

**CENTER FOR  
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**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING COTE D'IVOIRE**

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**SPEAKERS:  
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PRESIDENT,  
THE REPUBLIC OF COTE D'IVOIRE**

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JENNIFER COOKE: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Jennifer Cooke. I'm director of the Africa program here at CSIS. And I want to welcome you all to CSIS this afternoon.

First and foremost, I'd like to welcome President Gbagbo to Washington and to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. President Gbagbo hasn't been to Washington in the last 4 years or so, and I think you can see from the audience today, Mr. President, that there's a great deal of interest in what you have to say. Are you fixed on this?

There's a lot going on in Washington and New York, but from the size of the audience, as I say, there's a lot of interest in hearing your perspective on how the upcoming elections in Cote D'Ivoire are progressing, and I think also, the longer-term prospects for security and reconciliation in Cote D'Ivoire.

I'd like to say a special thanks and welcome to Amb. Charles Koffi, Ivorian ambassador to Washington, and Amb. Alcide Djédjé, who is Ivorian permanent representative at the United Nations and who helped organize this event. I'd also like to thank Mr. Behgjet Pacolli. He's an international counselor here at CSIS, made this introduction with President Gbagbo. And his representative, Mr. Aka (ph), is here with us today.

We've titled this event "Challenges and Opportunities," and that's a very overused phrase here in Washington at this kind of event, but I think it's clear and it's fair to say that this is a moment of tremendous challenge in Cote D'Ivoire. Presidential elections have been thrice postponed.

I think there's a great deal of skepticism here in Washington on whether this round will happen in the timeframe envisaged, whether the technical and the logistical hurdles will be overcome, and, to be candid, whether the political leadership has really thrown its heart and energy and resources behind this process in a way that will make it happen and overcome those obstacles – and I'm talking political leadership from all sides, here.

While the national identification process has concluded, there are still some questions about that, and the voter registration process has also been completed, but those have not yet been published, and I think a potential flashpoint is if and when they are published, if they're deemed at all controversial, that could be a potential setback to the election process.

The disarmament process, as I understand, and perhaps you can talk more about this, has made progress – both disarmament of the Forces Nouvelles in the North and some of the government militias and the genpatriote (ph). But it's still incomplete. And in a country that is saturated with arms, I think the potential for return to violence is always a possibility, and this could be very problematic if the elections are hotly contested and are not perceived to be legitimate and free and fair.

But this is also a moment of tremendous opportunity. I think the Ouagadougou Accord injected a new sense of hope into this, greater Ivorian ownership over the process. As I said, there has been progress in disarmament. The extension of administrative – administration at the national level has made important progress. And I think it's an opportunity for the political leadership to look to the longer-term future of the country and for the Ivorian people to choose who they would like to lead them through this process. And let me say that we're all, here, very anxious for this process to succeed.

I think most of you – I won't go through an extensive introduction of the president. Most of you know he's a professor and historian by training, but was also an activist and opposition leader for many years, spent time in prison for his pains, has seen the country through this last decade of turmoil and conflict and stalemate. And I'll turn to him in a moment.

I think I should have said this at the get-go, but I think everyone's got the recording – the translation devices set. If you don't channel five is English and channel six is French. I should have said that at the outset. The president will speak and then we'll open it up for question and answer. I said he should expect some tough questions from the audience, but as a former opposition leader, he knows how to handle that. (Laughter.) So Mr. President, welcome, again. I'll turn the podium to you, and we look forward to your remarks today. Thank you. (Applause.)

(Note: President Gbagbo's remarks are delivered via simultaneous translator.)

**PRESIDENT LAURENT GBAGBO:** Indeed, as I was waiting here, my host told me to expect difficult questions, and I answered that there were no difficult questions when one tells the truth. All one needs to do is to tell people what happened. So there are no difficult questions.

Thank you for having come in such large numbers. Jennifer's introduction was a little bit pessimistic, I found, but this is a pessimism that we find often in the West. When in the field, I have a sense of euphoria; I'm delighted and I'm quite reassured. And when I'm at the secretary general of the U.N. the day before yesterday, I realized that his representative had made him the same report – that is to say, that there are no more major obstacles. But I will talk about all this.

