

THE
CARTER CENTER



**The Carter Center
International Election Observation Mission to Côte d'Ivoire
Report #1**

**Observation of Identification and Voter Registration
Dec. 22, 2008**

Upon invitation of the Ivorian authorities, The Carter Center launched an international election observation mission to Cote d'Ivoire in October 2008. The main objective of the mission is twofold: to help reinforce confidence in the electoral process and to support free, fair, and transparent elections in Cote d'Ivoire through non-partisan and professionally executed election observation, in conformity with national laws and in accordance with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. A free and fair election in Cote d'Ivoire is an essential component for the successful achievement of the Ivorian peace and reconciliation process outlined in the Ouagadougou Political Accord.

The Carter Center conducted a preliminary assessment mission in October 2007 to meet with political leaders and gain a first-hand understanding of the political situation. President of Cote d'Ivoire Laurent Gbagbo, Prime Minister Guillaume Soro, and President of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) Robert Beugré Mambé acknowledged the importance of international election observation. As further confirmation of the interest on the part of Ivorian authorities to reinforce the transparency of the electoral process, Prime Minister Soro sent an official letter of invitation to former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, inviting the Center to deploy an international election observation mission to Côte d'Ivoire.

The Center deployed three teams of observers to assess the identification and voter registration operations Nov. 7 -Dec. 15, 2008. The Carter Center field office based in Abidjan managed the coordination of the observation mission. After a week of observation in the district of Abidjan, the teams moved to the interior of the country and continued to follow the process. To ensure an evenly balanced examination throughout the regions, observers were deployed in the following administrative departments: Divo, Gagnoa, Issia, and Duékoué in the West; Bouaké, Béoumi, Katiola, and Sakassou in the Center; and Korhogo and Ferkessedougou in the North. Staff from the Abidjan office observed in the district of Abidjan.

Observers met with actors involved all aspects of the identification and voters' registration operation: branches of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) at regional, departmental, and local levels; agents responsible for the identification and voter registration operations; members and supervisors of the Local Commissions for the Supervision of Identification; local authorities; members of the *Forces Nouvelles*; political party representatives; civil society organizations; populations; as well as electoral advisors of the U.N. Mission in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI). The Center's observers were well-received by everyone with whom they met.

With this report, The Carter Center wishes to share with national authorities, the CEI, and other political actors these preliminary observations, key findings, and recommendations. This report is meant to provide constructive and non-partisan analysis, maintaining the objective of transparency towards the Ivorian authorities and all stakeholders in the process. A second phase of observation is tentatively planned for January 2009.

Assessment of the Identification and Voter Registration Operation

The identification and voter registration operation was assessed on the basis of six main criteria, derived from the legal and regulatory framework put in place by the national authorities including the Procedures for Identification and Voter Registration (*Mode Opératoire*) and the Prime Minister's Circular of Oct. 21, 2008:

- Surroundings adjacent to the collection centers
- Logistics
- Registration operations
- Supervisory and monitoring mechanism;
- Presence of observers and political party representatives
- Other related factors

1. Surroundings Adjacent to the Collection Centers

In the assessment of the surroundings adjacent to the collection centers, the following was considered:

- Number of people petitioning
- General atmosphere in the surroundings of the center
- Presence of security forces

The official launch of identification and voter registration operations saw substantial public participation. A majority of those seeking identification and voter registration confirmed that they had been waiting for this operation to take place for quite some time. Particularly in urban areas, this interest resulted in large crowds of at times hundreds of petitioners outside collection centers, even before the centers were open for the day. In the district of Abidjan, a decline in the number of petitioners was noticed from the beginning of December up to the close of operations on Dec. 14.

Altogether, the atmosphere at and around the centers was calm, despite the often long waiting time and large number of petitioners. In some cases though, tensions were observed due to one or several of the following factors:

- Disputes among petitioners irritated by the long wait and anxious to be enrolled.
- Suspicions regarding the management of queues. Petitioners complained about others cutting in line, favoritism, or unfair advantage being given to acquaintances and/or political party members or supporters. Suspicions arose particularly when lines were managed by political party representatives or local youth.
- Petitioners originally from the village or specific area felt they should be registered before those who were not considered native to the community where the operation was taking place.
- There were two cases reported where individuals attempted to police the queues in an attempt to stop supposed foreign nationals from enrolling.

