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Ivory Coast Factions Reach Pact

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CAPE TOWN, South Africa, April 6 -- Ivory Coast's warring factions agreed Wednesday to end hostilities, begin immediate disarmament and make plans for new elections in a bid to prevent another explosion of violence in the world's leading cocoa producer.

The agreement followed four days of talks in Pretoria mediated by South African President Thabo Mbeki, who summoned all sides to his country's capital to try to rescue the peace process. The negotiations were the factions' first face-to-face meeting since civil war flared again last fall in the West African nation.

"The parties . . . hereby solemnly declare the immediate and final cessation of all hostilities and the end of the war through the national territory," the agreement signed in Pretoria said.

Ivory Coast has been split between the rebel-held north and loyalist south since a coup attempt in 2002. A peace accord was reached in France in January 2003, but to little avail. A cease-fire reached that May was violated twice by Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo, raising doubts about elections.

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan welcomed the accord and urged both sides to follow through with their commitments "promptly and in good faith," his spokesman, Fred Eckhard, said in a statement.

The agreement commits the warring factions to "immediately proceed with the disarmament and dismantling of the militia throughout the entire national territory," and it scheduled an April 14 meeting between leaders of the armed forces and rebels to hammer out the details.

To promote fairness and transparency, the agreement said the United Nations would be invited to participate in an independent electoral commission comprising representatives of the ruling party and rebels.

The accord also gave a more prominent role to the prime minister, who is regarded as more moderate and conciliatory than Gbagbo.