Thank you for having come in such large numbers, and I think you again for having invited me here. You know, when one occupies a position such as mine, one receives many invitations and one thinks before accepting an invitation. And I saw the list of those who you have already hosted and this is a quite prestigious list, and so this is why I decided to accept your invitation.

I am delighted to be here and I'm even proud of being here, yes, because above and beyond me, it is an honor for Cote D'Ivoire and it is about Cote D'Ivoire that people want to hear. People wish to have information on Cote D'Ivoire, not on me. I am just a vessel to tell you what the executive branch in Cote D'Ivoire has to share with the rest of the world. And that's why I'm here.

You know, Cote D'Ivoire is a small country when compared to the size of Russia or of the United States of America or India or China. Cote D'Ivoire is a quite small country. But within West Africa, except for Nigeria, Cote D'Ivoire is an important – it's a sizable country. I had forgotten to tell you that I see friends here in the room, so I would like to greet them: Rosa, who is a personal friend, and we lived through many things – Rosa Whitaker (sp) – but I would like to tell you that Cote D'Ivoire is an important country within West Africa.

Among the French-speaking countries of West Africa, it's the leader. There are eight French-speaking countries in West Africa: Cote D'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Togo, Benin, and I forgot – Guinea and Senegal. Have I forgotten one? Mauritania. There are eight countries that have a common currency, and among those eight countries, Cote D'Ivoire is the leader. Cote D'Ivoire supports the currency – the CFA franc – because Cote D'Ivoire represents 40 percent of the gross domestic product of these eight countries.

The market of those eight countries is essentially a market of Cote D'Ivoire. Cote D'Ivoire ensures 60 percent of exports among those eight countries. So Cote D'Ivoire allows the other countries to import through its own exports. This is one of the reasons why the governor of the central bank of these eight countries who have a single, central bank among them – this governor is always from Cote D'Ivoire.

So this is the position, if you will, that Cote D'Ivoire occupies in West Africa. It is the country that has the most infrastructure, phone network, two ports – the director of one of those ports is here present; the director of the San Pédro port is here. And the main port is Abidjan itself. Abidjan, among sub-Saharan Africa, is the second port after Durbin with more than 22 million tons of goods that go through this port every year.

There are roads. We have three universities – two universities in Abidjan and one in Tabouake (ph). There, we have research institutes, especially agricultural research institutes. And the main one is CNRA, which was the success of groundnut and coffee in Cote D'Ivoire. And the peanut culture in Malaysia actually owes its success to the research of the CNRA in Cote D'Ivoire.

In terms of economic performance, we are the main exporter of peanuts in the world – of coco in the world – and we have a great mining potential as well; we have diamond, gold, magnesium, iron – everything that Liberia and Guinea has, we also have, because we share borders with these countries. And then we have gold mines. The gold mines of Mali and Burkina continue in Ivorian soil.

So that's our situation. Because of this position, any crisis – political crisis – that affects Cote D'Ivoire will also affect the rest of West Africa. This is why I was telling you all this; it wasn't to tout our country, but it was to explain that when there is a political crisis, such as the one we have gone through in Cote D'Ivoire, well, this crisis automatically becomes international, becomes a sub-regional crisis.

This is why all of our friends need to follow closely the situation in Cote D'Ivoire because one franc invested in Cote D'Ivoire – one dollar, if you will, invested in Cote D'Ivoire –

this has consequences in all West African countries. We have people working in Cote D'Ivoire who come from all of West Africa. Even Nigeria sends some of its labor to Cote D'Ivoire.

We have only found a little bit of petrol – of oil. I believe that we will become a great oil-producing country in 5, 10 years, but for the time being, we just have a little bit just to put a little bit of butter on our bread. It's not a lot. But when a crisis affects Cote D'Ivoire, it affects the whole sub-region, which is why I stress this issue – I insist on this.

Jennifer spoke about a country where there are many weapons – a lot of arms that circulate. And that's true. We have suffered because our neighbors had 17 years of civil war – Liberia, Sierra Leone; when you add them up, it's a little bit more than 17 years. And there was a great circulation of handguns, as well as war arsenals in our sub-region. That was our first issue; that was the first problem in Cote D'Ivoire, because all those who had weapons come to live in Cote D'Ivoire.

