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Côte d'Ivoire: Ongoing detention of woman human rights defender Pulcherie Gbalet

On 14 April 2021, woman human rights defender **Pulcherie Gbalet** was brought before the investigative judge of the 8th investigative chamber of the prosecution of the Court of First Instance (TPI) of Abidjan-Plateau to review the conditions of her detention. The woman human rights defender has been detained since 15 August 2020, following a press conference in which she called for peaceful protests in response to president Alassane Ouattara's candidacy in the presidential election for a third term in office. Pulcherie Gbalet is accused of acts of "violation of public order", "participation in an insurrectional movement", "attack on the authority of the State", "willful destruction of public goods" and "provocation to a crowd".

[Pulcherie Gbalet](#) is a woman human rights defender and the president of *Alternative Citoyenne Ivoirienne* (ACI), a civil society platform that brings together several organizations working on human rights in Côte d'Ivoire. ACI works to promote and defend human rights, civil liberties, democracy and peace in the country.

On 15 August 2020, Pulcherie Gbalet was arrested along with her colleagues, human rights defenders Gbaou Gedeon Junior and Djehi Bi Doua Cyril (members of ACI) at a hotel where she was hiding, for fear for her safety. Gbaou Gedeon Junior and Djehi Bi Doua Cyril were visiting the woman human rights defender at the hotel, and were arrested at the same time. Two days prior, on 13 August, Pulcherie Gbalet's colleague Kouakou N'Goran Aime Cesar was arrested, reportedly due to his relationship to the woman human rights defender.

Pulcherie Gbalet and her colleagues have been detained at the Maison d'Arret et de Correction d'Abidjan (MACA) since their arrest. She has had regular contact with her lawyer since her detention. Pulcherie Gbalet's arrest occurred days after a press conference organised by ACI at the organisation's offices on 10 August 2020, during which the woman human rights defender called for peaceful protests to oppose the candidacy of president Alassane Ouattara in the presidential election in October 2020.

On 19 August 2020, Pulcherie Gbalet and her three colleagues were brought before the 8th investigative chamber of the prosecution of the Court of First Instance (TPI) of Abidjan-Plateau. The public prosecutor opened a judicial investigation against the four individuals on charges of "violation of public order", "participation in an insurrectional movement", "attack on the authority of the State", "willful destruction of public goods" and "provocation to a crowd". According to the prosecution, these acts allegedly occurred on 13 August 2020, during a demonstration in Abidjan, which Pulcherie Gbalet or her three colleagues did not participate in.

On 14 April 2021, Pulcherie Gbalet was presented before the judge of first instance to re-access the conditions of her detention. The pre-trial judicial proceedings are ongoing, and the trial is yet to be scheduled.

In November 2020, UN experts [condemned](#) the arrest and detention of Pulcherie Gbalet, her fellow ACI colleagues and other civil society actors in response to their denunciation of the unconstitutionality of the president's decision to run for a third term in office, in violation of their rights to freedom of expression and association.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned by the lengthy pre-trial detention of Pulcherie Gbalet and her three colleagues, as the organisation believes that their arrest, detention and the charges against them are in reprisal for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and association.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Cote d'Ivoire to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release Pulcherie Gbalet, and her colleagues Kouakou N'Goran Aime Cesar, Gbaou Gedeon Junior; and Djehi Bi Doua Cyrilas as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being held solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of speech and association;
2. Respect in all circumstances Law No. 2014-388 of June 20, 2014 relating to the promotion and protection of human rights defenders, and its implementing decree No. 2017-121;
3. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Cote d'Ivoire are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including harassment, arrests and threats.