

# Turning Dreams into Reality in Kong

*Resilience for Peace (R4P) is helping build trust through concrete collaboration between Fulani groups and Ivorian security forces*



*Security officials and Fulani leaders walk together in Kong in a show of mutual respect*

Kong department sits on the Burkina Faso border in northern Côte d'Ivoire. Tensions and fears are high following attacks on security forces in Kafolo by violent extremists in 2021. A handful of Fulani were implicated in the attacks, but all community members are now being condemned as supporters of 'terrorists' and 'jihadists', as well as being targeted by national security and defense forces. Many Fulani in Kong department have retreated from public life, fled the area or gone into hiding. Separately, hostilities between

Lobi and Fulani in Kobada village over livestock and crop damages erupted anew in May 2022, destroying homes and displacing over 100 Fulani. Suspicion and scapegoating now characterize Fulani existence around Kong and much of north-eastern Côte d'Ivoire today.

With Fulani relations at a nadir, Resilience for Peace (R4P) began a series of dialogues involving Fulani leaders, State authorities, and security forces from across Kong Department since early 2021. This ongoing exchange culminated in a jointly organized gathering of Fulani leaders, officers from the security forces, and the Prefect of Kong on June 3, 2022. To publicize this renewed mutual understanding, senior security officers and Fulani leaders organized a civic march through the town of Kong, from the Prefecture to the Gendarmerie Camp. So unexpected was this public display of solidarity that some bystanders interpreted it as a mass Fulani arrest. Civic leaders must model the behavior they want citizens to adopt, and this public testimony of mutual respect is a first step on the long road towards full acceptance of the Fulani community in northern Côte d'Ivoire.

*"If you can't take the smoke, you won't see the embers. This joint walk is a product of our patience, a dream that finally became reality. Walking hand in hand like this with the security forces was previously unthinkable"*  
Fulani participant



*The Kong Prefect, and sub-prefects, pose with senior security officers and Fulani leaders*

Inspired by this shared experience, the assembled leaders, under the guidance of the Kong Prefect, decided to extend this first step by establishing a more formal dialogue framework, the "Permanent platform for dialogue between security forces and Fulani," which will meet quarterly to plan monthly trust-building exercises.



Fulani leaders now describe feeling empowered to engage State authorities more regularly given the positive momentum generated by recent exchanges and greater optimism for full social integration.

*“By custom, the Fulani are a reserved community. Yet faced with the challenges of integration they are gradually opening up.”* Sub-prefect, Kong



*Participants from the Fulani community as well as the security forces discuss potential joint activities to demonstrate solidarity*

The road to more concrete collaboration is in part due to R4P facilitation of ongoing dialogue oriented towards concrete actions and tangible dividends. In practice this means focusing discussions on existing good practices of uniting the two parties and identifying ways of reinforcing them.

*“After the attacks in the Bounkani region and Kafolo, the Fulani were stigmatized. When we went to them, they were reluctant to talk to us. But with the project [R4P], their trust grew, and they’ve begun to work with security forces.”* Prefect of Bounkani, Bouna

Since 2020, Côte d'Ivoire faces increasing attacks by terrorist groups along its northern border, with one attack in 2020 and four between January and June 2021. In support of the Ivorian State to prevent and fight violent extremism, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) initiated the R4P project in 2021. The project will run for five years.



*Kong security officers and Fulani leaders pose in solidarity*