Either they were displaced people or they came with their weapons specifically to attack people. So this worsened the problems of insecurity and this ensured that ECOWAS, little by little, no longer was an economic and development community and became a conflict-resolution community. When we gather within ECOWAS, it's to solve problems. Oh, there's a problem in Liberia; ah, now, there's a problem in Sierra Leone; oh, there's a problem in Cote D'Ivoire; ah, there's problems in Niger; oh, there's problems in Mali.

But the developmental aspect has been lost – it's lost. So we want to put an end to this crisis, and by putting an end to this crisis, we want to give to ECOWAS – we want to give it back its development nature. This war occurred – this crisis occurred – war, crisis, call it what you want – but it occurred and we realize that many people were mobilized to try to solve the issues. And we went the world over – to Lomé, to Accra, to Paris, Pretoria – where else did we go? (Laughter.) Yeah, Paris, Libreville, Abuja.

And I realized – Freetown – and we realized that, from country to country – we were going from country to country but we weren't solving anything because many of those who wanted to be stakeholders and help to solve the problem wanted to impose their own peace to Cote D'Ivoire. They wanted to imprint their peace, but we want our own peace. And from the outset, I said Cote D'Ivoire will establish peace, but under its own conditions, while respecting its own constitution.

The U.N. as well, I forgot. There were many U.N. resolutions as well. But we couldn't resolve things. And when I saw that we couldn't resolve everything and that everybody was seeing that they were failing at the end of 2006, I took the decision to make proposals to Cote D'Ivoire, and on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2006, I made said proposals. I wanted to establish a direct dialogue with the former rebels.

Of course, I won't tell you everything that I had to do before – everything that I lived through – but the former rebels accepted my proposal. So I extended my hand and they accepted this extended hand and we began our dialogue. The dialogue lasted at least four months. And on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2007, we signed what is called the Ouagadougou agreement.

And since then, we have had – we have shared power. The secretary general of the former rebels became prime minister and I remained in position, of course. (Laughter.) But what I wanted to tell you is that before, sorry, June, the prime minister that had been advised – that I'd been advised to accept. It wasn't because he was incompetent, but he didn't have the power to act on the rebellion – to influence the rebellion for them to pull back. And you cannot solve an issue if the person who represents the problem themselves – if you can't make him pull back.

Today, we have made huge progress. The war is absolutely over. We circulate, in the country – we have what we call the “confidence zone,” the buffer zone. I went in all the points in the North of the country along the border with Mali, the border with Guinea, the border with Burkina Faso, the border with Ghana. I went all over the country, and had to meet other citizens of the country who were able to go home. And what else did we do?

We also had an electoral census. Well, I won't say more about this, but I will answer the questions that you will raise on this. Instead of being able to use simple means for this census, we were advised to use very complicated, very heavy, burdensome, expensive means for the census. But now, reform has reached the end of the process so we are not going to try to change the process. We will conclude – we will end this. And today, we will compare the list to the historic data. Maybe that's being done now, but for the last two days, I haven't spoken to the prime minister, so I don't know exactly where we stand.

But after this comparison of the lists, we will eliminate those who are committing fraud, we will set a date for the elections and we will have elections. So in Cote D'Ivoire, we remain quite reassured. And we are not concerned by the exact date. Let me tell you this immediately. Whether the elections occur on November 21<sup>st</sup> or not, well, we are not concerned, because what's important is that the war is over.

What is important is that we want to hold elections. What is important is that the candidates are already campaigning. And I hope that these elections can occur as soon as possible because when there is such confusion, it's hard to rule the country. You have, in the same basket, crabs, toads, snakes, hippopotamus, so the basket becomes too heavy and too dangerous.

So we need to hold elections to have a basket that either has crabs, either fish, either with bananas – that's it. So I want these elections to happen as soon as possible and I believe that we'll have elections before the end of the year, at the very least. It's not the government that organizes the elections; it's an electoral commission. But I discussed, before coming, and they were quite optimistic. The U.N. is quite optimistic.

