



# TRANSFORMING LIVES

## CÔTE D'IVOIRE PHOTO EXHIBIT: THE PRICE OF WAR, THE REWARDS OF PEACE

**Photo exhibition raises awareness of the benefits of peace and the costs of war**



Photo – Youth at the exhibition

Photo by DAO DAOUA

**March 2014** – The contested presidential election of November 28, 2010 was a part of the 2007 Ouagadougou Political Agreement, which aimed to reunify a country divided between a government-controlled south and a rebel-controlled north. Instead of achieving the needed stability, the elections resulted in serious violence. Three thousand people were killed and hundreds of thousands were displaced, inflaming an already-tense social and political environment throughout the country.

USAID sponsored a photo exhibition organized by the Union of Photojournalist of Côte d'Ivoire. *"The goal of this photo exhibition is to raise awareness of the importance of peace and national cohesion"* going into the 2015 presidential elections, stated the head of the photojournalists association, Emmanuel Tanoh. The six-day exhibition featured 50 photographs taken during and after the crisis by photojournalists from opposing political parties and media outlets. It was the first of its kind since the crisis. The exhibition was open to the public free of charge in three Abidjan communes, including Plateau (Abidjan's business center), Abobo and Yopougon, the two latter communes were the most affected in Abidjan during the 2011 post electoral crisis.

Approximately 15,000 visitors, including high level officials including the Prefect of Abidjan and representatives of the Ministry of Interior and the Dialogue, Truth and Reconciliation commission, saw deeply moving images that contrasted the horrors of the conflict—piles of corpses in a state of putrefaction, burnt out vehicles, and war-wounded civilians—with powerful images of calls for peace from rejoicing people, the military asking for forgiveness, and the national football team. The photos were accompanied by slogans such as *"We are united in our differences"*, *"The past should teach us to share the future"*, *"Never again in Côte d'Ivoire"*, *"For the well-being of our children, we must reconcile"* and *"Together we are strong"*.

Madou, an ex-combatant from Abobo who visited the exhibition explained the impact of the exhibition for him, *"these photos remind me the harm I did, I had goose bumps watching them, I killed people during the crisis and I don't want to live this tragedy again.... I am so sorry of what I did"*. A family member of one of the victims of the post-election violence, Diabaté gave her reason for coming, *"I heard about this exhibition and I came to see if I could see the corpse of my son who is missing since the post electoral crisis, I am a destroyed woman and I do not wish this on any woman...let's make peace"*. Bolly, a civil servant from Plateau recalled *"seeing the picture of this woman crying broke my heart, we all went too far, now we need to make peace and work together for peaceful elections"*. Brahim, a youth from Abobo explained how the exhibit had encouraged her to reconcile with her

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neighbor *“a group of people tried to burn me alive and today I am living next to one of my torturers. I was plotting revenge against him and I saw these pictures of dead peoples at the exhibition, it made me think...I realize I was lucky enough to be alive and I should not create any more trouble. I forgive, and I am going to let him know that I forgive him”*. These are just a few of the many testimonies given by attendees of the impact of this exhibition and their changed attitudes towards reconciliation.