Over the course of the period observed, the Center's observers noted a progressive increase in the security of collection centers in the district of Abidjan. By the end of the observation period, the security forces were present in approximately one out of every two centers. Security patrols were also seen at regular intervals and the collection center managers had the appropriate contact details to call upon security forces should the need have arisen when security personnel were not present.

In the town of Bouaké there was a significant presence of security forces from the start of operations. At a majority of visited sites, two or three security officers were often present and the mixed patrols executed by Ivorian Security and Defense Forces (FDS) and the Forces Nouvelles Armed Forces (FAFN) appeared to work harmoniously together under the management of the Integrated Command Center.

Outside of Abidjan and Bouaké, security forces were seldom visible. Various explanations were given to justify the absence of security forces:

- Security forces did not receive official orders despite operations having been launched.
- The lack of means of transport made it difficult for security forces to travel to collection centers located outside towns.
- The collection center manager deemed the constant presence of security forces unnecessary, stating that security could be called upon should security forces be needed.

In cases when the centers did have security forces present, they were positioned along the exterior periphery of the center. In Bouaké, the security forces were sometimes observed inside the collection centers, contrary to the stipulations found in the Prime Minister's Circular. According to the Circular, the head of center alone is responsible for calling the police into the center should a need arise.

2. Logistics

When considering logistical aspects of the operation, the Center's observers included all elements necessary for the functioning of the collection centers and for the timely implementation of each step of the identification and voter registration procedure, including:

- The presence of the entire collection center staff: one CEI head of the center, one CEI agent responsible for identification, one ONI (National Office of Identification) agent responsible for identification, one INS (National Institute of Statistics) agent, and one agent from SAGEM (French private company providing technical services).
- The availability of all properly functioning equipment and materials (includes registration forms, a ruler for measuring height, a computer for the INS, an uninterruptable power supply, a generator for centers lacking electricity, SAGEM equipment with a battery as needed for centers lacking electricity).
- Security of equipment and materials during non-working hours.
- Coordination centers functioning at the administrative departmental level.

At the start of the observation period, the operations in the district of Abidjan had been disrupted by a strike action of numerous agents in the process. The strikers protested several aspects of their contracts including deployment prior to the signature of a contract and the level of remuneration. Though not always followed by all agents at the same time, strike by an agent from any one of the agencies involved in the process was sufficient to disrupt the entire operation, particularly when it involved agents from the National Institute for Statistics (INS) or SAGEM.

The number of staff in most of the collection centers in the district of Abidjan was increased from one to two teams in an effort to accelerate the operations and reduce the wait time of the petitioners. However, in some cases the second team was not ready immediately following the call to be deployed and this often resulted in several additional days of delay before all the members of the team were assembled for deployment.

Equipment was readily available in the district of Abidjan though some cases of technical failure of INS computers or SAGEM equipment were reported. In most cases, these problems were resolved in anywhere from a half to a full day.

Delays in restocking the registration forms were noticed in various collection centers across the district of Abidjan. In extreme cases these shortages caused operations to be stopped for three to five days. Such delays were attributed to SAGEM agents not receiving sufficient funds for fuel for vehicles to deliver the forms where needed.

Outside of Abidjan, Carter Center observers witnessed the launch of operations in several administrative departments. The opening of centers was carried out in several successive steps beginning with the larger towns and spreading to the smaller surrounding villages. Most collection center teams were fully complete the first day of operations though in a few cases operations were delayed several days. There were several reasons that caused the delays, including:

- Late arrival of material and equipment.

- Errors in the deployment of teams or material, possibly having been directed to the wrong site or the late arrival of the list of centers prevented the various actors from efficient coordination.
- There were cases where collection centers were falsely said to have electricity though this was not realized until the team arrived at the site. Delays thus ensued due to a lack of a generator or other equipment necessary for the center to function. It was often the case that information about each center location was not properly verified by the CEI because they lacked the means to visit and verify the information for every site.
- Generators that were not operational or cases where there was no means to purchase fuel to run them.
- In one specific case, the regional CEI refused to participate in the process in the absence of an operations budget.
- Other financial problems.

