

WORLDWIDE CAMPAIGN FOR THE LIBERATION OF LAURENT GBAGBO



On April 11 2011, after dropping several bombs on the official residence of the head of State of Côte d'Ivoire (formerly Ivory Coast) and without considering at all the security issue of the crowd of youths who were forming a human shield outside the presidential mansion, the French army arrested Mr. Laurent Gbagbo and his wife Mrs. Simone Ehivet Gbagbo in the ruins of the building. Then, they turned them over to the rebel forces loyal to Mr. Alassane Ouattara. The

staging of this arrest, relayed by almost all television, radio, print and online around the world, was to present Mr. Gbagbo as one who did not win the presidential election of 28 November 2010 in Côte d'Ivoire, but who, "a bad loser", refused to hand over power to Mr. Alassane Ouattara that the then French president, Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, a personal friend of his, wanted to see him installed as president of the country.

Mr. Gbagbo was first taken to Mr. Ouattara's campaign headquarters at the Golf Hotel in Abidjan, and he was sent to prison in Korhogo, in the north of the country, for eight months without any possibility of seeing the light of day. On 30 November 2011, he was transferred to The Hague, in the Netherlands, in the detention facility of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Scheveningen Penitentiary, administered by the United Nations. Since 28 January 2016, Mr. Gbagbo and his former Minister of Youth are both prosecuted for "*crimes against humanity: murders, rapes, other inhumane acts and persecutions perpetrated during the post-election period of 2010.*"

On the occasion of the resumption of the trial, scheduled for 1 October 2018, we are sending you this message so that, in full knowledge of the facts, you would join the campaign we are conducting to denounce the conspiracy of which President Gbagbo and his co-accused Mr. Blé Goudé are the victims. **For that reason we demand their pure and simple release and the abandonment of all the charges that are leveled against them.** Indeed, throughout his political career, Mr. Gbagbo struggled so that multiparty politics and democracy become tangible realities in Côte d'Ivoire. He has always been a staunch advocate of a peaceful transition to democracy, because up to the 1990s, Côte d'Ivoire lived under the single party regime while the country's first post-independence Constitution of 3 November 1960 acknowledged the multiparty system of governance (Law number 60-356 of 3 November 1960 establishing the Constitution of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire). The Ivoirian Popular Front (FPI), the political party of which Mr. Gbagbo is a founding member, made the clear choice to come to power through free, democratic and transparent elections. The FPI has never taken up arms and has never been involved in coup attempts either in Côte d'Ivoire or elsewhere in Africa or around the world.

It should be noted that, elected to the highest office of his country in 2000, Mr. Gbagbo freely chose to govern the country by calling for the gathering of all the forces of the nation to take care of their sick country. The truth of the matter was that Côte d'Ivoire was ostracized by the international community following the scandal of misappropriation of funds allocated by the European Union during the administration of President Henri Konan Bédié; an uneasiness that was added by the refusal of Mr. Bédié to establish a truly democratic process among all political actors. This malaise turned into a real division of Ivoirian peoples that led to the coup of 24 December 1999, the first in the history of our country. President Gbagbo initiated a Forum to

seek a genuine national reconciliation which he depicted as follows: *"To make sure that Côte d'Ivoire regains its credentials and to ensure that Côte d'Ivoire regains its true nature, that is to say a country of peace, prosperity and responsibility."* The foundations of this national catharsis broadcast live on national television lasted from 9 October to 18 December 2001. All the social, political, religious, professional and regional components of the national community, as well as foreign communities living in the country, they all one by one came to the lectern and spoke from the platform of this national gathering to share their perception of the predicament the country was going through. In addition, on 5 August 2002, President Gbagbo formed a cabinet of national unity in which all significant components of the Ivoirian political spectrum participated. However, this well inspired move did not prevent, on the night of 18 to 19 September 2002, an attempted coup that was aborted and then turned into a rebellion that almost split the country into two entities from 2002 to 2011. These Ivoirian rebels, armed by France and trained at their base in the Burkina Faso of Mr. Blaise Compaoré, said to whomever wanted to hear it, that they took up arms so that Mr. Ouattara become President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire. A book that supports this hypothesis was even written by Mr. Soro Guillaume, the current president of the National Assembly of Côte d'Ivoire, who was the head of the political wing of the Ivoirian rebellion.

