in the Moroccan contingent and thus do his country proud.





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