

## STATEMENT OF GRANT PURPOSE

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Seeking Security through Women's Community Organizations in Ivory Coast

In 2007, Ivory Coast was the first African country and one of the first in the world to develop a National Action Plan (NAP) to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which called for women's increased participation in conflict prevention and resolution initiatives, as well as their protection during conflict and post-conflict situations. Ivory Coast's NAP outlined how it would incorporate the resolution into its national laws, focusing on four priority areas: protection against sexual violence, gender mainstreaming in development, integration in national reconstruction, and strengthening political participation. The NAP was soon tested, with the country breaking into civil war in 2011 for the second time in a decade. Despite the country's early adoption of the NAP, gender-based crimes were prevalent, and women were shut out of political processes. While reported sexualized violence was not as extensive in Ivory Coast as in other conflicts in West and Central Africa, the country's former president and his wife are both accused of crimes against humanity for indirectly perpetrating such violence.

After the war's end, women's organizations worked to re-establish their communities, recreating security that had been shattered by conflict. In many post-conflict areas, women see themselves as agents of change, playing a transformative role in rebuilding the formal structures and informal ties that frayed during the conflict. In recent years, the United Nations has also highlighted women's roles as peacebuilders and as a source of community stability, using civil society to implement and monitor the Security Council's series of six Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) resolutions. In Ivory Coast, despite women's inequality relative to men, women's political and development organizations were active throughout both civil wars, and women's human rights and security organizations arose after each war to advocate for women.

My dissertation will examine the role of women's community organizations in Ivory Coast to understand how they interact with national politics and international priorities in assuring security for women. With the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, paying increasing attention to women's security, it is important to understand how women define their own security and rights, especially in post-conflict zones where their security and rights were threatened. I focus in particular on two essential questions: As women navigate the post-conflict politics and peacebuilding of Ivory Coast, do they prioritize their security and empowerment goals the same way that have been defined by the international community in the UN's WPS resolutions and by Ivory Coast in its National Action Plan? Are women's community organizations in Ivory Coast experiencing protection and support purportedly provided by the WPS resolutions or by the Ivorian government through its NAP? The Fulbright fellowship will allow me to address these questions in Ivory Coast, where, through an exploration of women's political and human rights organizations, I seek to understand how women define security and rights for themselves and how their experiences can influence national and international policies.

Central to this research is an analysis of the various competing narratives of women's security locally and internationally: how are the same events explained by different actors, even actors with the same stated goals? In Ivory Coast I will collect these narratives from a number of women's organizations, both local and national, through participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Community organizations and NGOs are indispensable interlocutors between civilians (especially women), national governments, and international organizations in West Africa and are often responsible for translating a rhetorical commitment at the UN level

into concrete progress on the ground, a position that allows the organizations and their members to interpret agendas differently from those developed at the UN. Because lobbying by women's organizations was crucial in persuading the Ivorian government to establish the NAP in 2007, I will conduct interviews with key government and civil society leaders, with whom I have already established preliminary contact, as well as gather archival data. I will also interview current leaders of women's community organizations to understand whether and how the WPS resolutions and the NAP have influenced their post-conflict work and empowerment initiatives.

This project will be undertaken with the supervision of [REDACTED] at the Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny. This affiliation will allow me to use Abidjan as the base for my research; the city is both the economic center of Ivory Coast and the seat of many government and NGO offices. Additionally, I have secured affiliation with two national NGOs that work closely with international partners and local communities: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] which works to protect human rights in the country. My affiliations will afford me the opportunity to meet a number of organizations and individual women who can provide insight into local peacebuilding. Their efforts in integrating and localizing the WPS resolutions will also help me explore the rights and security Ivorian women are obtaining for themselves, officially and unofficially, and will also illustrate the possible tensions with their international partners, who make it possible—through donations and technical support—for the national and local organizations to exist. Because of the potential political and emotional sensitivity of my research, I intend to focus on women's *organized* efforts in security and human rights, and any interactions with women who were the targets of wartime violence will be in the presence of those NGOs already working in the political and cultural context. I will obtain approval from my university's institutional review board for all my research activities.

My research in Ivory Coast will begin October 2014 and will continue for the subsequent nine months; I will have completed all my pre-dissertation requirements prior to my research. I intend to spend the first approximately four months in Abidjan, conducting interviews and working with Professor [REDACTED] to understand how Ivory Coast has incorporated the WPS resolutions into its own laws. I will also begin integration with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] in their human rights training and peacebuilding activities, leading to participant observation in workshops and community meetings, in addition to interviews with participating community members, for the remaining five months. Throughout my time in Ivory Coast, I will also spend time in the archives at the Centre de Recherche et d'Action pour la Paix (Center of Research and Action for Peace), a focal point for social sciences research in the country.

Not only will my project seek to answer questions about how women working through organizations in Ivory Coast advocate for their own security, but it will also address larger questions about how women's organizations empower women in post-conflict areas, whether UN gender mainstreaming and security efforts for women have had the intended effects, and whether and how women have been instrumental peacebuilders in post-conflict Ivory Coast. Receiving a Fulbright for my research in Ivory Coast is essential to be able to spend an extended amount of time in the country in order to develop relationships with leaders of women's NGOs, with community members in conflict-affected areas, and with other academics whose research complements my own. Establishing these relationships is necessary for understanding women's narratives of security and human rights and how they navigate international priorities and potentially reshape them to account for local needs.