

FIELD MESSAGE

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U. S. INFORMATION SERVICE

FROM: USIS Abidjan

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TO: USIA WASHINGTON

MESSAGE NO.

REF:

January 14, 1972
DATE

SUBJECT: Visit of Mrs. Nixon to Ivory Coast

AGENCY USE

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SUMMARY: MRS. NIXON RECEIVES A TREMENDOUSLY WARM AND ENTHUSIASTIC RECEPTION IN IVORY COAST; PRESS COVERAGE IS SLOW STARTING BUT GAINS EXTRAORDINARY MOMENTUM DURING VISIT AND IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER; RADIO AND TELEVISION COVERAGE IS CONTINUOUS; USIS IS ASSIGNED MAJOR ROLE IN VISIT AND SPECIAL FACILITIES CREATED FOR VISITING PRESS CORPS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL; MRS. NIXON'S PRESS COFFEE PROVES TO BE A HIGHLIGHT.

Warm Welcome

The visit of Mrs. Richard Nixon to Abidjan from January 7-9 appears to have been an unqualified success by any measuring stick. She was warmly and graciously received by President and Mrs. Houphouet-Boigny and all the government hierarchy, and the crowds of enthusiastic Ivorians who turned out to see her not alone upon her arrival but throughout her visit apparently exceeded anything she had witnessed on her previous two stops in Monrovia and Accra. The President obviously went all out, greeting her on her arrival and seeing her off at the airport on her departure, plus offering her a lavish state dinner, and somewhat unexpectedly showing up for a gala picnic given by the Mayor of Abidjan. Mrs. Houphouet-Boigny, who was known to be unwell, returned from Europe for the occasion and accompanied Mrs. Nixon throughout her stay. The high degree of genuine warmth on both sides was clearly evident and there were no mishaps to cloud any portion of the busy schedule.

Media Coverage

As is customary in the Ivory Coast, the local press waited until the last moment to wheel out its biggest publicity guns. Fraternite-Matin waited until the day before her arrival to splash the upcoming event, and on the day of her arrival, it used a headline three and one half inches deep in red across the full width of the page to say: "Welcome Pat Nixon". In that issue and the subsequent two issues (Saturday and Monday), Fraternite carried double-page photo spreads as well as front page treatment of Mrs. Nixon's activities. The full length editorial (see

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enclosed translated text) written by recent leader grantee and editor-in-chief Laurent Dona-Fologo was ecstatic in its praise of Mrs. Nixon in particular and American-Ivorian relations in general.

Radio and television were not one step behind. Mrs. Nixon's arrival at the airport, welcoming ceremonies and exchange of greetings with the President were televised live, as was the visit to City Hall the following day. Every event on the schedule was filmed and played back, in most cases twice, on television throughout their programming schedule. Radio carried most events live with effusive commentaries including full texts of the arrival statements and the exchange of toasts at the state dinner. The advance taped interview with the Ivorian Ambassador in Washington was also heard several times and we appreciated the Agency's backstopping on this item. The weekly Ivoire Dimanche contributed a two-page spread to the coverage, based on USIS-supplied materials, and another weekly Hebdomadaire devoted its cover picture to Mrs. Nixon surrounded by Ivorian children plus detailed coverage inside. The Post feels that local media went all out in their efforts and every word was complimentary.

USIS Facilities

Given the large contingent of correspondents and motion picture cameramen travelling with Mrs. Nixon, augmented by locally-based journalists and reporters coming from elsewhere in Africa, the Post made a special effort to create adequate facilities for them. The key element was a press room off the lobby of the Hotel Ivoire which was staffed around the clock during the visit. A special telex line operating 24 hours was installed which, together with the hotel telex, seemed to serve the needs of correspondents adequately although there were several journalists who suggested that the availability of a third telex would have been even better. The press room was fully equipped with two outside telephone lines, copying machine, seven typewriters, bar, and all the accoutrements which go with such an operation. The press room was in constant use and the favorable commentary of the correspondents was gratifying.

Two press busses, one of them air-conditioned, transported the press to all events, and given the humid and sultry weather, the availability of cold refreshments in each bus was a perhaps minor but essential ingredient. In addition to its own vehicles, USIS hired three additional sedans for standby special service in front of the hotel throughout the visit. Although they weren't in constant use, they came in extremely handy. A specially-equipped two-tiered flatbed truck was used only once, for the motorcade after arrival, but every motion picture cameramen including Ivorians used it so it was well worth the trouble and expense.

The most laborious single product was the creation of a two-tiered wooden platform 32 feet long for use at the airport in connection with the arrival

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ceremonies. Because the welcoming ceremonies were simplified at the last minute, the only ones to use the platform were the pre-positioned USIA documentary film crew but they were grateful for it.

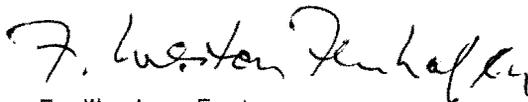
Last but not least of the major elements was the preparation of a voluminous press kit including just about every detail a correspondent might or might not want to know. This production was almost entirely the result of a dedicated effort by JOT Jeanne Rogge (see copies enclosed).

Press Coffee

One of the most successful events on Mrs. Nixon's program was a press coffee (read cold soft drinks) which was arranged by USIS. The occasion was by invitation only and an excellent representational selection of Ivorian journalists were included. Mrs. Nixon was at her very best in fielding the questions and replying with charm, humor, detail and enthusiasm. The give and take was so spontaneous that the event lasted a half hour longer than anticipated and not before Mrs. Nixon had graciously posed for a series of group photographs with her guests. The dean of the Ivorian press corps, Laurent Dona-Fologo, expressed the appreciation of his colleagues for the opportunity to meet on such an informal basis with the First Lady.

Conclusion

It's hard to say how the Post would or could have handled its responsibilities any differently if given another opportunity. There were no breakdowns of any consequence and the press corps appeared to be thoroughly happy, if a bit weary, at all times. The presence of USIS officers on TDY from Dakar, Kinshasa, and Yaounde was most appreciated and they held up their end well. The performance of the USIS Abidjan American and local staff was superb and our compensation was in feeling that the visit of Mrs. Nixon had gone extremely well and that the warmth of Ivorian-American relations had been even further developed.



F. Weston Fenhagen
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Enclosures