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Rebels Sign Truce to End Ivory Coast Uprising

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

YAMOUSSOUKRO, Ivory Coast, Oct. 17 — Insurgents signed a truce today to halt a monthlong rebellion in Ivory Coast that has killed hundreds of people. Mediators said the rebels would hold talks with the government in an effort to return stability.

Tens of thousands have already fled the fighting, which has unleashed long-simmering ethnic, political and religious tensions in Ivory Coast, once an oasis of stability in turbulent West Africa. Tuo Fozié, a rebel official, signed the cease-fire with West African mediators in the central city of Bouaké, which the rebels have held since the start of the uprising on Sept. 19.

The government had no representative at the signing, but in a televised speech tonight, President Laurent Gbagbo, expressed support for the plan. "We are starting the peace process today," Mr. Gbagbo said.

A Senegalese mediator, Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, said, "We want both sides to be separate on the ground, remain in position and refrain from engaging in offensive action."

At the core of the insurgency are about 800 former soldiers, many dismissed for suspected disloyalty. Their uprising gathered support from Ivoirians in the north, who feel poorly treated by the southern-based government.

The truce provides "a framework of principles to bring an end to the ongoing crisis through dialogue and negotiations," said another mediator, Muhammad Ibn Chambas.

Even so, prospects for lasting peace still seemed uncertain.

Speaking before word of the signing, an army spokesman, Col. Jules Yao Yao, said Ivoirian forces supported talks but reserved the right "to break that engagement and go on the offensive."

The mediators were working from peace proposals initiated by President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, who heads the Economic Community of West African States, a regional grouping.

The rebels had indicated on Sunday that they agreed in principle to the cease-fire. But they waited until today to sign, partly because they suspected that the government was bringing in Angolan troops.

The Angolan Embassy in Ivory Coast has also issued a denial. But a European foreign minister, who spoke on condition of anonymity, acknowledged the presence of 500 Angolan troops in Ivory Coast.