Despite all the concessions made by President Gbagbo so that his country would not know the pangs of the war, despite all the international peace agreements signed, despite all the UN Security Council resolutions and despite their presence in the government, not to mention the post of Prime Minister offered to their standard bearer, Mr. Soro, the Ivoirian rebels never laid down their arms. It is in this context, where the north of Côte d'Ivoire remained a de facto zone under the control of rebels armed to the teeth, that the presidential election took place in 2010. Despite the unprecedented violence, in spite of the intimidation of voters, in spite of the massive fraud and the stuffing of ballot boxes in areas under rebel control, Mr Gbagbo won the election. Then, there came a dramatic turn of events, a real electoral coup. The then French ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire, Mr. Jean-Marc Simon, took it upon himself to usher the chairman of the independent electoral commission, Mr. Youssouf Bakayoko, to the Golf Hotel, the headquarters of candidate Ouattara where, to the general amazement, on 3 December 2011, Mr. Bakayoko announced, live on a French television channel, the victory of Mr. Ouattara, the candidate of France and the candidate of Mr. Sarkozy.

However, the Ivoirian Constitutional Council, the only one empowered to do so, proclaimed the final results and presided over the swearing-in ceremony of Mr. Gbagbo as the duly elected president. Faced with the politico-media outcry orchestrated by France, Mr. Gbagbo asked that ballots be recounted, so as to be able to get out of the predicament provoked by Mr. Bakayoko, the president of the Independent Electoral Commission. France categorically rejected the

proposal. It was followed by the United Nations and other representatives of the international community. The post-election crisis was thus created and the subsequent armed clashes between rebel troops and Côte d'Ivoire's regular defense and security forces defending the country and its republican institutions, are only the opposing faces of the same coin. They are only the objective extension of the coup of 18-19 September 2002. The events of 6, 7, 8 and 9 November 2004, under the French President Jacques Chirac, to whom Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy succeeded on 16 May 2007, are as a matter of fact a good showcase of the little consideration that France has for the sovereignty and independence of Côte d'Ivoire, including those of the African countries in its sphere of influence in this new world order.

While the Ivoirian army launched an air offensive and destroyed all military targets of the Ivoirian rebels, to the general amazement, the French military already present in Côte d'Ivoire and who operated there supposedly as a force of interposition and peace, destroyed all war planes of the country. They said that the Ivoirian regular army war planes, in their operation to destroy the Ivoirian rebels' military targets, targeted the French military cantonment in Bouaké, the second most important town occupied by the rebels. France said that 9 French soldiers were killed. Not content with this retaliatory action, although France was not at war with Côte d'Ivoire, the French military deployed an impressive display of their tanks at the Ivoire Hotel, which is less than a kilometer from the presidential mansion of Mr. Gbagbo.

This incongruous presence in such a sensitive venue was interpreted by the Ivoirian peoples as a maneuver to remove Mr. Gbagbo from office. From all the neighborhoods of Abidjan, in an unprecedented patriotic drive, the populations came and put themselves between the French tanks and the presidential mansion of Mr. Gbagbo. This face-to-face, which began on the night of 6 November 2004, had a tragic end on 9 November 2004, when the French army fired on an unarmed civilian crowd, without the French forces having ever been in a situation of legitimate defense, as confirmed by a survey conducted by South African experts. The toll of the casualties was heavy: 65 killed and more than 2100 injured. A confirmation of this horrible massacre came from the French newspaper, "Le Canard Enchaîné", of Wednesday, 8 December 2004. It revealed that an internal investigation of the French army reported about fifty dead and that, above all, the thesis of self-defense could not be substantiated. "Le Canard Enchaîné" transcribed the words of a French officer who seriously questioned the thesis of self-defense: *"It was not, as we are asked to say, self-defense in the strict sense of the term [says the officer], but rather to send this message: 'That's enough. You stop playing.' And it worked. We held the strategic points of Abidjan, those that allowed us access to the port and the airport for the evacuation of our nationals. We knew we had to hold that square. Our soldiers limited the number of dead by targeted fire. And if we had really let go, there would have been hundreds of deaths."*