Technical problems were observed or reported more frequently outside of Abidjan. The generators needed to power the INS computers often broke down owing to the poor quality of fuel available in the CNO zone (the former rebel-held areas of the center, north and west of the country), the inadequate generator capacity to power the necessary equipment, and/or agents by some means damaged the generator. SAGEM equipment also had problems stemming from improper functioning of the battery or failure to hold a charge, but normally these issues were resolved within a day. A lack of sufficient light rendered it difficult to take ID photos.

There was also no standardized procedure for securing material outside of working hours. CEI officials reported that they had suggested that the material be stored in their premises but the administrators were hesitant to do so. In practice, the agents themselves became responsible for the security of equipment. When the collection center was located in a school, INS and SAGEM agents quite often found a place within the school to keep the equipment secure. In cases where agents did not find an appropriate place, the material was usually entrusted to the local chief, the mayor, or in rare cases in the homes of residents living nearby the location of the collection center.

For some of the centers located in towns, a system to ensure equipment was securely stored was eventually organized with the assistance of UNOCI. The equipment was dropped off after the close of operations each day and picked up the following morning, left under the watch of the local CEI or SAGEM agents at coordination centers. This system often caused delays in the opening times of collection centers because a lack of vehicles prevented the equipment from being systematically redistributed on time.

The official procedures for the identification and voter registration operation foresaw regular data transmission – a “daily flow” according to the official procedures – from collection centers to coordination centers located at the administrative departmental level. Once data are received in the departmental coordination centers, a satellite transmission system was to transfer data to the principal site in Abidjan for further review. However, this complex system of transmission and treatment of data is not operational. It seems that neither the technical preconditions that must be in place to enable such a system as defined by SAGEM nor the physical structures needed to accommodate the coordination centers have been established. It is evident that the

scale of the logistical challenges to implement such as system was underestimated from the start. When and how the authorities will settle this predicament is unknown to The Carter Center at this time.

3. Registration Operations

In general, the agents carrying out the operations had a good grasp of the process, after what was a short breaking-in period during the earliest days of the operation. During the first several days of operation, agents made a significant number of mistakes on the registration forms that resulted in a number of forms being cancelled and the individual registration operation restarted again. Agents also appeared to follow the directives listing the required documentation to register and the means to check its authenticity. In some instances however, individual agents pursued in-depth questioning of petitioners who had names thought to be of a foreign origin. This tendency was acknowledged by some agents and heads of collection center, and seemed to be at least partly attributable to a case of arrest and sentencing of a National Identification Office (ONI) agent who registered a foreigner on the voter list. However, it was also possible that an overly-exhaustive interrogation by some agents may have led them to act beyond their terms of reference – which were limited to the checking of the formal elements outlined in the Circular – resulting in undue rejections.

Other irregular implementation of the Circular was observed. For example, the verification of dates appearing on the documents was sometimes subject to interpretation that could have resulted in unmerited rejections of petitioners. This situation seemed to have been corrected by verbal instructions communicated to agents in the collection centers. The verification of the official stamp on documents did not always follow the same criteria: the monetary value of the stamp was sometimes considered and sometimes not. In this case also, it appeared that verbal instructions had been given to agents to accept the validity of identification documents regardless of the monetary value of their stamps. The lack of uniformity in implementing these instructions appeared to be attributable to the fact that agents did not receive the instructions at the same time.

The following is a list of the most frequent reasons for rejections based on official procedures:

- Some petitioners under the age of 18 were not in possession of a certificate of nationality. This was observed in all the regions visited but with higher frequency in the CNO zone (the former rebel-held areas of the center, north and west of the country) due to the previous absence of tribunals competent to deliver such documents.
- Petitioners presented a notarized deed issued by a judge or a record of individual civil status issued by a state officer; this case occurred most frequently for citizens displaced as a result of the war.
- Illegible documents; due normally to mold or general deterioration as a result of bad conservation.
- A worn seal on the original document.
- Absence of the signature and/or capacity of the administrative authority on the original documents.
- Unreadable photocopies.

Other less frequent causes for rejection in conformity with the Circular were observed or reported:

- The petitioner was born before the civil registry was started.
- The original document and photocopy did not match.
- The written name on the document did not match that given by the petitioner.

Some irregular cases of rejection were observed or reported, including instances when:

- A petitioner whose name is common in neighboring countries, even though their parents were born in Cote d'Ivoire, was unable to register without a naturalization document.
- A petitioner had a foreign father and an Ivorian mother.

