



AFRICA/IVORY COAST - After the post-election disorder children start going back to school, late and traumatized

Abidjan (Agenzia Fides) - In Côte d'Ivoire the school year generally begins in late October. Instead this year the opening has been delayed by the difficulties caused by post-election violence that disrupted classes for several months in many schools. In the western part of the country along the border with Liberia, the schools between the villages of Blolequin and Toulepleu are still closed and many children have not yet returned to their homes after fleeing with their families in Liberia or other parts of Côte d'Ivoire. Even in the commercial capital, Abidjan, from the start of the school year attendance is still very low. In the primary school in the northern suburb of Abobo Baoli only 60% of the 500 children estimated have arrived, some teachers have 10 students per class. The 4 primary and secondary schools in Abidjan are not attended by 50% of the students expected.

Public schools in Côte d'Ivoire are free, there are no fees for registration or for school material, but parents must buy school uniforms and pay for some administrative costs, such as birth certificates needed for enrollment. Many students from Baoli Abobo come from poor families and the parents have decided to send them to school as from next month. In the last school year, only 57% of admissions to secondary school were registered, compared with 70% in past years. From 34% of graduates this figure has fallen to 21%. In addition it is estimated that about 140 000 pupils in public primary schools will not manage to reach the last school year. Many private school students were penalized because their parents could not pay the last term. Approximately 20 000 of them, especially in the west, were unable to take exams for admission to secondary school.

Approximately one million of the 2.5 million primary school children were affected by the political crisis both for the closure of schools and especially because they were forced to flee with their families. Schools in the north of the country, held by the rebels at that time, closed from January to April after the elected president Alassane Ouattara had asked the officials not to work more with former President Laurent Gbagbo. Schools in the south, controlled by the previous government, were closed for the entire month of April due to the violence.

In a UNICEF study in June 2011, 224 attacks were recorded against the structures of the education system, 50% of which occurred in Abidjan. According to the organization, since June 2011 97% of primary schools have reopened and 86% of students are attending classes, but in the western cities of Divo, Man and Odienné, less than 70% of students have returned to school. Many of the children are highly traumatized, they have seen their parents being killed, and have been expelled from their homes. This is why UNICEF has trained over 5 000 teachers in 8 regions to help them overcome these traumas and promote recreational activities. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 07/11/2011)