



UNOCI MEETS CIVIL SOCIETY IN DANANE

The western town of Danane had its turn to host a forum of the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) on 12 April 2005. Like preceding fora, the meeting gave UNOCI officials an opportunity to discuss the mission's mandate and other issues with civil society.

Welcoming the UNOCI officials to his town, the resident mayor of Danane, Mr. Déli Dang Jacques, thanked the impartial forces for the work they do in Côte d'Ivoire. He gave a "special homage and thanks to the talented officers who have accepted to brave high and hell water to come and help us build peace". In this connection, he mentioned by name officers who head the UNOCI military observers, UN Police (UNPOL) and Force Licorne contingents in the area.

Similarly, the chairman of Danane's civil society groups, Mr. Mamadou Soumahoro, stressed that since the outbreak of the Ivorian crisis on 19 September 2002, the deployment of the impartial forces has permitted "a lessening of tension on the various war fronts between the belligerents".

The impartial forces also make their presence felt on the material plane, for example in the field of education, where they have rehabilitated a number of schools, civil society representatives said.

1633: recognizing Ivorians' hopes for peace

Soumahoro also mentioned UN Security Council resolution 1633, which he described as "the recognition of the hope for peace that exists in the hearts of Ivorians, who had been told there would be an apocalypse after 30 October 2005", when the mandate of President Laurent Gbagbo officially ended.

The Danane meeting was the seventh forum organized by UNOCI for Ivorian civil society. The previous ones were held between October 2005 and March 2006 in the towns of Bouaké, Yamoussoukro, Daloa, Zuénoula, Guiglo and Man. More than 600 people attended the Danane Forum, including representatives of the municipal, religious and traditional authorities, and of the Forces Nouvelles. Socio-professional and economic groups, non-governmental organizations, refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) were also represented.

Representatives of UNOCI's military force, UNPOL and various other civilian sections – including those dealing with Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, Civil

Affairs, Elections and Public Information – participated. They each briefly explained the mandates of their units, then fielded questions from other participants.

IDPs express their suffering in mime

One of the striking aspects of the event was the interest shown by the population. Throughout the day, men, women and children of all ages flocked the former warehouse where the forum was being held. Those unable to find places inside gathered in the compound, from where they listened to the discussions.

Through the open doors, they could also see the performances done in honour of the visitors, who were able to admire the prowess of a stilt dancer, musicians male and female, and people displaced by the war.

The displaced mimed the suffering they endured on being forced to leave their homes and farms, the trials they endured during their exodus and the relief they felt on arriving among their new hosts.

Later, they verbally expressed their need for help to get out of the misery in which they live, while stating that they wished to be able to find peace and go back to their homes.

From DDR to help for the handicapped

The participants at the Danane forum had various concerns. What is DDR? When will it start? How will identification be done? How does one go about receiving support for community projects? Is there a section within UNOCI, which deals with handicapped persons?

Dozens of questions were asked. Some had to do with insecurity, abuses to which women are reportedly subjected at roadblocks, extortion, the pitiful state of certain roads and the break down in health services.

Where education is concerned, the issue of payment for volunteers who helped the few teachers who have remained in the area to keep the schools running, and the rehabilitation were also discussed.

Other main concerns included water and electricity. Some participants complained about frequent power and water cuts and called for help to rehabilitate both services. Residents of nearby villages who use water from rivers and pools launched urgent calls for wells to be dug in their communities.

Ivorian fish for Liberia

Representatives of economic groups deplored the low coffee and cocoa prices. Others complained about other abuses such as extortion, and other impediments to the movement

of people and goods, which have prompted some people to sell their goods, such as fish, to Liberia. The uncontrolled exploitation of wood is also a source of worry, participants said.

UNOCI representatives gave responses to questions in their respective areas of responsibility. For other questions, they referred the gathering to other sources.

A representative of the FN told participants that they could complain to the Forces Nouvelles whenever they had any grievances against the movement.

A plea for the extension of ONUCI FM's network to Danane

One area that fell under the jurisdiction of ONUCI was that of information and communication. Many participants drew attention to the isolation of their region, whose inhabitants generally do not have access to radio.

The resident mayor launched a strong plea, complete with figures, for the extension of ONUCI FM's services to Danane. The absence of the UN radio cannot be justified, he said, in a region with a population of 314,428, moreover, 45 percent of the population is under the age of 15 years. These young people, in particular, also had a right to be connected to ONUCI FM, he said. The resident mayor had other figures at hand, just in case they were needed, such as the percentage of foreigners within the population of Danane: 13.1 percent.

UNOCI officials promised to relay the resident mayor's complaints to the highest authorities in UNOCI.





Produced by the UNOCI Office for Public Information. April 2006.

UNOCI Photo/PIO, April 2006.

Disclaimer - This publication is for information only and is not an official document of the United Nations. The views expressed do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations or the United Nations Mission in Cote d'Ivoire.