

**After Action Report**

**ONUCI Evacuation**

**Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit**

**December 2004**

# After Action Report: ONUCI Evacuation

## I. Introduction

The following report reviews events leading up to the evacuation of non-essential UN personnel from ONUCI on 11 November 2004, as observed by a visitor to ONUCI. Observations and recommendations relating to the crisis response, security and evacuation procedures have been provided by two visitors to the mission and a security official serving with the mission.<sup>1</sup> This is not a comprehensive review, and does not represent the views of DPKO or ONUCI.

## II. Sequence of events 4–11 November 2004:

*Thursday 4 November:* Arrived in Abidjan in the evening for an 11-day mission visit. Abidjan was in code orange following demonstrations by Young Patriots and attacks on UN vehicles. I travelled to the hotel in Cocody in an unmarked vehicle as the movement of UN vehicles was restricted. Means of communication were limited to calls through the hotel reception, since I did not have a working cell-phone or UN radio.

*Friday 5 November:* Cocody HQ had only local security guards. The streets seemed calm but staff were advised to stay at home and the movement of UN vehicles remained restricted.

*Saturday 6 November:* I was advised by my counterpart in the mission not to leave the hotel. That night I was woken by nearby gunfire and learned from CNN of the attack on Licorne and of their retaliatory action.

*Sunday 7 November:* Hotel staff advised Europeans to stay out of sight as mobs were roaming the streets. In the afternoon, a local staffer drove me – covered by a blanket – to a UN residence block. The UN radio system advised code red and that people should continue to stay at home. Young Patriots had stolen some VHF radios and transmissions were intermittently blocked with music. Local radio and television broadcasts were inciting violence. Military observers who had come to pick us up were reportedly turned back by Ivorian police. The local guards at the building were armed but we felt uneasy about where their loyalties lay, and we felt that they had no incentive to protect us if they were threatened themselves. Late afternoon, an armed PKF escort arrived with one unarmed ONUCI security officer and transported us

*Observations and recommendations relating to the crisis response, security and evacuation procedures.*

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*I was woken by nearby gunfire...*

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<sup>1</sup> Narrative by Roxanne Bazergan, Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit, DPKO Headquarters, New York; observations and recommendations in collaboration with Luc Andriamampianina, ONUCI, and Siobian Smith, UNMIK.

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to the Cocody HQ, making stops en route to pick up other UN and NGO personnel. In some cases premises had been looted. The peacekeepers were increasingly agitated that civilians were not ready to be picked up, thereby delaying the process and potentially putting the convoy at risk. The streets were largely empty and commercial premises were boarded up. Water, military rations and mattresses were provided soon after our arrival at Cocody HQ. Mobs could be heard on the streets outside the base.

*The conditions at Pagoda were much more crowded with large numbers of non-UN international staff and Ivorians sleeping on the floor.*

*Monday 8 November:* We received a briefing at around midday from the Chief Security Officer, thereafter there were ad hoc daily briefings. Around 23:00 the Chief Medical Officer, based at the Force HQ at Pagoda, contacted the HIV unit to request a post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) kit and counselling support for a non-UN international who had been the victim of a gang rape. PEP needs to be administered within 72 hours, ideally 3–4 hours, to be effective. A PEP kit was procured from UNDP but the peacekeepers at Cocody HQ were initially reluctant to provide a military escort despite repeated requests from the head of ONUCI security. The conditions at Pagoda were much more crowded with large numbers of non-UN international staff and Ivorians sleeping on the floor. We received a military escort back to Cocody HQ at around 04:00.

*The evacuation flight to Accra, Ghana, left in the afternoon after extended delays surrounding the flight manifest.*

*Tuesday 9 November:* I travelled with a civil-military liaison officer to Pagoda to visit the rape victim. The situation on the ground worsened and I was unable to travel back to Cocody HQ until Wednesday morning.

*Wednesday 10 November:* Under the direction of UNSECOORD, at approximately 21:00 FANCI soldiers escorted me to a hotel which was a concentration point for the Thursday morning evacuation flight for UN agencies and non-essential ONUCI personnel.

*Thursday 11 November:* A UN bus transported us to the airport in the early morning, escorted by two unarmed ONUCI security officers and four PKF soldiers in UN staff vehicles. The evacuation flight to Accra, Ghana, left in the afternoon after extended delays surrounding the flight manifest.

### **III. Observations/recommendations:**

*The threat of direct violence to UN staff was moderate...*

The threat of direct violence to UN staff was moderate and the UN evacuation took place without fatalities or panic. However, in order to respond effectively to any future threats, especially if the UN is specifically targeted, a number of issues/concerns need to be highlighted.