So all those who are concerned – the representative of the facilitator for Burkina is quite optimistic – but as I speak to you now, I'm also campaigning at the same time. So we are locked. There is no pessimism. So we need to look above and beyond the crisis. And this is why I'm here. We need to look at what's going to happen after the crisis.

Cote D'Ivoire is in a – occupies a privileged position, as I was telling you, and we have, also, an economically important position. We are the natural outlet for all the countries in West Africa that are landlocked. So our port is quite useful – 90 percent of our customs revenue is garnered in the Abidjan port. All the products that go to Mali, to Burkina Faso, to Niger go through the Abidjan port or the San Pédro port.

The San Pédro port is the largest port for cocoa in the world. So these are some characteristics. If you want to go to the northwest of our country, to the border with Guinea and Mali, were you have a road – a paved road – all the way up to Guinea. If you want to go all the way in the north, but through the center of the country, through Korhogo, there is a paved road. If you want to go to the north – all the way to the north, but through the east of the country, the road is paved.

So that's what is happening in Cote D'Ivoire. And we have a good phone network. I was here listening to a phone operator who was saying that we had more phone operators in Cote D'Ivoire than in China. He was comparing the population of China and Cote D'Ivoire and he said in China, they have one or two phone operators – cell phone operators – and we already have four or five cell phone companies that are there. Apparently, this is a source of revenue. We are delighted because for the state as well, it's a source of revenue. So we get a lot of money from those cell phone companies as well. So everything is fine there.

The issues that remain to be resolved is to bolster security. But we can do that after the elections because handguns have been circulating since before the crisis. ECOWAS, during the war in Cote D'Ivoire, carried out a study to show what are the countries where there are more attacks, where the car drivers are, if you will, attacked – waylaid – on the road. ECOWAS has 14 countries and Cote D'Ivoire was fifth on the list.

We weren't the worst, but we had the war. And I won't tell you who was at the head or the second or the third or the fourth on the list. I won't mention them, no, because I am a head of state and I don't want to create issues with the others. But we were only fifth. So it wasn't as a consequence of the war that we have insecurity.

Poverty is a root cause of the criminal element. And the war itself, to my mind, stems from poverty as well because somebody who has a regular income is not going to take up arms because somebody gives them a few dollars. No, they will stay and continue working and making the income. So we need to work on security and we are counting on the U.S. to support us in this field.

If the U.S. can help us in matters of security, that would be most useful. As far as the economy is concerned, we also count on the U.S. A few months ago, I carried out a campaign for food autonomy because it's a scandal that Cote D'Ivoire, which is the greatest agricultural center in West Africa, suffers because of the raise in the price of rice that we have to import from Asia.

But we have so much fields to cultivate rice and so much space and so many arms, so many people willing to cultivate rice, so we launched an operation. And today, we are a little bit

overwhelmed, because all of those who sold rice are asking who is going to come and buy this rice, so as soon as I get back, we need to work with the traders in order to ensure that instead of them to wait for rice coming from Thailand or India, that they buy the rice in the country to sell it on our local markets, because rice has become the food of our cities. It's what they eat in the urban centers. Whatever your region of origin, when you're in a big city, you eat more rice than anything else. So that's what we need to do and that's what we will do.

We have, at the same time, worked to open up a new dialogue with the international financial institutions – the World Bank, the IMF, the African Development Bank – and things are going well. We have good governance and the most recent meeting that I had was the day before I went on my plane, and I was telling the lady who was at the head of the IMF delegation, you don't need to speak for a long time, because we all agree.

But let's first hold the elections. That's what we need to do. As long as you rule with people who come from all walks of life and you have to sort of walk on eggshells because you want to support peace, you can't have good governance. You can't have good governance. And the African countries whose leaders put their money outside of the country, everybody knows who they are. Well, but it's not me – I can tell you that. Everybody also knows that it's not me. So on that issue, there are no concerns – no concerns.

We are in communication with the IMF. We are in communication with the World Bank. WE are in communication with the ADB. So everything is fine, ladies and gentlemen, on that front. We haven't finished. The program isn't over because we asked for debt alleviation. We have accumulated debt since the '70s. I was a teacher when Cote D'Ivoire was increasing its debt levels.

