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Ivory Coast Leader Appoints a Premier After a Peace Deal

By CRAIG S. SMITH

PARIS, Jan. 25 — President Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast today formally accepted a peace plan here to end his country's four-month-old civil war and appointed a new prime minister to lead a reconciliation government.

Speaking at a news conference after the first day of a weekend meeting of West African leaders who hope to help put the peace plan into effect, Mr. Gbagbo said he had accepted Seydou Diarra, a former prime minister, to lead the country's government until new elections could be held.

He said other members of the new coalition government would be appointed in the coming days. The peace plan also offers amnesty for rebel fighters and promises that a new army will be formed that will include both supporters of the present government loyalists and rebel forces.

Mr. Gbagbo said the new government had "two essential objectives: to lift the Ivory Coast out of war and to bring back prosperity."

If the plan works, it will be a major victory for President Jacques Chirac of France, who sent 2,500 troops into Ivory Coast after a failed coup to oust Mr. Gbagbo in September set off a civil war. By sending the troops, Mr. Chirac risked both France's prestige in Africa and support among a skeptical French public.

Earlier this month, France helped negotiate a cease-fire to make peace talks possible and sponsored the nine days of talks between all of Ivory Coast's political parties, including the three rebel groups that now control most of the country.

Those groups agreed on a draft peace plan early Friday, in time for the French sponsored West African summit meeting, which the United Nations secretary general, Kofi Annan, is also attending and is intended to lend the peace accord international legitimacy.

Leaders from 11 West African nations spent most of today behind closed doors, working to create an international surveillance committee to ensure that the accord is respected.

Mr. Chirac is pushing for wider international involvement, including support from the United Nations, to ensure that the peace holds and to allow France to withdraw most of its forces.

But new tensions are already threatening the fragile peace. Reuters reported that thousands of people rallied today in Abidjan, Ivory Coast's economic hub, to protest the agreement, which they claimed capitulated to demands of rebels.

Residents of the largely immigrant Abidjan shantytown known as Washington also said eight uniformed paramilitary policemen stormed through courtyards today, beat down doors and yanked people from their beds, whipping some with ropes. The paramilitary police accused residents of harboring rebels, Reuters reported.

The Ivory Coast has accused neighboring Liberia of supporting rebel operations in the western part of the country.