



UNOCI FORUM IN MAN

“The Role of ONUCI in the Resolution of the Crisis in Côte d’Ivoire,” was the theme of a forum organized by UNOCI’s Public Information Division for members of civil society at the Centre Béthanie in the western town of Man on Saturday 25 March 2006. Some 150 persons attended the forum, which followed similar meetings in Abidjan, Bouaké, Daloa, Yamoussoukro, Zuénoula, and Guiglo.

Personalities who attended the forum included the fourth deputy mayor of Man, Gueu Sahi, 35 of the region’s 80 traditional chiefs, led by the head of Man’s Belleville district, Dion Robert, Forces Nouvelles’ representative Kollo Ouattara, the president of the Coordination of Civil Society in Man, Camara Daouda, and leaders of the different religions.

Various divisions of UNOCI were also well represented: Child Protection, HIV-AIDS, Gender, Rule of Law, Human Rights, Military Public Information, Civil Affairs and DDR. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Programme also sent representatives to the forum.

A delegation from Abidjan landed in Man at about 11 am and immediately headed to the Béthanie Centre.

After a libation ceremony performed by Dion Robert on behalf of the four districts in the region, the leader apologised to the UNOCI delegation on behalf of those who were absent, invoking the power of their ancestors and asking them to help bring peace to Man which, he said, had suffered a lot during the Ivorian crisis.

Then it was the turn of the religious dignitaries to say prayers, Mr. Traoré Bakaba for the Muslims and Mr. Guéné Tia for the Christian community.

In his welcome address, the fourth Deputy Mayor of Man, Mr. Gueu Sahi, first wanted to express his recognition of UNOCI. He then expressed the hope that the debates opened during the forum would lead to a decisive contribution to peace. There were no taboo subjects, he told the audience. “Since the meeting in Yamoussoukro, the issue of electricity had been resolved and exams had taken place in areas under Forces Nouvelles control, these are significant steps towards gaining a durable peace in Côte d’Ivoire,” he declared.

On behalf of the Forces Nouvelles, Mr. Kollo Ouattara, before making an encouraging assessment of the way problems in the areas under their control had been well managed said, that “they hoped that the problems which would be posed throughout the forum would attract the close attention of all partners in the process of peace”. He also underlined the fact that UNOCI’s support was urgently needed in creating income-generating activities, because according to him, this in turn would lead to national reconciliation.

Lieutenant-Colonel Murtoza, representing Bangladeshi troops in Man, said that the role of peacekeepers comprised of monitoring the Zone of Confidence as stipulated in the United Nations Security Council mandate, protecting the United Nations staff and other civilians, monitoring the movements of militias and armed groups, preventing inter-ethnic clashes, and liaising closely with FANCI and the FAFN and helping re-establish trust between the two sides. He concluded his address by asking Ivorians to join UNOCI on the road to peace.

For his part, Mr. Camara Daouda, President for the Coordination of Civil Society in Man, noted, that “the forum represented a godsend for the Manoies” to help to disarm their minds. He also stressed on the need for a national identity accepted by all because, according to him, cultural diversity is a source of enrichment. Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter, which Côte d’Ivoire is under, should question each of us, he said. However, he regretted, that he remained pessimistic because of the hesitation and procrastination of United Nations in dealing with Ivorian crisis.

On behalf of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Côte d’Ivoire the Director of the Public Information Division, thanked the public for their participation in the forum. She underlined the importance of these types of exchanges, which informs UNOCI, so that the Mission can respond better to the problems it faces in its mission to bring peace to Côte d’Ivoire.

At this juncture, there was an incident, which involved the spokesman for the traditional leaders, who threatened to leave the gathering because Ms. Amodeo had not mentioned them in her vote of thanks. He argued that her oversight was a “royal crime”. But after short negotiations and the diplomatic intervention of the fourth deputy mayor of Man, the Director of the Public Information Division offered her apologies and everything came back into order.

The Forum then continued with discussions on various topics and questions, which clearly showed what people’s main concerns were. The questions were as follows.

What are the plans for training of the ex-combatants?

Why are all UNOCI sections not adequately represented on the ground? What about the United Nations Agencies, should they not be properly represented as well?

HIV-AIDS deserves more attention in the region, considering its fast development. How can UNOCI initiate more aggressive sensitization campaigns?

Impunity, human rights, Child Protection, unemployment of War Victims, DDR and Reintegration programmes all these issues should be made priority. How can UNOCI answer these urgent questions?

The problem of identification provokes justified anxiety as elections draw near. How will the identification and demobilization process be conducted?

What is the fate of the displaced and the refugees? What can UNOCI or IOM do faced with this situation?

What can be done to improve the movement of the persons and property?

When will UNOCI finish the redeployment of troops in Guiglo?

How do you go about preparing a request for a Quick Impact Project?

In the absence of teachers who left, voluntary teachers in areas under Forces Nouvelles control are now treated with equality because they are contributing to the continuance of the education system. But can they be protected from unemployment when teachers are redeployed once again? What can UNOCI do about this?

What can be done to help people who lost everything during the war?

When does UNOCI think that Sub-Prefects could be redeployed in areas under Forces Nouvelles control so that the registration of births can begin again?

What can UNOCI do for girls made vulnerable by war and condemned to prostitution and sexual exploitation?

What about farmers who are war victims? Who is in charge of dealing with their problems? And when you talk about protecting children, what about old people?

How can the role of women in the peace process be reinforced?

These questions provoked spirited discussions among the audience and deserved the right to frank and precise answers. The Civil Society of Man, by way of showing its gratitude, awarded a symbolic title of the Certificate of Honour to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan and his Special Representative in Côte d'Ivoire, Mr. Pierre Schori, the Director of the Public Information Division of UNOCI, Ms. Margherita Amodeo, Mr. Abdoul Sow and Mr. Kebe Yacouba, of the Outreach Unit, and Miss Maria

Rosa Lorini of the same unit, without forgetting the ONUCI FM team which broadcasted some of its programmes from Man during the forum.





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