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STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE NON-GOVERNMENTAL INTERNATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNITY OF DEMOCRACIES (ISC/CD) ON EVENTS IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE 14 December 2010

The International Steering Committee of the Community of Democracies notes with approval the recent statement by the United Nations Security Council that it recognizes the results of the elections in the Ivory Coast. That statement recognizes Alassane Ouattara as the winner of last month's second-round runoff in the Presidential Elections in Côte d'Ivoire. This recognition follows similar statements by the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States, as well as by the European Union, the United States, and other governments. Earlier, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General based in Abidjan had declared the Mr. Ouattara was the winner by an "irrefutable margin," basing his findings on the careful cross-checking by UN personnel across the country against results declared by the Independent Electoral Commission. We also note that numerous international and domestic civil society groups, including the Carter Center and the Convention of Ivoirian Civil Society (CSCI) had found that while there were problems during the voting, they were not serious enough to call the entire process – or the overall results – into question.

These statements, worth headlines in themselves, take added importance in light of the refusal of the former President Laurent Gbagbo to admit defeat and cede the Presidency in a democratic transfer of power after the voters have spoken through the ballot box. Instead, Côte d'Ivoire now finds itself with two Presidents and two rival governments -- one backed by the United Nations, regional and continental African organizations and numerous governments, the other backed only by the force of Côte d'Ivoire's army and gangs of youths in the streets of Abidjan. In a country which recently suffered a bloody and divisive civil war, whose wounds are still healing slowly, the risk of another rupture through violent, extra-judicial means is more than worrisome.

If there were ever any doubt that merely having elections does not make a democracy, the events of the past week in Côte d'Ivoire offer solid proof that true democracy depends far more on the faithful adherence to a well-defined process and respect for the rule of law, and not merely a single electoral event. The ISC/CD calls on all its brethren in civil society -- throughout Côte d'Ivoire, across Africa, and around the world – to work together for a peaceful, lawful transition. Likewise, the ISC/CD calls on all democratic governments to speak out forcefully concerning the political standoff in Abidjan, and to work through the UN and regional organizations to facilitate a peaceful, democratic transition in Côte d'Ivoire as quickly as possible.