



Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Côte d'Ivoire: The Ivoirian Popular Front (Front populaire ivoirien, FPI), including the treatment of its members (July 2014July 2015)

Publisher	Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
Publication Date	24 July 2015
Citation / Document Symbol	CIV105236.FE
Related Document	Côte d'Ivoire : information sur le Front populaire ivoirien (FPI), y compris sur le traitement réservé à ses membres (juillet 2014-juillet 2015)
Cite as	Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, <i>Côte d'Ivoire: The Ivoirian Popular Front (Front populaire ivoirien, FPI), including the treatment of its members (July 2014July 2015)</i> , 24 July 2015, CIV105236.FE, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/568e340d4.html [accessed 7 January 2016]
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1. Situation of the FPI

Sources indicate that the FPI is grappling with internal divisions (UN 7 May 2015, para. 7; Jeune Afrique 30 Mar. 2015; Freedom House 2015). Freedom House reports that divisions within the party of the country's former president, Laurent Gbagbo, have existed since his arrest [in 2011] (ibid.).

According to some sources, there are two camps in the party: the one of Laurent Gbagbo's supporters, led by Aboudramane [also written Abou Drahamane] Sangaré; and the other camp that supports Pascal Affi N'Guessan (UN 7 May 2015, para. 7-8; Jeune Afrique 30 Mar. 2015). Jeune Afrique explains that, on 5 March 2015, Pascal Affi N'Guessan, who had been party president since 2001, was removed by the Sangaré camp and replaced, on an interim basis, by Aboudramane Sangaré, one of the party's founders, pending the release of Laurent Gbagbo (ibid.). Pascal Affi N'Guessan took legal action to [translation] "have the decision overturned" (ibid.). A report of the UN Secretary General to the UN Security Council indicates that [UN English version] "[o]n 3 April 2015, the court declared [Pascal] Affi N'Guessan the sole representative and leader of [the] FPI" (UN 7 May 2015, para. 8). According to Jeune Afrique, Affi N'Guessan's camp is considered [translation] "moderate," while that of Aboudramane Sangaré is characterized as "extremist" (Jeune Afrique 30 Mar. 2015). According to some sources, the latter are calling for the release of Laurent Gbagbo, who is being held by the International Criminal Court, before they agree to participate in the political life of the country (ibid.; AFP 1 May 2015). Sources indicate that, on 30 April 2015, members held an unauthorized assembly in the village of Mama, at which Laurent Gbagbo was elected president of the FPI (ibid.; UN 7 May 2015, para. 8). At a party assembly held in May

2015, the FPI named Pascal Affi N'Guessan as the party's candidate in the presidential election in October 2015 (le Monde and AFP 22 May 2015; Jeune Afrique 22 May 2015; RFI 23 May 2015). According to Radio France internationale (RFI), the other camp still maintains that Laurent Gbagbo is party president and they are contesting the results of the May 2015 assembly (ibid.).

2. Treatment of FPI Members

For more information on the treatment of members of the FPI, particularly from December 2013 to July 2014, see Response to Information Request CIV104929.

2.1 Attempts at Reconciliation

The US Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014 indicates that in May 2014, the government unfroze 43 bank accounts held by associates of Laurent Gbagbo (US 25 June 2015, 9). Freedom House also reports the unfreezing of assets of some associates of the former president in the first part of 2014 (Freedom House 2015). According to the same source, talks between the government and the FPI then stalled (ibid.). According to the report of the UN Secretary General, talks resumed on 29 December 2014, and in January 2015, the bank accounts of 31 associates of Laurent Gbagbo were unfrozen, including that of Pascal Affi N'Guessan (UN 7 May 2015, para. 3). The report also indicates that talks between the government and opposition parties resumed in January 2015, which led, in May 2015, to the disbursement, [UN English version] "on an exceptional basis," of one billion CFA francs [approximately C\$2 million] in public funding of political parties in preparation for the elections, including 40 percent to the FPI (ibid., para. 4).

Freedom House reports that President Ouattara has "honored his commitment not to prosecute individuals returning from self-imposed exile" (Freedom House 2015). Similarly, Country Reports 2014 notes that in October 2014, four Gbagbo supporters returned to the country without incident after three years of self-exile (US 25 June 2015, 12). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.2 Detentions and Prosecutions

According to Country Reports 2014, approximately 50 prisoners close to former president Gbagbo were released in June 2014 (ibid., 8). Without specifying numbers, Freedom House also reports that some members of the FPI who had been detained were released in mid-2014 (Freedom House 2015). According to the report of the UN Secretary General, in December 2014 and January 2015, [UN English version] "as a conciliatory gesture, a total of 63 detainees were released on bail" (UN 7 May 2015, para. 3). According to Country Reports 2014, some local human rights groups and political parties alleged that members of the FPI, who were detained on charges such as economic crimes, armed robbery, looting and embezzlement, "were political prisoners, especially when charged for actions committed during the 2010/11 postelection crisis" (US 25 June 2015, 8). IRIN reports that

[IRIN English version]

[w]hile both camps [the supporters of the FPI and the supporters of Alassane Ouattara] have been accused of abuses, prosecutions have focused on Gbagbo's supporters. Since December [2014], 83 of them have been on trial for alleged crimes committed after the 2010 election. (IRIN 13 Mar. 2015)

According to the report of the UN Secretary General, [UN English version] "[c]ontinued perceptions of 'victor's justice' were fuelled by the prosecution of former President Gbagbo's supporters for committing crimes against the State" (UN 7 May 2015, para. 16).

