

Former Ivory Coast rebel leader urges arms embargo for his country
Beaudelaire Mieux, *Associated Press*, 8/21/03

A top rebel now serving as Cabinet minister in Ivory Coast's power-sharing government urged the international community Thursday to impose an arms embargo on his country - saying it would help preserve peace after a nine-month civil war. Guillaume Soro, who led a rebel movement that seized over half of the West African nation last year, accused pro-government forces of massive arms purchases. "The international community must impose an arms embargo on Ivory Coast," Soro told *The Associated Press* in a telephone interview from Bouake, a former rebel stronghold in the center of the country.

The war in Ivory Coast was officially declared over on July 4, and a coalition government set up as stipulated in a Jan. 24 peace accord signed in Marcoussis, France. However, Ivory Coast Prime Minister Seydou Diarra acknowledged Wednesday the peace process was deadlocked by haggling over key posts controlling the country's defense and security forces. All rebel ministers have retreated to their central base and suspended their participation in the coalition government, until the posts of defense and interior ministers are filled. Rebels are accusing President Laurent Gbagbo of flouting the peace deal by refusing to fill those key posts.

If the deadlock in the peace process continues, Ivory Coast will see even more of the now-flourishing rumors of another coup attempt, said Soro, who now holds the communications ministry in the power-sharing government. Over the past week, persistent talk of new uprisings has been circulating, prompting the authorities to increase the number of armed soldiers patrolling the streets of the commercial capital, Abidjan. A 1999 coup in Ivory Coast shattered decades of prosperity and calm in the West African nation. The country has been wracked by political and economic instability ever since. The last attempted coup, in September, has left the country divided between the rebel-held north and government-controlled south.