

**UNITED NATIONS HUMANITARIAN CHIEF ALARMED AT  
COTE D'IVOIRE VIOLENCE**

(New York, 18 March 2011): I am gravely concerned at the shelling on Thursday of a market in the Abobo district of Abidjan that resulted in the deaths of at least 25 civilians. The incident demonstrates a blatant disregard for international humanitarian law which prohibits attacks against civilians and civilian objects. It is an alarming development in the conduct of the current hostilities and underlines the dreadful humanitarian impact of explosive weapons when used in populated areas.

The incident is the latest in a series of human rights and humanitarian law violations in Côte d'Ivoire that have occurred following the disputed presidential election in November 2010. Violations appear to have been perpetrated by forces loyal to both sides in the political dispute and resulted in over 400 civilians killed and provoked a humanitarian crisis, both in Abidjan and throughout the country. An estimated 300,000 people have been displaced in Abidjan while 45,000 are displaced in the west of the country. Over 75,000 people have also fled to Liberia.

The ability of humanitarian organizations to access those in need of assistance is increasingly restricted by escalating violence and direct obstruction of humanitarian personnel trying to reach affected areas.

I am particularly worried by reports that civilians who wish to flee the violence in Abobo are prevented from doing so while others who are able to access assistance are intimidated into refusing it.

I call on those involved in the violence to respect the civilian population and allow rapid, safe and unimpeded access by humanitarian organizations to those in need.

New York, 18 March 2011

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