

**Testimony by Deputy Assistant Secretary William Fitzgerald,
Bureau of African Affairs, U.S. Department of State
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights
April 13, 2011
“Crisis in Cote d’Ivoire: Implications for the Country and Region”**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking member Payne, and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today on Cote d’Ivoire. Cote d’Ivoire is an important country in sub-Saharan Africa and one of great significance to the United States.

First, let me express our concern for the very real human tragedy that has befallen the Ivoirian people as a result of the political crisis. The road to democratic elections was a long and turbulent one, and the Ivoirian people deserve to have their voices heard and respected by a government that is responsive to their needs.

The fall 2010 presidential elections were the culmination of nearly ten years of international community engagement to broker lasting peace in Cote d’Ivoire. Following controversial elections in 2000 and a civil war which divided the country, then-President Laurent Gbagbo and opposition leader Alassane Ouattara helped craft the electoral process through a series of negotiated agreements beginning in 2005. These agreements specified that the United Nations provide technical assistance to support the elections, deploy widespread election observers,

and certify each stage of the electoral process. We have supported the United Nations' presence in Cote d'Ivoire since 2003, including its current incarnation as the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI), and the French military force (Licorne), which is mandated to UNOCI's work under UNSC Resolution 1528 from 2004. After several years of delays, the first round of elections on October 31, 2010 was hailed by all candidates and observers as peaceful and fair, with nearly 80% voter turnout and no significant irregularities reported.

The November 28 runoff between Alassane Ouattara and Laurent Gbagbo was again characterized by high voter turnout and largely peaceful participation by the Ivoirian people. Credible, accredited observers assessed that both rounds were fair, and free of irregularities that would have impacted the results. As a part of his mandate to certify each step of the electoral process, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, Y.J. Choi, received identical copies of the 20,073 tally sheets which the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) and the Constitutional Council used to determine the results. After reviewing these tally sheets, SRSG Choi certified the finding of the CEI that Alassane Ouattara had won the second round with 54% of the vote. However, the Constitutional Council, a body composed of Gbagbo appointees, nullified the totality of the results in several specific districts which Ouattara had carried, handing Gbagbo a victory by a margin of 51%.

International observers, including the Carter Center, the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, and the United Nations, were unified in their acceptance of President Ouattara's victory. The international consensus in support of a well-organized democratic process was critical in preventing a return to full-scale civil war in Cote d'Ivoire, and preserving Africa's democratic momentum as other countries, such as Nigeria, hold national elections this year. Despite this consensus, Gbagbo refused to concede defeat and began re-arming militias to intimidate and attack communities that supported President Ouattara.

From the onset of the crisis, the United States worked closely with ECOWAS, the AU, and the UN to find a peaceful resolution to the crisis, using diplomatic and political tools to push for an outcome which respected the will of the Ivoirian people. However, Gbagbo's tactics became increasingly violent as the crisis drew on. As fighting increased between the two camps, there have been reports of human rights abuses committed by combatants on both sides. Following Gbagbo's use of heavy weaponry against unarmed civilians, the UN Security Council called for the UNOCI and French military force Licorne to act under their mandates and take "all necessary measures" to protect civilians under imminent threat, including by neutralizing heavy weapons in and around Abidjan. These operations were critical in preventing further escalation of violence in Abidjan. On

Monday, April 11, President Ouattara's Republican Forces took Gbagbo and his wife into custody.

The hard work is just beginning in Cote d'Ivoire, and President Ouattara must now begin implementing his reconciliation plan in earnest. President Ouattara has outlined his intent to be president of all Ivoirians, and is committed to a broad and comprehensive reconciliation effort to build lasting peace. This must include accountability on all sides for atrocities committed since the November elections. We commend President Ouattara's calls for independent investigations into alleged human rights abuses and violations, and the United States recently co-sponsored a resolution at the UN Human Rights Council which created a Commission of Inquiry to investigate these allegations.

Accountability and a meaningful reconciliation process will be essential not only for Cote d'Ivoire's future, but for regional stability in the wake of the Ivoirian crisis. With over 100,000 Ivoirian refugees in Liberia and other neighboring countries, President Ouattara must create a stable and peaceful environment to allow them to return. Up to 1,000,000 Ivoirians have been internally displaced, and must be able to return to their lives. The United States is providing \$31.7 million to address the growing humanitarian crisis in Cote d'Ivoire and the affected communities in Liberia and neighboring countries.

We are committed to working with President Ouattara and the Ivoirian people to help re-establish Cote d'Ivoire as the beacon of stability and economic prosperity it once was. A prosperous and peaceful Cote d'Ivoire is an asset to the region and the continent, and we look forward to playing a part in the hopeful future that lies ahead.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and I welcome any questions you may have.