

## **The Washington Appeal for a new Côte d'Ivoire**

*We, the religious and civil society leaders of Côte d'Ivoire, were invited to meet in Washington, D.C. from April 26 to May 1, 2010, by the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, and the United States Institute of Peace. A feeling of helplessness affects us all, as the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire has reached an impasse. We are very worried for our country's future, with the many difficulties and challenges we all face in the months to come. After much reflection, we take note of our responsibilities and call upon the men and women of Côte d'Ivoire, as well as the political leaders of our country to answer our appeal:*

For years now, Côte d'Ivoire has been in transition towards permanent and definitive peace. Many comments and interpretations have been made about the origins and the ills of our crisis. Without adding more to the controversy, we humbly and strongly affirm our worries about the obstacles and the ongoing stalemate.

The suffering, fear, and mistrust, our people feel must absolutely stop. Many are concerned about the fate of our future. Our country must overcome the many uncertainties fueling hostilities, mistrust, and fear.

We firmly believe Côte d'Ivoire's destiny is not one of division, but rather, unity, fraternity, and a spirit of friendship, in total respect for each other's identity. For those that have lost all hope and resigned, we say:

Free yourselves from pessimism that breeds a culture of mistrust!

Choose courage and peace!

For all that dwell in the worry of suspicion and fear, for those who are resigned to the status quo, for those who only see enemies, and those who feel we can continue waiting, we implore you; "Be brave, take the first step! Nothing will be lost with peace! Let's not leave the potential of Côte d'Ivoire wither and in the process, lose sight of a brighter future! Although much talk has taken place, and while peace may seem risky, it is the only possible solution for our destiny!

We must all assume some responsibility for today's impasse. We cannot find a resolution to this stalemate by blaming one another. We all must find within ourselves, the strength we need to revitalize our beloved Côte d'Ivoire. We are convinced that change begins with each and every one of us, as we eradicate the roots of mistrust and the fear in our hearts. If you want someone to change, begin with yourself!

The diversity and pluralism of our nation is not a weakness, but an incredible asset we need to capitalize upon. Our nation can count on its resources to begin anew.

Over the course of the past few years, many external partners have contributed to our quest for peace. We are infinitely grateful and we urge them to continue their efforts. But ultimately, it is up to Ivoirians to reclaim their place and put an end to this impasse. The precious support the friends of Côte d'Ivoire are providing us can only be effective if we, the people of Côte d'Ivoire, can bring change and reconcile with one another. In effect, if we do not embrace the path towards peace, nothing will save us!

We understand that for democracy to work, we need our institutions to function normally. With this, we must add the importance of our youth, as they will carry us into the future. We have no right to ruin their chances for a better life.

In this regard, we have observed that much anguish and intense anxiety, is linked to the upcoming elections. The elections are indispensable, but should not be seen as ends in themselves. If we demand peaceful, free, just, and transparent elections, we have to defuse the context in which they will take place. We have to see beyond the elections and confidently envision the future.

We call upon the political stakeholders to engage in dialogue with civil society to discuss the entire peace process. Let's talk about our future! We propose a Guarantee Agreement that can foster good will among us all, in the efforts to maintain peace, security and harmony for all, before, during, and most importantly, after the elections.

Let's not waste these opportunities for peace and reconciliation, or the benefits obtained from the dialogues of the last few years, especially the Ouagadougou Political Agreement.

We are conscious of our own responsibilities of past events leading up to our present state. We have all inherited this situation and we must share its responsibilities.

We remind you that if we begin with ourselves, peace and a new era for Côte d'Ivoire will be in our reach. If our hearts are sincere and our spirits endure, God will lead us on a path of peace.

*Washington, D.C. April 30, 2010*

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