In 2010-2011, the goal of Nicolas Sarkozy was to prevent Mr. Gbagbo, who used to speak of independence and sovereignty of his country, to remain in power. Toward that aim, France made every effort to use all means: military, media, diplomatic and legal, not to mention the assistance of Mr. Luis Moreno Ocampo, the Prosecutor of the ICC of the time, to oust from office and arrest the elected president of a country supposedly independent and sovereign. For that matter, a campaign of outrageous demonization, systematic media lynching and manipulation of public opinion against Mr. Gbagbo left little room to venture an opposite account.

However, today two series of major events make it possible to know the whole truth about what happened in Côte d'Ivoire and to reaffirm what was, from the outset, the conviction of the great majority of the Ivoirian peoples. First, there are the confessions of certain key actors. Because they were convinced of their impunity and their omnipotence, Mr. Sarkozy and his ambassador in Côte d'Ivoire at the time of this post-election crisis, Mr. Simon, indulged in confessions about their felony. In his series of interviews to French journalists Nathalie Schuck and Frédéric Gerschel, who revealed it in their book entitled, "It remains between us, huh? Two years of confidences of Nicolas Sarkozy" (Editions Flammarion - November 2014, Page 39), Mr. Sarkozy said: " *When I see the care I put to intervene in Côte d'Ivoire ... We evicted Laurent Gbagbo, we installed Alassane Ouattara, without any controversy, without anything.* "

Nowadays, converted into a businessman whose consulting firm "Afrique Stratégies" is based in Abidjan, where the services he rendered to Mr. Ouattara enable him to obtain juicy markets, Ambassador Simon, for his part, declared in an interview broadcast on 18 September 2015 by "Fraternité-Matin", the Ivoirian government daily: "*If there had not been the intervention of the United Nations, backed by France, Côte d'Ivoire was about to turn into a terrifying civil war ...*" In the same interview, he blatantly stated: "*I must say that I am impressed by the spectacular results achieved over the past four years. (...) It is easy to criticize and deplore that the bottle is only half full but let's not forget, that five years ago it was empty, dramatically empty! The country is governed with efficiency and flexibility, without false declarations and demagogic promises. President Ouattara is listening to his compatriots and is open to dialogue ...*"

The laudatory remarks of this former French ambassador have just been sharply and overwhelmingly contradicted by the report of the ambassadors of the European Union accredited in Côte d'Ivoire. Indeed, their 9-page report of April 2018 is an indictment against the governance of Mr. Ouattara. Their document highlights the authoritarian drift of power of the authorities of Abidjan, the refusal to establish the rules of a consensual democratic process, their incapacity to control the spread of corruption in their governance, the flagrant social inequalities,

the open practice of nepotism and tribalism, described as a "catching up" policy by Mr. Ouattara himself, the excessive national debt and the creeping of violence and insecurity into everyday life are all the consequences of the increased impoverishment of the Ivoirian peoples. Nonetheless, this predicament take place against the backdrop of cleverly orchestrated media campaigns, the manipulation of public opinion by compliant press articles aimed at extolling a Côte d'Ivoire that is doing well, as denounced by the journalists of the weekly "Jeune Afrique." The ambassadors of the European Union highlighted all these problems in their report.