There is – there was money that was borrowed and we don't even know what was done with it. There are other debts whose result we can see, but for some, we don't even know if they had a result. But we nonetheless have to reimburse them. So we asked the World Bank and the IMF, ladies and gentlemen, help us with debt relief, because it is ethically unfair to make us reimburse these debts.

But they have understood us so we are in a debt alleviation process and we recently discussed with the Paris Club, which manages public debt – we had a promise that a large portion of our public debt would be pardoned. And we are beginning our discussion with the London Club, which manages the private debt, and we hope there, too, that we will have good results.

So, ladies and gentlemen, that's what I came here to tell you. Cote D'Ivoire waits for you. We wait for you. We're not concerned at all. We're quite calm. We consider that what happened is a bump in the road, but as any mishap, one has to learn our lessons. The lesson is that nobody can sort of seize power and believe that they will, through a coup, obtain power, because what fooled people in 2002 and those who had a coup in 1999 – they did overthrow the head of state at the time, and they believed that if they did this all over again, they would overthrow the one who was there.

But I was elected and I will only leave if I am elected out of office. I will cede the place to a president of the republic who will have been democratically elected, but not to somebody who committed a coup. God bless us all and thank you for your kind attention. I am here to answer your questions. (Applause.)

MS. COOKE: Thank you, Mr. President. We want to know if you're a crab or a hippopotamus.

PRES. GBAGBO: My problem is that I am only one man. This is why I am suffering from the presence of all this.

MS. COOKE: No, in seriousness, it's – (pause) – it's very good to hear this note of optimism from you. and I think out of this crisis, too, has come an opportunity to deal with a lot of the fundamental problems that gave rise to it – the question of identity, of national reconciliation, this issue of Ivoirité, which I hope perhaps you can say a few words about – how much that remains an issue, if it does.

But I want to turn this – open this floor to discussion. Maybe we'll take a few questions at a time, if that's okay with you, because we have about 15 or 20 minutes for questions. So who will ask the first question? In the far back – and if you could identify yourself please.

Q: Peter Coharris (sp). I have an international law and consulting firm. I had the honor of representing your government a number of years ago in an investment dispute. You had a very good result. (Laughter.) My question is, what would you like to tell foreign investors, especially those interested in investing in some of the sectors that you identified at the beginning of your speech, in terms of legal and regulatory reforms and other measures that your government is taking to attract foreign investment?

PRES. GBAGBO: Thank you for your question. We need investors in all sectors – construction, agriculture, industry – but one word as to your question is legal security – that is to say, legal guarantees. I would be dishonest if I told you that, in terms of justice, everything is fine in Cote D'Ivoire, because that's not the case. And that's one of the reasons why I wish to hold elections quickly, in order to have a reform of the judiciary so that justice can be fair.

I had to intervene several times among disputes between entrepreneurs – several times among U.S. companies and their partners that were either from Cote D'Ivoire or from France. And I was forced to use diplomatic means to resolve issues that should have been resolved through the rule of law. So that's one issue that remains difficult. And I promise you that once elections will be held, we will have an in-depth reform of our legal system in order to ensure that people can come and invest freely. Thank you for your question.

MS. COOKE: Let's take a couple. Yes, sir, here – and then in the far back.

Q: (In French.) I am an economist – I work here in D.C. – that specializes in international economy and issues of integration. I don't have a question, but I have a proposal for you. During the crisis, we realized that Cote D'Ivoire is an immigration country. We know

that Cote D'Ivoire – so I wanted to ask you, Mr. President, if the Ivory Coast could have a research institute about immigration. I think it's an important point. Thank you very much.

Q: (Inaudible, off mike) – Africa Center for Strategic Studies. And Mr. President, as you mentioned in your address earlier, when there is an accident, we should draw lessons learned. So what lessons would you say that Cote D'Ivoire has learned from this crisis that would avoid something like this – an accident like this or a crisis like this – from occurring again in the future? Thank you.

