

Political Rivals in Ivory Coast Reach a Deal

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By AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ABIDJAN, [Ivory Coast](#), April 8 (Agence France-Presse) — The five main rival leaders in Ivory Coast have agreed to a disarmament program and a census leading to elections by the end of October, the chairman of the African Union, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, said after talks here on Saturday.

"We leave with the feeling that things here are moving and are heading in the right direction," Mr. Sassou-Nguesso said.

The meeting was attended by President [Laurent Gbagbo](#), Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny, the rebel leader Guillaume Soro, Henry Konan Bédié of the Democratic Party of Ivory Coast (once the only legal party in the country) and Alassane Ouattara of the Rally of Republicans.

"We have agreed that it was important that, under the authority of the government and the prime minister, the two processes of disarmament and establishing identity be carried out simultaneously and without delay," said Mr. Sassou-Nguesso, who is also president of the Congo Republic.

The question of which should come first had caused a major split between the supporters of President Gbagbo and the New Forces rebels, who have controlled the northern part of the country since trying to oust him in 2002.

Mr. Gbagbo wanted disarmament to come first, while the rebels said their forces should be given official new identity papers before laying down their arms.

The two programs "should progressively lead us to the reunification of the country, to the redeployment of the administration in the country and the pursuit of the process that should lead us to elections by Oct. 31 next," Mr. Sassou-Nguesso said.

On Feb. 28, the five leaders met for 48 hours in the administrative capital, Yamoussoukro, and "agreed on the need to meet frequently to exchange views on the peace process and ensure that political life takes place in a climate of peace."

Mr. Konan Banny will soon make his first visit as prime minister to [France](#), Ivory Coast's former colonial ruler. He will meet President [Jacques Chirac](#) and Defense Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie, and then plans to travel to the United States.