Based on the IMF's latest review of the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, the European Union's ambassadors wrote in their April 2018 report: *"Despite ... the IMF's overall satisfaction, the economic and social situation also gives rise to some doubts in the short term. (...) Although it is still considered well managed, the public debt has doubled in five years (from 4.68 billion in 2012, to 9 billion FCFA in 2016 and from 34.2% to 46.3% of GDP). More broadly, the ongoing willingness to take on structural measures to improve the business climate (reaffirmed when the G20 Compact was adopted with Africa in June 2017) has not been translated, up to this time, into a process of sufficiently credible reforms... At the same time, social indicators are stagnating (poverty rate at 46%, even though the statistics date from 2015), and the population is increasingly openly questioning this growth, which seems to be of little or no benefit. Even less for that reason, it tolerates the financial largesse enjoyed by the circles of power. Every opportunity is seized to manifest, sometimes violently, a confused but very real discontent against the structures and representatives of the State, as symbols of plundering as far as some sections of the population are concerned. As a result, the confrontation between a power that is gradually restricting spaces for expression and a growing social protest would not bode well for the 2020 elections..."*

Thus, besides the fact that for nearly 10 years the Ivoirian rebels on his and his friends' payrolls weakened Côte d'Ivoire, Mr. Ouattara, this former senior official of the IMF, has established for 7 full years a governance at odds with the values of rigor, probity, exemplarity and good management advocated by the international financial institutions. In addition to the confessions of Mr. Sarkozy and Mr. Simon, and this is the second major fact, there are the revelations made in recent European press outlets. These revelations are known as "Ocampogate" based on the name of Mr. Ocampo, the first ICC prosecutor. These revelations have finally convinced the Ivoirian public and validated, from day one of the Ivoirian saga of the Ouattara regime, what we have always been saying to all those who follow the situation in Côte d'Ivoire about the effects of the deposition, the arrest, the transfer to the ICC in The Hague, and the subsequent trial of Mr. Gbagbo and his co-accused Mr. Blé Goudé.

Indeed, from the end of September 2017, the European Investigative Collaborations (EIC) network, which includes Der Spiegel (Germany), Falter (Austria), El Mundo (Spain), Le Soir (Belgium), Mediapart (France), L'Espresso (Italy), Newsweek Serbia (Serbia), Politiken (Denmark) and The Black Sea/RCIJ (Romania-website of the Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism), published evidence-based surveys on the actions of Mr. Ocampo. These investigations were an opportunity to discover and then to make public for international opinion, the strings of the collusion between the actors who are: (1) the former prosecutor of the ICC, Mr. Ocampo, (2) the French State through its diplomacy Department upon Mr. Sarkozy's instructions and his personal involvement, as he himself admitted in the above-mentioned quotation, and (3) Mr. Ouattara who was installed in power in Côte d'Ivoire by France without actually being the elected leader of the Ivoirian peoples.

Indeed, thanks to these investigations by European journalists, we have learned that, as of 11 December 2010, after Mr. Gbagbo was sworn-in as president of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire on 4 December 2011, French diplomacy was immediately set into motion. To this end, Ms. Béatrice Le Fraper, a diplomat who served as Ocampo's chief of staff at the ICC, from 2006 to June 2010, undertook a course of action from her new assignment post at the French representation at the UN, in New York. Her task was to have Mr. Ocampo start a process to get rid of Mr. Gbagbo and sign his political death. Today, according to Médiapart's revelations, it is established that Ms. Béatrice Le Fraper sent an e-mail to Mr. Ocampo where she wrote: "*I need to know what your conversation with Alassane Ouattara gave you.*" This explains that on 11 April 2011, Stéphane Gompertz, head of the Africa Department of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote in an email addressed to about twenty people, including Mr. Ocampo and officials at the Quai d'Orsay or the Elysée, that a former French assistant to the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), probably Ms. Le Fraper, just called him to say that "*the prosecutor wishes that Mr. Ouattara not release Laurent Gbagbo.*" She also suggested that "*an African state in the region take the case before the ICC as soon as possible*" while emphasizing that: "*Ocampo will try to join Ouattara or one of his close allies.*" Thus, without any legal basis, without having had the legal competence, without any warrant of arrest and in flagrant violation of the requirements of independence and impartiality, upon instructions of Mr. Sarkozy, Mr. Ocampo deeply involved himself with intent to have Mr. Gbagbo be ousted from office and be replaced by his political adversary Mr. Ouattara, even though the former but not the latter was the duly elected president of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire. At the time of this plot and saga, Mr. Gbagbo but not Mr. Ouattara was the only one invested by the Ivoirian Constitutional Council, the sole competent jurisdiction in Côte d'Ivoire whose decisions are final.