Q: (Inaudible, off mike) – Mr. President, let me bring you to a subject that many of our African leaders, when they're in your position, they love, but when they are in power, they don't like – and that is election. You mentioned that the electoral commission does conduct the election in Cote D'Ivoire, however, if the political will is not there, particularly from the leadership and other stakeholders, those elections are not going to be held.

Mr. President, will you promise us that the upcoming elections in Cote D'Ivoire, you will be committed to making sure that those elections are free, fair and free from fair (sic)? Thank you.

PRES. GBAGBO: I would like to start by answering the last question. It is the freshest in my mind, of course. After that, I will answer the question of the lady over there. As you know, it seems to me that you've been here for a long time. You have to go back to Africa every now and then. And in Cote D'Ivoire, we don't have these problems because it was the single party in West Africa – you have to remember that it is us who have sacrificed our freedoms for multi-party and pluralism.

Some in the room here can attest to that. We went into exile and we went to prison in order to bring about multi-party rule. And the electoral commission is not the body that will do the election; it will just organize the election and not carry them out, meaning that they will just be overseers. The political leaders who, in applying the constitution of Cote D'Ivoire have decided that the elections must take place. Therefore, we have entrusted to this organization with organizing the elections, but not to carry them out, in a way.

So I have to tell you, also, that I am very comfortable regarding the upcoming elections in Cote D'Ivoire because we don't have any other tools in order to predict what's going to happen, but so far, all the polls are pointing to my victory. So we don't have any problems, really, but we have to leave this electoral commission work and do its job so that tomorrow, those who lose are not going to cry wolf and say well, there's this irregularity and that irregularity.

In other words, the electoral commission has nothing to do with the outcome; they are organizers – technicians. So there are no problems – no worries for me. And I'm one of the very few heads of state who knows what he will do when he steps down from the presidency. I have a lot of things to do. I'm going to teach; I'm going to do research; I can write a book – perhaps a printing shop. So there is no worry about me and there is no reason to fear for me.

So this is – the reason why I'm saying that oftentimes, people don't analyze Africa properly – Africa is not one country; it is 53 countries. And in every country, there are realities that are vastly different from the reality of the country next door. I'm observing what's happening. I have my ideas. But since I'm president, I cannot comment on everything that's happening because that can create diplomatic hiccups.

You asked if we have an immigration institute. No, we don't have an immigration institute, but what we do have is the national institute of statistics, which is a stakeholder, in fact, and participant in the organization of elections. We have, also, the national identification office, which is also participating in the organizing of the upcoming elections. And all these institutes give us a percentage of foreigners at 26 percent. So there are 26 percent of people living in Cote D'Ivoire who are foreigners, which is one of the highest percentages in the world.

Now, to go back to the question of the lady over there, I don't believe that it is the percentage of foreigners among our population that provoked or caused the war. The war in Cote D'Ivoire came about as a result of the war of the heirs. We don't – we cannot change the reality, when Houphouët-Boigny died in 1993, he left his heirs in place – Konan Bédié, Alassane Ouattara. These were the heirs of him – Guei Robert, Forogo (ph) – so he left a certain number of heirs, and the war between two of them became the war of Cote D'Ivoire.

Earlier in her presentation, as she was introducing me, I heard the word rivalry, but I wanted to talk about it now. It is the war of heirs that has led us to the situation we are. Ouattara, for example, who was more legitimate than Bédié, Bédié said it's the opposite – that he was more legitimate than the other.

And all were looking for arguments to eliminate each other. And Bédié used the word rivalry to exclude Ouattara. But we're not concerned by this as people of Cote D'Ivoire – we are not concerned. It is the war of the heirs. These two heirs, as you mentioned – in Gabon, in fact, the battle between Ali Bongo and Amir Attayur (ph) – it was also a war between two heirs. The same thing happened there in Gabon. This is the way things are.

When one patrimony – one estate – is not set as property, that creates problems that could degenerate into a conflagrated situation. These two were fighting and I saw in 1994, just before the death of F'wete (ph), I was a member of the parliament. These wars started in January, 1993, when the supporters of Bédié attacked the initiatives and reforms of privatization of Mattra (ph) and I told Mattra not to take the floor and let them fight it off. We followed it closely, and I think it is this war of heirs that I mentioned that brought about the coup of 1999.

