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The Cote d'Ivoire Transition: Prospects and Challenges

by
Francis Nguendi Ikome
and
Siphamandla Zondi

Introduction

The September 2002 failed coup attempt sparked off a rebellion which saw rebels take control of the northern areas separated from the government forces by a buffer zone manned by French armed forces. This plunged the country into a political crisis and threw one of the strongest economies of West Africa into decline. The crisis threatened stability in the neighbouring states which for most of the post-colonial period had parasited on Cote d'Ivoire's economic miracle and political tranquillity. As accusations and counter-accusations about the involvement of states like Burkina Faso and Liberia intensified, the national crisis risked developing into a regional quagmire. Both the regional efforts and the French initiative which produced the Marcoussis agreement in January 2003 failed to bring finality to the conflict. Neither did the SA-led AU mediation. Now the UN faces the litmus test of steering the peace process towards satisfactory conclusion. On the basis of interviews that the authors conducted with a cross-spectrum of stakeholders in Cote d'Ivoire this paper reflects on the challenges facing the peace process and prospects for the future. It also reflects upon the outcomes of a roundtable held with the stakeholders in Grand Basaam, Cote d'Ivoire subsequently. It further ponders the probability of the UN take-over in October 2005 advancing the process effectively.

How does one understand the crisis in Cote d'Ivoire?

In many ways the Ivoirian crisis is an economic one. The manner in which the post-colonial Ivoirian state has managed the distribution of resources partly explains the current political malaise. The abundance of resources and a thriving economy at a time when Cote d'Ivoire had a small national population that could hardly meet its production needs led the post-colonial Ivorian state under

Institute for Global Dialogue

Block 12, Thornhill Office Park,

Bekker Street, Vorna Valley

Midrand, South Africa

P O Box 32571, Braamfontein 2017

Tel +(11) 315-1299

Fax +(11) 315-2149

e-mail: info@igd.org.za
www.igd.org.za

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