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AFRICA/CÔTE D'IVOIRE - Serious battle in the centre of Abidjan, while at the city's port, the parish priest works towards peace

Abidjan (Agenzia Fides) - “The battle rages in the centre of Abidjan. Shots from canons and guns have continued all through the night and this morning,” local sources from the Church tell Fides from Abidjan, the economic capital of Cote d'Ivoire, where the Republican forces, supporters of the President-elect Alassane Ouattara, have gone on the offensive to capture the key places of power (the presidential palace and residence, and headquarters of the national radio and television network) that are still in the hands of the incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo. The Republican forces are backed by the Blue Helmets, the UN peacekeepers (the United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire) and by French troops of Operation “Licorne”, which according to Resolution 1975 of the UN Security Council they are authorised to “neutralize heavy weapons used against civilians”. Ouattara is recognised as the legitimate President of Cote d'Ivoire by the international community. “Yesterday, April 4, we saw the UN helicopters flying repeatedly over Abidjan. Today, from what we can see, they do not seem to be around, but we can still hear a large number of explosions and shots,” the sources tell Fides.
While the battle goes on in Abidjan, Fr Celestine Ikomba, Scalibrinian, parish priest and chaplain in the port of Abidjan, works to reconcile souls and in the chaos that has been created, prevent the situation from getting out of hand and the violence spiralling out of control, in private and personal vendettas. “Our message is simple: we have to live together beyond any political differences or differences in ethnicity and religion. It is a message that is gaining momentum in the hearts of people, who realise that violence does not lead anywhere,” Fr Celestine tells Fides. “We organise meetings between the supporters of the two Presidents to try to defuse tensions and prevent misunderstandings that could lead to violence. In our neighbourhood, in the port of Abidjan, we support our Bishops who call for peace,” says Fr Ikomba. “At this moment at the port there are struggles, but we hear gunfire and explosions from the battle being fought in other parts of the city. Unfortunately it is difficult to get in contact with these areas because communication is blocked. But we know that the situation is very difficult,” concludes Fr Ikomba. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 5/4/2011)

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