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Ivory Coast Factions Said to Reach Accord on New Government

By REUTERS

PARIS, Friday, Jan. 24 (Reuters) — A peace plan agreed on by rival Ivory Coast factions this morning calls for a new government of national reconciliation to be led by a prime minister chosen by wide consensus, a delegate source said.

The plan, accepted after nine days of talks near Paris, also calls on the future government to set the dates for "credible and transparent" elections and to organize the disarmament of those fighting forces active on the ground.

The measure carried the signatures of representatives of all the Ivoirian political parties and rebel groups around the table, including that of President Laurent Gbagbo's ruling Ivoirian Popular Front.

All parties to the peace talks were to be included in the new government, it said.

"This government of national reconciliation will be led by a prime minister of consensus who will stay in place until the next presidential election at which he will not be able to stand," the plan read.

It did not specifically refer to Mr. Gbagbo's future role, but participants had indicated beforehand that his position would not be challenged if he agreed to a national unity government.

The private talks did not appear to be affected by new unrest in Ivory Coast, the world's top cocoa producer, as the government army accused Liberia of involvement in a rebel attack on the western town of Toulépleu on Wednesday.

Liberia insisted that its regular forces were not involved. But Kadet Bertin, Ivory Coast's defense minister, rejected the denial and called on France, the country's former colonial power, to commit more troops to his country's defense.

"I urge France to fully commit itself side by side with the Ivoirians, side by side with the government so that all the rebels get out of Ivory Coast," he told French RFI radio.

"We have to activate defense accords, France must send troops here to chase out those people," Mr. Kadet, speaking from Abidjan, said of a 1961 accord that could be activated in the event of "blatant external aggression."

France has about 2,500 troops in Ivory Coast upholding a shaky cease-fire and protecting its many foreigners.

The French Defense Ministry said again that its troops in the country ascribed the latest attack to "uncontrolled bands."

Fighting set off by a failed coup on Sept. 19 has hit the north and west of the country in a conflict some fear could spread through West Africa.

The peace conference, being held about 20 miles south of Paris at France's national rugby center, has focused on defusing the ethnic tensions that touch off strife in a country where a quarter of the population are immigrants.

There was agreement on the need to tone down bloodline-based nationality clauses to allow Ivoirian citizenship based more on residency, and on the need for property ownership to be made easier for foreigners, people close to the talks said.

There was consensus on the need to review constitutional clauses that have stopped an exiled former prime minister, Alassane Ouattara, from running for office on grounds that include a dispute over his mother's nationality.

One source close to the talks said that rebels were not being compelled to disarm. Instead, agreements would confine forces on both sides to clearly defined zones.

Delegates acknowledge that whatever comes out of the talks can only take effect if Mr. Gbagbo accepts it.