This coup was only successful in half. It resulted in overthrowing Bédié, but did not achieve the bringing of the other guy to power. In the meantime, another heir, Guei Robert, took power, and as we came and we waged a campaign and we said these are military and we don't militaries in our country. We had supporters among the people and we were able to win.

Now, you see, they are united again now, against that. They are saying we fought, we did coups and everything and now this is a guy who comes and takes our position; it just doesn't make sense. So, this has cost hundreds and thousands of lives of people from Cote D'Ivoire.

There is a whole serious book that needs to be written about the situation to demonstrate that when we look at a country as a personal estate from a monarchic standpoint, we end up by having a war between the heirs to the estate. And this exactly what we're having now.

So ma'am, let me go back to you to tell you that the most important lesson that we have to take is that Cote D'Ivoire must remain a republic. And that all the children of this country must have equal rights. But the people is not blind. When we say that people, all the people, have all rights it doesn't mean that anyone can succeed. When we say that everybody has the main right, but those who have to succeed – the people must know them. Those who must lead, the people must know them.

So what's important is that democracy reinforced and the republic – the principles of the republic are reinforced. Reinforcing the democracy, on the one hand, meaning the forms of access to power, the manners in which the country is run, reinforce the institutions – the republican institutions, that must have available on a merit basis and accessible on a merit basis. This is what we're trying to do and this is what we have propped up and this a matter of honor for us. During the crisis, economic crisis, we supported and maintained the republican heritage and principles.

Q: You talk about the importance of Cote D'Ivoire in West Africa and you are optimistic about the upcoming election in Cote D'Ivoire. Are you also optimistic about the integration of ECOWAS countries?

Q: Thank you, Mr. President. I had two simple questions. First of all, you talked about the IMF and the World Bank. Are you going to take advantage of your visit to Washington to visit them?

PRES. GBAGBO: Unfortunately, I don't have the time. I have to go back to Cote D'Ivoire tomorrow.

Q: My second question, Mr. President, is that you talk about the relationship that you have with the prime minister. Can you concretely talk to us about the functioning of this tandem and what kind of relationship do you have with the prime minister?

Q: Good afternoon, Mr. President. My name is Lena Khasid Mudoo (ph) with the Voice of America Television. This past Tuesday you met with our president, Barack Obama, along with other African head of states to discuss issues pertaining to Africa. I was wondering what transpired from this meeting. Thank you.

PRES. GBAGBO: Somebody asked whether I was optimistic regarding the integration of the ECOWAS countries. Well, it's moving rather slowly. But I believe that the Africans themselves don't know how to take integration, how to deal with it. In the face of this fact, myself and the president of Burkina Faso signed, in 2008, a friendship and cooperation agreement. Thanks to it, to which, I visited Burkina Faso and himself, he was in a visit to Cote D'Ivoire about a week ago or 10 days ago.

But, this friendship agreement is a bilateral agreement and solves the issue of integration between our two countries, which means that this agreement give us, puts us in a position where we must do everything that needs to be done so that these two countries will work together in tandem. We set up a joint ministerial cabinet. The ministers of Burkina Faso, the ministers of Abidjan they will sit around the table to talk about bilateral issues.

During such meeting, we decided to build a highway from the capital of Cote D'Ivoire to Ouagadougou, in order to reinforce the trade relationships between our two countries. We will reinforce, also, the cooperation between airline companies and we will have energy and agricultural cooperation. On the energy level, at this point, Ivory Coast is selling energy to Ghana, to Togo, to Benin, even to Burkina Faso and Mali. In the meantime, when we will have increased our capacity to do it also for Liberia and Guinea. I think, personally, that the future of West Africa is in integration but I'm not sure that other heads of state think the same way. I'm just not sure.

But I'm fighting for that. For example, during the last meeting of ECOWAS I asked that instead – we come to the United States all the time, to Paris or go to Britain to ask for money – we can create a fund of investment, an investment fund, at the level of the West African Economic Community. If on each barrel of oil, we can take a few dollars, we can take from each commodity – diamond, cocoa, coffee – from the income of these commodities we can take a little bit of money that goes into a fund that would guarantee our investments. It was the third time that I proposed such a thing. Ultimately, they said yes.