For more information on the conflict that broke out in Côte d'Ivoire between supporters

of Laurent Gbagbo and supporters of Alassane Ouattara after the October 2010 presidential election, see Response to Information Request CIV104688.

According to Country Reports 2014, the FPI estimates that between 750 and 800 Gbagbo supporters remain in detention (US 25 June 2015, 8). In contrast, the report of the UN Secretary General indicates, that in January 2015, [UN English version] "[o]ut of the 659 persons detained in connection with the crisis, 321 remain[ed] in detention" (UN 7 May 2015, para. 3). Similarly, Freedom House reports that the authorities continue to delay bringing to trial more than 300 supporters of Laurent Gbagbo, many of whom are detained since 2012 (Freedom House 2015).

Sources indicate that in March 2015, Simone Gbagbo, the wife of Laurent Gbagbo, was found guilty of undermining state security and of related charges for crimes committed during the 2010-2011 postelection period (IRIN 13 Mar. 2015; UN 7 May 2015, para. 16-17). According to the UN Secretary General, 59 of the coaccused were also convicted (ibid., para. 17). Sources indicate that Simone Gbagbo was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment (IRIN 13 Mar. 2015; UN 7 May 2015, para. 17) and to withdrawal of her civic rights for 10 years (ibid.). Sources indicate that Aboudramane Sangaré was also sentenced to five years (Jeune Afrique 30 Mar. 2015) or to 10 years in prison (IRIN 13 Mar. 2015). According to the report of the UN Secretary General,

[UN English version]

[o]verall, 32 prominent FPI figures are facing imprisonment and deprivation of their civic rights, and are therefore prevented from participating in political activities, including Michel Gbagbo [son of Laurent and Simone Gbagbo] and Mr. Sangaré. Mr. Affi N'Guessan received a suspended sentence of 18 months. The defence lawyers and prosecution have filed appeals. The Court also awarded the State some \$1.9 billion in damages from the convicted persons. Nineteen of the accused were acquitted. (UN 7 May 2015, para. 17)

Jeune Afrique notes the disparity between the verdicts announced against Simone Gbagbo and Aboudramane Sangaré and the sentence imposed on Pascal Affi N'Guessan (Jeune Afrique 30 Mar. 2015). According to Jeune Afrique, Pascal Affi N'Guessan was [translation] "publicly confirmed by the government, which sees him as its 'only discussion partner'" (ibid.). Similarly, Alerte info, an Ivorian online news site, reports that a government spokesperson stated that the Côte d'Ivoire government recognized Pascal Affi N'Guessan as its sole [translation] "'discussion partner'" (Alerte info 11 Mar. 2015).

2.3 Other Treatment of FPI Members

According to Country Reports 2014, in June 2014, the authorities denied requests from the youth wing of the FPI for authorization to organize prayer vigils for the release of former president Laurent Gbagbo by the International Criminal Court (US 25 June 2015, 11). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to Alerte info, in April 2015, approximately 30 members of the Sangaré camp who had gathered near the head office of a newspaper with ties to the FPI, in Abidjan, were dispersed by the police (Alerte info 3 Apr. 2015). Stating that they had been ordered not to authorize the rallies around the building, the police used tear gas and arrested 10 people (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that in May 2015, members of the Sangaré camp were arrested and placed in detention (UN 7 May 2015, para. 8; AIP 7 May 2015). According to the Agence ivoirienne de presse (AIP), a government spokesperson stated that these arrests were part of the government's [translation] "duty" to maintain public order, given that the detainees, including two former ministers, had organized a rally of the Sangaré camp in

Mama on 30 April 2015, "despite an order prohibiting it" (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Oral sources: Attempts to contact the following persons and organizations were unsuccessful within the time constraints for this Response: Ligue ivoirienne des droits de l'homme; Mouvement ivoirien des droits humains; professor, Université Michel de Montaigne.

Internet sites, including: Abidjan.net; Amnesty International; La Dépêche d'Abidjan; ecoi.net; Economic Community of West African States; Factiva; Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme; Germany - Federal Office for Migration and Asylum; HCH24; Human Rights Watch; Notre Voie; United Nations - Refworld.

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