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Leaders Meet on Saturday on Ivory Coast Peace Plan

By REUTERS

PARIS, Jan. 24 — West African leaders will meet in Paris on Saturday for a meeting that France wants to approve a peace plan to end four months of civil war in its former colony of Ivory Coast.

President Jacques Chirac of France, who will preside over the meeting, wants the leaders to underwrite the peace plan, which rival Ivory Coast factions agreed to today after nine days of talks near Paris.

A spokeswoman for Mr. Chirac, who met today with Ivory Coast's president, Laurent Gbagbo, said afterward that there were "high hopes" the meeting would complete the process of reconciliation.

The plan would keep Mr. Gbagbo in office but force him to share power with a new prime minister chosen by broad political consensus, delegates at the talks said.

The summit meeting, due to end on Sunday, will begin with an address by Mr. Chirac. Mr. Gbagbo is also expected to speak, as well as President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, representing the African Union, and the United Nations secretary general, Kofi Annan.

Saturday afternoon will be dedicated to a working session on measures to back up the accord.

The plan urges the creation of an international surveillance committee to ensure that the accord is respected. Such a body could lessen the burden for France, which has put 2,500 troops into Ivory Coast to uphold a fragile cease-fire.

But animosities in the region mean that there is a big question mark over whether the summit meeting can back the peace plan in the world's top cocoa-producing country, where France also has major business interests and thousands of citizens.

Adding to tensions, Burkina Faso's president, Blaise Compaoré, said today that his country would go to the international court over accusations of killings and abuses of immigrants living in Ivory Coast.