So I am waiting now what's going to happen regarding the actual implementation mechanism. So we can achieve integration – we have to put forward proposals in order to achieve that. Although I told them all, though – I told my colleagues that when we ask the Western countries to help us, and they said, well, we have our own problems, we don't have a lot of money, but as soon as there were the sub-prime crisis in the U.S., the government of Bush and Obama were able to find \$800 billion to inject in the economy. So the money is there; the money exists, but it only exists for those who have elected them.

Us – we have to find our own sources to serve the interests of those who have elected us. And I think we can find it in creating this fund. You understand what I am saying? This is the reason why I believe that an integration is necessary, but does everyone understand that it is necessary? Well, as far as I am concerned, I did what I had to do, and I let the others do what they have to do.

The president of Faso said that he understands the same thing and we're trying to run a part of the course together. And then when we start building our own highway, I'm sure others will be interested and would want to join us, and bit-by-bit we will increase this network, hopefully, and will expand it.

Someone asked – a relationship about the tandem with the prime minister. It's working. Do you know why it's working? Because since the beginning of the crisis, it is the only prime minister who respects the constitution. The constitution says that all the executive power is in the hands of the elected president, so there is no problem. (Laughter.) So there is no problem.

Do you understand? As far as I'm concerned, I don't have any problems with anybody – if you respect the law, we're in agreement. If we don't respect the law, we're not in agreement – period. So I have the privilege of being the only one who has not worked in the government of someone else. I'm not interested – I don't want to work in a government that is not mine, where I cannot do what I think is the right thing to do for the country. So if I had been in the government of someone else, I would have left so that the person in charge would do whatever they want. And I would like for those who are in my government to do the same thing. So you understand?

So I had proposals before to get into government, but I never accepted. As a matter of fact, the first time I was in a ministerial council, it was to preside it. Otherwise, I had never been to a ministerial council. So it's basically, ultimately, a moral issue – an ethical issue. If you're not elected, you come to work in the government of someone else and you want to replace them. It doesn't work that way. Why? This is the way in which democracy doesn't work. Democracy doesn't work there. Why? For democracy to work, each has to respect the law and the rules. And of course, there are written laws and there are unwritten laws – ethical laws.

Today, in the United States, Obama has been elected. Who comes to work in his government will have to abide by what Obama says. If they're not interested in abiding by what he says, they should stay out of the government. So what I said is that this relationship is working fine because the prime minister understands that, despite the fact that not many people have respected their legal limits.

Ma'am, you asked what happened with Obama. But it was a private lunch, and himself, quite frankly, didn't want any pictures. He came from a back door and then he left from a back door. But I can tell you that we were 25 heads of state, plus himself, so we are 26 in all.

The American delegation was made up of four: President Obama, Secretary of State Ms. Hillary Clinton, U.N. Ambassador to the United Nations Rice, and Ambassador Jones. These are the four people who made up the American delegation. The rest of us, we other countries, were represented by one. It was a relaxed conversation, and what I liked mostly is the man was someone who had just arrived, and he wants to really design a political policy – an African policy.

So he wanted us to come to have lunch and he wanted to listen to the preoccupation of the heads of state in Africa. And I think based on that, I think he said that he will ask his secretary of state to build a proposal for an African policy. I think it's very modest and very humble on his part. And I think it's very respectful of the others. So this is essentially what I can tell you. As for the rest, these are not decisions that need to be taken. We just had an exchange; we shared our various preoccupations.

Since you are a woman I can tell you, apart from Hillary Clinton and Susan Rice, there was only another woman – the president of Liberia. So for there to be many presidents in Africa – and this is wanted to say, ma'am: I hope that I didn't talk for too long – I was not too long-winded, and that I provided them with some information. Thank you very much.

MS. COOKE: I just want to say, thank you very much for that very rich and frank conversation. Our door is open at CSIS; we hope to see you post-election, whether you're professor, an editor or president. And thank you again, very much. It's been great.

(END)