

Introduction

Since the disputed elections in November 2010, Côte d'Ivoire's slide into civil war has been marked by increasing use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The use of artillery, mortars, rockets, and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) has caused acute suffering for the civilian population, from severe explosive weapons injuries to widespread displacement.

Explosive attacks timeline¹

2011	1 April	Heavy artillery, RPG7 rockets, and explosions reported in Cocody district, Abidjan. ²
	22 March	RPGs used in Bedi-Gouzan near Blolequin town. ³
	21 March	Artillery hit and damaged a convent, Abobo, Abidjan. ⁴
	17–18 March	19 killed by rockets and/or grenades in Abobo, Abidjan. ⁵
	17 March	100 killed or maimed by six 81mm mortar shells, market, Abobo, Abidjan. ⁶
	16 March	Four killed and 51 injured by a grenade attack in Attecoubé district, Abidjan, near UN headquarters. ⁷
	14 March	Heavy shelling in Yopougon suburb of Abidjan. ⁸
	12 March	Eight people killed by artillery and helicopter 'bombardments' in Abobo, Abidjan. ⁹
	24 Feb	Heavy weapons fire in Abobo, Abidjan caused women and children to flee. ¹⁰
	22 Feb	RPGs killed 19 and seriously wounded 65, according to UN special representative on Côte d'Ivoire. ¹¹
2010	21 Feb	RPGs killed six women protestors in Koumassi and Treichvillez, Abidjan. ¹²
	12 Jan	RPG attacks targeted at police killed six and injured three in Abidjan. ¹³
	16 Dec	RPGs lobbed into crowds at a demonstration in Abidjan reportedly caused many of the 30 resulting deaths. ¹⁴

Shelling of Abobo market

On 17 March 2011, 100 civilians were killed and injured during the shelling of a market in Abobo,¹⁵ one of the "most populated areas" of Abidjan city.¹⁶ The market, located close to the town mayor's office, was hit by at least six 81mm mortar shells. At one market stall, an elderly woman lost both her legs¹⁷ in traumatic amputations which are characteristic of explosive weapons injuries.¹⁸ According to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, "Shelling impacts were visible throughout the market and at least three houses were destroyed."¹⁹

UN Humanitarian Chief condemns attack

Following the shelling of Abobo market, the UN Humanitarian Chief, Baroness Amos, released a statement, noting that:

*"This incident...underlines the dreadful humanitarian impact of explosive weapons when used in populated areas."*²⁰

Displacement

The increasing use of explosive weapons in populated areas has been accompanied by large-scale displacement. On 17 March 2011, 200,000 people had reportedly been displaced from Abidjan.²¹ By 29 March, the UN reported that up to one million Ivorians had fled the city following artillery bombardments.²² The scale of the displacement, now standing at one quarter of the population of the city, has been described by a local nun as an "exodus."²³ On a national level, by 29 March a total of 116,000 Ivorians had reportedly fled the country, with 112,000 refugees entering Liberia and the remainder seeking shelter in Ghana, Togo, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Nigeria.²⁴

"...what we hear is the sound – the loud thud of heavy explosion ordnances which are so loud and so powerful they almost rattle the glass windows of the building...three to four kilometres... from the epicentre of the fighting."
(Nbor Susungi, Abidjan resident, BBC, 1 April 2011)

Explosive attacks signal escalating violence

As explosive attacks in Côte d'Ivoire have increased, there has been a corresponding deterioration in the security situation. The use of heavy weaponry signals a significant escalation in the violence, according to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations in Côte d'Ivoire, Choi Young-jin. Specifically, he stated that *"RPGs should not be used. Of course we do not accept the use of live bullets. But RPGs are serious weapons. So this must stop."*²⁵ The UN Assistant Secretary-General for peacekeeping, Atul Khare, has also noted this escalation, stating that:

*"...the escalation in the use of heavy weapons has had a serious toll on the lives and well-being of the Ivorian people."*²⁶

This sentiment was echoed by UN Humanitarian Chief Baroness Amos, who stated that *"The escalation of violence and use of heavy weaponry, particularly in urban areas, is taking an increasing toll on civilians."*²⁷

No to heavy weapons in civilian areas

Heads of state, senior United Nations figures, and international NGOs have moved swiftly to condemn the use of heavy weapons in populated areas as unacceptable, calling for an end to the violence.

"The launching of mortars into a market place and bus station is abhorrent and the UN should conduct a full investigation."

(UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague, *Associated Press*, 18 March 2011)

The attack on Abobo market was described as *"completely unacceptable"*²⁸ by an Amnesty International spokesperson, and in a broader statement, the NGO said:

*"Côte d'Ivoire security forces must halt the shelling of civilian areas."*²⁹

When six female demonstrators were killed by RPG fire, Human Rights Watch's Africa Director said that firing a heavy weapon into a crowd of

"At a minimum there should be no heavy weapons in Abidjan...We're talking about helicopters, mortars that could shoot on the population. It should be declared illegal by the international community."

(Nicholas Sarkozy, French President, *Reuters*, 25 March 2011)

women protestors *"exemplifies the moral bankruptcy of Gbagbo's security forces."*³⁰

UN Security Council intervenes

On 30 March 2011, the UN Security Council intervened on the issue of explosive weapons in populated areas, passing Resolution 1975. The resolution specifically mandated the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), to *"...prevent the use of heavy weapons against the civilian population."*³¹

Lack of casualty data

Casualty data has been reported on a small number of individual incidents, such as the shelling of a market in Abobo on 17 March 2011. However, there has been little systematic reporting of casualty figures, either by the national government, UN agencies, or international and local NGOs. This data is essential to support the provision of adequate and appropriate assistance to explosive weapons victims, as well as to measure the impact of interventions such as Resolution 1975.

Recommendations

1. All parties should refrain from using explosive weapons in populated areas.
 2. States, international organisations, and NGOs should demand an end to this use.
 3. When security allows, urgent action should be taken to address the immediate threat of explosive remnants of war, and to ensure the security of explosive ordnance stockpiles to prevent wider proliferation.
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For a full list of sources, please see page 3.

Sources

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