Indeed, on 11 April 2011, Mr. Ouattara, retrenched in the Golf Hotel, was only in the position of a candidate contesting the official results of an election since he was sworn-in as president of the

Republic of Côte d'Ivoire only in May 2011. Nonetheless, as of March 2011, France and the ICC Prosecutor, Mr. Ocampo, were already dealing with Mr. Ouattara as if he were the sworn-in president. It is even the ICC prosecutor who, as revealed by the inquiry of Mediapart, made the proposals of actions against Mr. Gbagbo who was at the time the only sworn-in head of state. We also know, thanks to the journalists of EIC, that in violation of the deontology and the rules that govern the functioning of the ICC, Mrs. Fatou Bensouda, the current prosecutor of the ICC, despite her denials, had regular correspondence with Mr. Ocampo. It is only on 28 January 2016 that the trial of Mr. Gbagbo started, since it was necessary for Ms. Bensouda to find evidence since Mr. Gbagbo had been transferred to the ICC as of 30 November 2011. Ms Bensouda presented 82 witnesses who were interrogated during this trial which started on 28 January 2016. Following the trial discussions which were broadcast live by the ICC, the public opinion noted that most of the accusation's witnesses, when they were consistent in their depositions and their answers, they gave testimonies rather in favor of Mr. Gbagbo.

Already, in 2013, during the first confirmation of the charges hearing against Mr. Gbagbo, the ICC judges told Ms. Bensouda that her charges against the accused were not at all substantial and that she needed to further substantiate them. One thing was to find a veneer of a political, diplomatic, political, pseudo-legal and military smokescreen to bring about the coup against Mr. Gbagbo and his co-accused Mr. Blé Goudé. Another thing was to prove, through irretrievable proof of evidence, the culpability of Mr. Gbagbo and Mr. Blé Goudé for the crimes they were accused of. The truth of the matter was how could one prove what never existed as it was presented to the public opinion, or how to establish facts that never occurred or whose true authors, the executioners, would have to put on the coat of victims so as to become credible?

The consequences of France's contemptuous and criminal interference in this part of the history of the Côte d'Ivoire is the suffering and grief experienced by the Ivoirian peoples, as denounced strongly by the ambassadors of the European Union in their uncompromising report. As for the great majority of the peoples of Côte d'Ivoire, Mr. Ouattara's poor economic performance is not at all a surprising event. For, he made the choice to be a pawn in the service of the sole interests of France. The fact of the matter is that he turned his back on the path of loyal access to power, through free, democratic and transparent elections on the basis of a government program and a societal project to be submitted to the country's sovereign peoples in order to seek through the ballot boxes their support without any coercion whatsoever.

There is indeed a clear link between the destabilizing actions of France, the plundering of the populations of the former French colonies in Africa, the growing misery in Côte d'Ivoire and elsewhere, and the massive immigration of these countries with thousands of deaths in the Mediterranean Sea. This immigration is currently provoking serious political crises in today's

Europe. The recent official figures provided on Thursday, 14 June 2018, by Mr. Didier Leschi, Director General of the French Office for Immigration and Integration on Television and French Radio BFM-TV and RMC, are very telling: of the 124,000 peoples who are in exile demand in France, Ivoirians arrive well ahead of Syrians who are in 15th position. In this interview, Mr. Leschi stayed that Ivoirians' exile demand has risen by 50% when for Algerians it is at a 26% and for Malians at a 35% increase.

All the facts converge towards one focal point. Everything has a logical explanation. Every explanation is understandable. All the facts fit relentlessly the parameter of a logical reasoning.