Representatives of political parties, in particular in the CNO zone and in the West, alleged fraud occurred before and during the operations through the distribution of false papers. It is important to note that, with one exception, these allegations were not substantiated with reference to particular cases or evidence. The Center's observers were unable to verify these allegations of fraud.

4. Supervisory and Monitoring Mechanism

The identification procedures mandate that all the steps that fall under the responsibility of ONI are to be monitored by the National Commission for the Supervision of Identification (CNSI) and its local branches called Local Commission for the Supervision of Identification (CLSI). Save for the complaints about the identity of individuals, the CNSI is responsible for all complaints relative to operations under its area of competence. Complaints can be introduced by individuals, political parties, and the technical structures involved in the operation.

The Center's observers noticed a general ignorance of the existence of the CNSI. Most petitioners and political party representatives at the local level were not aware of the existence of the administrative recourse entrusted to CNSI. The dispute mechanism regarding the provisional voters list was often confused with the administrative recourse offered by CNSI.

During the observation period, the ten CLSI of the district of Abidjan progressively sent their agents into collection centers. In Bouaké, where there should have been 174 CLSI agents deployed, observers found them in fewer than half of the collection centers. In other administrative departments visited where operations were launched at the beginning of December, the CLSI was only rarely present.

In general, very few complaints were brought to the CLSI. Most disputes appear to have been settled on the spot by those officials who were present, reportedly, to the satisfaction of all concerned. However, the absence of CLSI in most places could compromise the effective and just settlement of any future disputes that arise and become subject to legal proceedings.

5. Presence of Observers and Political Party Representatives

In general, Ivorian civil society organizations are not yet involved in the observation of the identification and voter registration operation. It appears that certain civil society organizations were still waiting for the official CEI authorization necessary to access and observe the operations in the collection centers.

On the other hand, political party representatives were involved in the identification and voter registration. The prime minister's Circular allows access to the collection centers only to those authorized by the CEI. Political party representatives were generally found nearby the collection centers. In only one instance was a political party representative found inside a collection center. Party representatives assisted their supporters and members, notably in verifying the spelling of names recorded on the registration receipts. Representatives of one political party established lists with names and receipt numbers of supporters and members who registered to keep for their records so they could assist voters who might lose their receipt to check the provisional voter list.

6. Other Related Factors

Several other factors affected public participation in the process, including:

- Difficulties in providing the documents required to register.
- Difficulties with making photocopies of the required documents.
- Accessibility of collection centers.
- Public awareness and understanding of the process.

Members of the public who tried to acquire the necessary documents to register faced additional challenges, including:

- Overcrowding of state offices as the number of requests for copies of birth certificates doubled or more after the start of identification and voter registration. The high volume of requests resulted in greater delays.
- Underage petitioners could not obtain a nationality certificate in the CNO zone.
- Petitioners affected by lost or destroyed civil registers were unable to register as long as those registers remained in need of reconstitution.

In urban areas, most members of the public did not appear to have too much difficulty finding a photocopier but it is likely to be more difficult once the process is extended to rural areas.

Accessibility of the collection centers did not seem to constitute a problem, especially since most of the collection centers opened to this point have been located primarily in towns. Accessibility is likely to become more of an issue once the operation is extended to rural areas.

In general, petitioners were well informed about the location of collection centers and the documentation they needed to register. Word-of-mouth appears to have been the most effective way that information about the operations was transmitted. Heads of communities, village chiefs, religious leaders, local governmental authorities, local radio stations, political party

representatives, the UN mission radio ONUCI FM and television were among the sources of information for most people.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The launch of the identification and voter registration process was a significant step in implementing the Ouagadougou Political Accords. There is also a strong public interest to participate in this process. Despite several security incidents that occurred in the beginning of the operation in Abidjan, the process has been unfolding peacefully. The agents and supervisors from all of the different institutions involved in the operation seem motivated and serious, even as they worked in what were often difficult conditions.

The operation progresses, however slowly. In the heavily populated district of Abidjan, the operations closed on Dec. 14, 2008, with more than two million people registered. The opening of collection centers in the interior of the country starting on Nov. 18, 2008, took place in successive waves beginning with the larger towns of the administrative departments. The operation has not yet started in the smaller localities (sub-prefectures). In addition, the coordination centers at departmental level are not yet functioning. The slow progression of the operation raises serious questions about the capacity of authorities to handle the logistical and financial management demands of the process. Generally speaking, it seems that the scale of these logistical challenges and their implications for planning, organization, and financing were not given adequate consideration from the outset.