*There was a delay in elevating the alert to red...The security colour code system was not well understood...*

*A 24-hour command system was not in place and the Crisis Management Centre was not staffed.*

*Designate crisis personnel authorised to make decisions and delegate in an emergency situation.*

### 1. Preparation and alert system

- There was a delay in elevating the alert to red. This hampered security and logistical preparations and meant that staff remained mobile during a dangerous period.
- The security colour code system was not well understood and there was confusion regarding the significance of each colour in terms of the response required (e.g. initiate warden system, prepare for evacuation).
- The warden system was not properly activated or understood and some staff relinquished responsibility during the crisis. In addition it was organised according to geographical areas of residence rather than work units, which presented a problem as wardens would not necessarily know if people were on leave or ORB.
- There was no map of, or central database containing staff locations and contact information.
- A 24-hour command system was not in place and the Crisis Management Centre (CMC) was not staffed. The Security Operations Centre is not co-located with CMC in Cocody HQ, undermining quick responses to security situations. Information on incidents and reports for assistance could not be gathered or collated in one site.
- Coordination between the military and civilian elements of the mission was difficult as they are based at many different sites.<sup>2</sup> Overall, the scattered nature of ONUCI in Abidjan stretched the mission's resources.
- There seemed to be a disconnect between the military reading of the security situation and the civilian interpretation, with the former urging greater caution.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Review the three-colour code levels of alert and the relevant responses.
- Activate the warden system and make wardens accountable. Ensure senior staff take the warden system seriously and support its implementation.
- Create a central database of staff locations and contact information, including a record of who is in the country at any given time, with relevant maps.
- Designate crisis personnel authorised to make decisions and delegate in an emergency situation (medical/logistics/movcon) to ensure 24-hour coverage.
- Activate Crisis Management Centre (CMC), ensuring that it was fully resourced and with the necessary trained staff.

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<sup>2</sup> PKF Locations: PKF compound at Riviera (western part of Abidjan) / PKF HQ Force at Pergola (Southern part of Abidjan). ONUCI Locations: HQ ONUCI at the Northern part of Abidjan, Cocody / HQ Annex (Logistic HQ) at the Southern part Of Abidjan, Marcory / Supply HQ at the Southern part of Abidjan, Koumassy

- Co-locate CMC and the Security Operations Centre (SOC) in ONUCI HQ
- Consolidate the locations of ONUCI HQ in Abidjan.
- Establish one HQ for civil-military coordination in a crisis situation.

## 2. Communications

- The security frequency of the radio was overwhelmed and the ‘young patriots’ were able to block VHF transmissions and eavesdrop on communications.
- There were insufficient cell phones for the extraction teams and connections were unreliable (Orange services were disrupted for four days).
- Staff were not trained on how to transmit succinct, clear messages requesting emergency assistance or relaying critical information.

### *Recommendations:*

- Make use of ONUCI FM radio for broadcasts, as well as the internet, lotus notes and SMS. Create an emergency phone number for international staff – answer phone during non-crisis periods, with a central phone system in SOC.
- Review broadcast frequencies. Establish one frequency for broadcasting only (security messages from SOC), one frequency to send and receive security messages to SOC and three simple frequencies for communications between staff.
- Ensure radios for essential staff and extraction teams during crises.
- Provide training for staff on communications during crisis situations.
- Visitors to missions arriving during periods of elevated alert to be provided with a radio and/or cell phone.

## 3. Extraction of staff from residences

- There were no clear SOPs on the extraction of staff from dangerous locations or guidelines on the division of labour between UN security officers and the PKF.
- The extraction of staff was not coordinated and convoy teams were not clearly defined with team leaders. There were no clear instructions on how and when staff would be moved. Personnel were mainly left to make self-assessments of whether or not they felt at risk. However, the threat was unpredictable with flash points arising out of relative calm, resulting in some requests for extraction being made when people were under direct threat. Convoys largely responded to individual calls made direct to security officers or Civpol. As a result, repeat visits had to be made to the same areas. Some staff members arrived at the concentration points individually.
- Not all the mission security officers were willing to assist with the extraction of staff, thereby placing a greater burden on their colleagues.

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*Make use of ONUCI FM radio for broadcasts...*

*The extraction of staff was not coordinated and convoy teams were not clearly defined with team leaders.*

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*...in some instances extraction was left to unarmed civilians.*

- There were insufficient vehicles equipped with radios reserved for extraction. Some designated vehicles had empty fuel tanks and there was no means to repair vehicles.
- There were no drivers on standby for communal transport (buses)
- Escorts were not always sufficiently armed – in some instances extraction was left to unarmed civilians.
- Military air assets (helicopters/planes) were not available to assist in risk zones.

