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HEADLINE: Tough new UN measures needed to keep Ivory Coast from war: Crisis Group

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BODY:

Ivory Coast needs a collective rescue strategy to prevent it from sliding deeper into chaos, Crisis Group said Wednesday in a new report one day before the UN Security Council was to vote on an African Union measure to extend the mandate of President Laurent Gbagbo by one year.

"If the UN Security Council does not use the 12-month transition to impose shock therapy, the machetes and AK-47s will soon be put to use again," the influential Brussels-based thinktank said in its new report 'Ivory Coast: halfway measures will not suffice'.

Crisis Group pointed to the legacy of conflict in neighbor Liberia, where elections were held Tuesday after a two-year transition period from back-to-back civil wars, as evidence that both Ivory Coast and its international partners must seize on any "window of opportunity for durable peace".

"The risk that Ivory Coast could follow the same self-destructive path has not been enough to bring the principal actors in the conflict to their senses," Crisis Group wrote.

Ivory Coast had been scheduled to hold presidential elections on October 30, mandated under a long-dormant peace pact in the divided west African state, producer of 40 percent of the world's cocoa.

Continued unrest, a failed disarmament operation and entrenched political bickering has made the tenure of such elections impossible, though Gbagbo's armed and political opponents have said they expected a power vacuum from October 31 when he was constitutionally mandated to step down.

At an emergency meeting last week in Addis Ababa, the AU decided to leave Gbagbo as head of state for a maximum 12 months. He was also required to name a new transitional prime minister accepted by all parties to the peace pact brokered in France in January 2003 to end months of civil war.

Crisis Group recommended tough measures for the United Nations to implement in the next 12 months, including targeted sanctions so as to force compliance with peace accords and adherence to a disarmament process that has been postponed for more than a year.

Crisis Group also urged the rapid publication of a human rights report enumerating violations committed by both sides of the conflict since 2002, including massacres in the country's tinderbox west.

"This plan may appear overly ambitious and difficult to apply, but halfway measures have not worked," Crisis Group said. "It was partly the lack of international audacity that cost millions of lives in Rwanda, the Congo and Sudan in the past decade."

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