Throughout the country equipment breakdowns delayed the operations from the outset. Due to the complexity of the operation, the number of institutional actors involved, and the realities on the ground, some problems were inevitable. Having said that, more careful planning and increased coordination between all of the structures involved in the operation could improve efficiency. Centralized coordination efforts have not always produced the expected results at the local level and it appears that local actors, notably the local CEI, were not really involved in the initial operational planning and once initiated, they lacked the means to implement the process efficiently.

The agents appeared to have proven knowledge of the official procedures regarding the required documentation and methods of verification. Limited cases of irregular rejection and registration were reported or observed, but overall this did not seem to affect the integrity and credibility of the operation. Although the tendency of certain agents to go beyond the terms of their mandate may have led to irregular rejections of petitioners, in general agents limited their verification efforts to the formal elements.

Some petitioners were unable to participate in the process at this stage due to the earlier absence of tribunals in the CNO zone and the problem of lost or destroyed civil registers. Furthermore, the significant increase in requests for new documents required for registration has overwhelmed the limited capacity of state offices.

The activities of the National Commission for the Supervision of Identification started far behind schedule. Once again, financial constraints seem to have been at the root of this delay but the

result is that potential beneficiaries were usually unaware about the existence of such a mechanism.

Outside of Abidjan and Bouaké, the security of collection centers often appeared limited or nonexistent, including in areas where the security situation was considered volatile. Limited transportation restricted security forces capacity to patrol collection centers outside the main cities and towns. There was no uniform procedure put in place from the start outlining how equipment and materials should be secured outside of working hours and therefore this responsibility falls principally on agents themselves.

The representatives of the main political parties regularly followed the operations particularly in towns. By contrast, the presence of national civil society organizations in the observation of these operations was very limited. In spite of repeated requests to the CEI for authorization to observe the identification and voter registration process, some interested civic organizations are still waiting for a response.

The Carter Center makes the following recommendations:

- CEI and other actors should renew their cooperation in order to reallocate available resources more rationally and efficiently.
- Improved planning, assessment, and more efficient coordination between the different structures could be reached by a more effective involvement of their representatives at decentralized level, especially to take advantage of their knowledge of local conditions.
- Authorities should implement an improved payment system to avoid additional late payment of funds to various agents working in the operation.
- CEI should develop and publish a more realistic electoral calendar based on a coherent estimation of deadlines (considering the delays already incurred) and the applicable legal framework.
- The prompt redeployment of tribunals in the CNO zone will facilitate the inclusion of minors in the identification process and enable the proper adjudication of any legal disputes that may arise related to the electoral process.
- The identification and voter registration and the reconstitution of civil registers lost or destroyed during the war must be effectively linked to ensure that all eligible petitioners have the opportunity to be included.
- All institutions involved in the identification and voter registration should remind their agents of the limits and of the exactitude of their mandate especially regarding the determination of the validity of documents (and likewise strengthen public information efforts). In cases where clarifications, adaptations, or other procedural changes are made, it is recommended that they be written in an official addendum to the existing procedures and distributed to all of the affected agents.
- The National Commission for the Supervision of Identification (CNSI) should do everything possible to ensure that their agents are present from the first day of operation in the collection centers so as to ensure a balanced supervision throughout the country and to provide all petitioners with the same information. The role and mandate of CNSI should also be more widely communicated.

- As the operation is extended to the sub-regions of the country, it would be useful to organize a patrol system for the security forces that will enable them to intervene quickly if needed. Furthermore, it would be useful to start identifying possible sites for keeping equipment and materials secure in rural areas.
- Political parties should continue to ensure that their agents observe all phases of the electoral process in a constructive manner. The Carter Center also underlines the important role of civil society organizations in civic education and non-partisan election observation and calls on the CEI to provide the appropriate authorization for qualified groups who wish to deploy observers.

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The Carter Center conducts election observation activities in a nonpartisan, professional manner as set forth in the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation. The Center coordinates closely with other international and domestic observer delegations and publishes its statements on its Web site: www.cartercenter.org.

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