*Recommendations:*

*PKF units to provide extraction teams...as there are insufficient security officers in the mission.*

- Clear SOPs and guidelines establishing a coordinator and team for each zone of operations. Teams working in shifts should provide 24/7 coverage with team leaders delegated by seniors to make real time decision.
- Centralise and coordinate extraction of personnel by zones.
- PKF units to provide extraction teams and have an area of responsibility which they manage on their own (in addition to providing convoy protection) as there are insufficient security officers in the mission.
- Prepare a list of vehicles that can be commandeered during a crisis situation; ensure fuel supplies at concentration points.
- Review availability of ONUCI air assets.
- Drivers and buses to be in a set location following an alert.
- Consider riot control units to provide security for ONUCI and UN personnel.

4. Management of concentration points

*Personnel were not routinely registered at all of the sites...staff movement was not controlled...*

- Not all envisaged concentration points were activated or easily accessible or provided with sufficient/timely security.<sup>3</sup>
- It was difficult to monitor the internal situation in each of the concentration points – some were underutilised while others were over-crowded. In some cases the distribution of rations was not organised until supplies ran low.
- Personnel were not routinely registered at all of the sites making it difficult to monitor needs and to plan for evacuation.
- Staff movement was not controlled, with personnel intermittently returning home to sleep, wash or collect more belongings, requesting escort assistance each time.

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<sup>3</sup> Four CPs were designated in the emergency contingency plan. Three were not secured in time by PKF and were on the path of the Young Patriots. One (Hotel Golf) was secured by Licorne, however no PKF units were deployed. Three further CPs were activated - Hotel Tiama (UN agencies only), Cocody HQ and Pergola. As Pergola was over crowded (1350 'refugees') two further CPs near Pergola were created by Licorne, in liaison with the PKF.

*The mission leadership did not stay at the concentration points.*

- The mission leadership did not stay in the concentration points. This created a divide and also security concerns as their demand for military escorts diminished the level of protection at the base.
- There was a need for more information and updates on the security situation and plans for evacuations at all the concentration points. The briefings provided in Cocody HQ were welcomed by staff and helped ease the sense of frustration.
- Internationals and NGOs were successfully accommodated in the concentration points with the assistance of UN staff.
- Local staff established an unofficial network to provide internationals with food and supplies

*Recommendations:*

- Set up blocks and controls on the principle access routes to concentration points and secure peripheral areas.
- Draft clear SOPs for the running of concentration points. Designate a head for each of the concentration sites and plans to utilise space – identifying eating, sleeping and working areas. Plan the logistical needs based on the capacity of each site and set up a system for the distribution and monitoring of supplies.
- Set up welcome teams, including basic medical capacity, at each concentration point.
- Establish a registration system for anybody entering or leaving a concentration point.
- Limit the movement of personnel out of concentration points.
- Mission leadership to remain at concentration points in the interests of command and control and morale and to reduce demands on security resources.
- Mission leadership and security officers to provide routine briefings and updates to personnel gathered in concentration points.

*Designate a head for each of the concentration sites and plans to utilise space...*

*Mission leadership and security officers to provide routine briefings...*

5. General logistics

- Not all concentration points had a doctor and the mission does not have a psychologist.
- There was no clear medical contingency plan – when the bridges were blocked, for example, the north was cut off from the south, limiting the access of medical assistance.
- Concentration points did not have fire extinguishers.

*Recommendations:*

- Redistribution of medical assistance – doctors, advance medical support and ambulances – at the point at which an alert is activated.
- Mission to hire a psychologist.
- Place fire extinguishers and clear fire exit procedures in all concentration points.

*There was no clear medical contingency plan.*

*A number of UN staff had family members with them, despite it being a non-family mission.*

#### 6. The evacuation

- ONUCI security officers were overwhelmed by last minute requests from embassies for evacuation assistance.
- A number of UN staff had family members with them, despite it being a non-family mission. The low nature of the immediate threat allowed for a series of evacuation flights and meant this did not become a major issue. But this would be more problematic if the UN was facing a direct attack and places on flights were more limited.
- Coordination between the different actors – movecon/security/transport/UNSECOORD etc and agencies – was weak. Flight manifests were incomplete resulting in long delays.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Need for clear SOPs regarding assistance provided to embassies and other VIPs.
- Need for guidance on how to address the issue of UN family members in a non-family mission.
- Designation of a person responsible for each agency/NGO etc. A centralised database on personnel.
- Review coordination mechanisms and integration of ONUCI security and UNSECOORD.

*Review coordination mechanism and integration of ONUCI security and UNSECOORD.*