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HEADLINE: Ivory Coast opposition repeats call for Gbagbo to go

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BODY:

Ivory Coast's political opposition repeated Saturday a call for President Laurent Gbagbo to step down when his term ends on October 30 in favour of a "transitional administration" pending elections in the divided country.

A grouping of four opposition parties, including those of former president Konan Bedie and former prime minister Alassane Ouattara, said Gbagbo's remaining in office even though presidential polls are currently impossible would only make Ivory Coast's political crisis worse.

The statement was sent to the head of the African Union, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan and the current chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

It followed an ECOWAS summit Friday to seek a way to avert a potentially violent political crisis in Ivory Coast, which split into two rival armed camps after a failed revolt against Gbagbo three years ago.

Gbagbo's constitutional term in office is due to end on October 30 but no mechanism has been put in place to ensure a fair nationwide election, raising fears that violence may once more erupt between government troops and the rebel forces holding the north of the country.

Gbagbo himself has said that with no new election he has no intention of standing down.

Nine ECOWAS heads of state who gathered in the Nigerian capital Abuja Friday under Obasanjo's chairmanship to decide what advice to give to the full African Union on the crisis refused to divulge much afterwards.

Nigeria's Foreign Minister Olu Adeniji said the demand from the opposition and the rebel New

Forces for Gbagbo's government to be replaced by a transitional regime was "an option" but "an extreme option."

Before the meeting the head of the United Nations operation in Ivory Coast, Sweden's Pierre Schori, warned of a "dangerous atmosphere" on the ground, where the tense front line is patrolled by 6,500 UN peacekeepers and 4,000 troops from France, the country's former colonial power.

The political opposition Saturday accused Gbagbo of betraying his oath of office with regard to the protection of civil rights and liberties and the unity of the country.