It is now established that Mr. Ouattara is the fruit of a sham. We cannot rub out this sham and we cannot erase it either. However, despite France's enduring support of the libertine regime of the authorities in Abidjan, we as a nation, we can come together, through a healing dialogue aiming at allowing the different components of the Ivoirian peoples pitted against each other by such a stupid policy of so-called "ethnic catch up", with intent to take care of our wounds, with intent to reconcile and to seek restoration together for the standard norm and the time lost for nearly three decades which have elapsed since Mr. Ouattara's intrusion into Ivoirian public life and all the violence, blood and tears that led to his installation at the leadership of Côte d'Ivoire.

President Nelson Mandela was held prisoner in South Africa for 27 years. And one morning, they finally agreed to release him from prison without having had to judge him. And this prisoner became a famous hero throughout our planet. We do not want that fate for Mr. Gbagbo. The sacrifice of his life that President Mandela made, the fight he fought, should be enough to ensure that no other African political leader struggling for the empowerment of his peoples and the emancipation and independence of his peoples has to endure the same fate as Mr. Mandela. For the sovereignty of his country any African political leader should not have to go to prison or should have to be forced into any form of exile. There are scores of African resilient activists who were sent to concentration camps by France and other colonial powers. The arrest and deportation of Mr. Gbagbo is only the version of modern times of this unacceptable history. Keeping Mr. Gbagbo one more day, after all the time he spent in the ICC, and after most of Mr. Sarkozy's France conspiracy against him have been revealed, will accentuate the social divide in Côte d'Ivoire. The Ivoirian peoples are mature and they aspire to peace and reconciliation. Côte d'Ivoire can keep its youth on its own soil instead of seeing them go and die in the Mediterranean Sea. West Africa and Europe need an economically strong, stable and peaceful Côte d'Ivoire. The unconditional liberation, the abandonment of all the charges against them, and the safe and secured return to the Ivoirian homeland of Mr. Gbagbo and Mr. Blé Goudé will make a strong contribution to the appeasement, the reconciliation and the peace endeavors.

After seven long years, on 8 August 2018, the spouse of President Gbagbo, Mrs. Simone Ehivet Gbagbo, detained in Côte d'Ivoire's prison since 11 April 2011, was finally given back her

freedom along with that of about 800 political prisoners and exiles, through an executive order of amnesty announced by Mr. Ouattara on 6 August 2018. This measure of appeasement came to the Ivoirian peoples as a noticeable good signal. Nevertheless, it is insufficient, all the more that this amnesty does not secure the release of soldiers who are still in prison on the charges of having defended the institutions of Côte d'Ivoire against the Ivoirian rebels who attacked our beloved country.

At its very recent Party Congress held on August 3-4, 2018, the FPI re-elected Mr. Gbagbo to the leadership of this Ivoirian political organization to bear witness to the world its faith and confidence to the vision and ideals of this man through the sacrifice of whom multiparty system of governance was brought back to Côte d'Ivoire. The FPI is well aware of how to count on you and on your leadership to bring to their senses those who are the decision makers at the ICC. For, the trial of Mr. Gbagbo and Mr. Blé Goudé should not become a political ballgame because it is about the lives of two human beings and their families. The FPI is deeply grateful to the peoples of the world, who have a great love of peace and justice and who are forever working hard to obtain the release of Mr. Blé Goudé and Mr. Gbagbo. The FPI and the Ivoirian peoples express, in advance, their deepest gratitude for your unparalleled and flawless mobilization. They thank you so much for all your endeavor to obtain without further ado, at the close of what will begin to unfold at the ICC, from 1 October 2018, that M. Gbagbo and M. Blé Goudé return safely to Côte d'Ivoire where the Ivoirian peoples, their parents, their wives and their children have been waiting their release for seven long and unjustified years.

The original text in French of this worldwide campaign for the immediate release of President Gbagbo and his co-accused, Mr. Charles Blé Goudé was an initiative by a fellow-Ivoirian of the Ivoirian Diaspora. This initiative was implemented by the Vice-presidency of the FPI in charge of the Ivoirian Diaspora. The following English version is proposed here at your Anglophone readership to share with them the predicament the country of Côte d'Ivoire has been experiencing for many years in a row.

Washington, DC 30 September 2018

Pascal Kokora, PhD

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