

Alert

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Humanitarian Crisis looms as people flee Ivory Coast to neighbouring countries

Geneva, 27 December 2010

The month-long political impasse in Ivory Coast is in danger of causing a humanitarian crisis as people flee across the border to Liberia and Ghana, say ACT Alliance members working in the two neighbouring countries.

Ivory Coast has been mired in a political stalemate since the results of the national elections of 28th November 2010 were declared. The incumbent president, Laurent Gbagbo, has declined to concede defeat to the apparent winner, Alassane Ouattara, citing rigging in the Northern region of the country where Ouattara has a wide following.

Alassane Ouattara has been recognised internationally as the new president by the UN, the United States, the European Union, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Leaders of the 15-nation members of ECOWAS have stated that they could use force if the incumbent does not step down. The leaders have planned a visit to Ivory Coast on Tuesday 28th December 2010 to urge Laurent Gbagbo to quit.

The disputed presidential election has already taken a deadly turn. More than 170 people have been killed in the country as a direct result of the electoral stand-off, according to United Nations figures, while 14,000 people have fled to neighbouring Liberia to escape the violence that broke out in the election's aftermath. The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that, in the worst case scenario, as many as 30,000 people could become refugees. Women and children have been hit disproportionately hard by the conflict in Ivory Coast. According to ACT Alliance's Forum in Liberia, corroborated by the Liberian International NGO network (LINGO), the 14,000 who have now reached Liberia include 8,666 children below 17 years (4,451 boys and 4,215 girls) and 5,292 adults and elderly people (1,748 men and 3,544 women).

The fleeing population, mainly from the western part of Ivory Coast, has been walking for several days to safety in Liberia through Nimba. It is thought that there could be more refugees in other border areas.

Those who seek refuge in Liberia face severe shortages of basic facilities such as water, sanitation, shelter and food, in a country where even the host community lacks these basic necessities.

ACT forum members in Liberia and Ghana are sharing information with UN agencies the World Food Programme (WFP) and UNHCR, and will today (Monday 27th December) participate in inter-agency assessments in their respective border areas with Ivory Coast, where a rapid influx of refugees is expected. The two forums will then inform the ACT Secretariat by Tuesday 28th December whether they plan to mount an international response or a local response to the refugee crisis. WFP and UNHCR are already providing food and other essential items to the refugees.

ACT Alliance has no members based in Ivory Coast, but ACT members EED (Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst) and Ecumenical Church Loan Fund (ECLOF) work through national partners in the country.

Members of the ACT Forum in Liberia are Finn Church Aid (FCA), Church of Sweden (CoS), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), ICCO and Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (DKH). Two national members are in the process of renewing their membership with ACT Alliance.

Members of the ACT Forum in Ghana are Presbyterian Relief Services and Development (PRSD)/Presbyterian Church, Christian Aid, ICCO and ECLOF.

The ACT Alliance Secretariat will be providing further updates by email and on the website (www.actalliance.org) as soon as we hear from our members in the field.

For further information please contact:

ACT Alliance General Secretary, John Nduna (mob. +41 79 203 6055, jhn@actalliance.org) or
ACT Alliance Regional Program Officer, Katherine Ireri (mob. +41 79 433 0592, kir@actalliance.org)

Member/Forum contact information in Liberia and Ghana:

Liberia	Ghana
Päivi Muma Regional Representative, West Africa Finn Church Aid +231-(0)-614 0571 +358-(0)-50-5255816 paivi.muma@kua.fi Skype: paivihietta	Emmanuel N. Ankamah National Coordinator Presbyterian Relief services and Development prsdngo@yahoo.co.uk 233 27 74 959 15