

INTERNATIONAL

Factions in Ivory Coast recommit to peace deal

ACCRA, Ghana (AP) - Parties to Ivory Coast's moribund peace process have again committed themselves to knitting their civil-war divided country back together, setting new target dates for implementation of their peace deal at a summit in Ghana.

In a communique published late Friday, Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo and the rebels behind a 2002-2003 war to overthrow him laid out specific dates for the resumption of a national unity administration and the implementation of political reforms and a disarmament process.

"I hope the (Ivory Coast) public will force the leaders to accept this very genuine and liberal agreement and enforce it so the country will be restored to normalcy," said Ghana President John Kufuor after the two-day talks for which he was host.

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and African leaders brokered the talks in Ghana's capital, Accra, after

Ivory Coast's January 2003 peace deal all but broke down this year, threatening a nascent peace spreading across West Africa.

Rebel ministers have boycotted the Gbagbo-led power-sharing government and retreated to northern strongholds they captured after war sprang from a failed September 2002 attempt to oust Gbagbo.

The France-backed accord largely ended fighting and spelled out political and social reforms meant to cobble the world's largest cocoa exporter back together before 2005 elections, but little progress has been made amid traded charges of bad faith.

On Friday, Gbagbo, rebel ministers and members of Ivory Coast's political parties agreed to restart the Gbagbo-led transitional government, scheduling a cabinet meeting for next week.

Gbagbo promised to finally hand greater powers to his prime minister, chosen by consensus with the rebels

last year, and will turn to the crucial question of electoral eligibility by the end of September.

A disarmament process to take weapons from the insurgents and government-allied paramilitary groups will begin by Oct. 15, according to the communique.

A new group will monitor Friday's Accra deal, with staff drawn from a regional bloc headed by Kufuor, the African Union and the United Nations, and send biweekly reports to their organizations.

From its 1960 independence from France until its first coup in 1999, Ivory Coast stood as a relative model of stability and economic advancement in war-driven West Africa.

As nearby Liberia and Sierra Leone return to peace, giving the region its best shot at lasting peace in a decade and a half, fears mounted that a return to all-out war in Ivory Coast would plunge the whole region back into crisis.

South African designers gain notice

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) - Sandals made from cow hide and used tires, paired with delicate cotton pinafores. The silhouette of an African woman peeks through the folds of an earth-toned skirt.

A generation of young Black designers is putting South Africa on the international fashion stage, creating traditional-influenced garments with a sharp urban edge that embody a new and vibrant post-apartheid culture.

"We are now suddenly emerging with a South African identity which never, never happened before," said Dion Chang, program manager for South African Fashion Week, which got underway on Thursday. "We don't quite know where we are headed, and we don't quite know where we are going to end up, but boy are we having fun."

During close to half a century of White minority rule, labels imported from Europe and the United States defined fashion in South Africa.

"It also led to a really bad self image in South Africa, so nothing that was local was really appreciated," said Chang.

With the end of apartheid a decade ago came a surge of patriotism and cultural pride. South Africans - Black and White - began turning up at formal state functions in full African regalia.

But the style didn't appeal to the hip, young, Afro-chic generation that has emerged from the Black townships to take leading political, business and cultural roles.

So the new designers modernized the look, using traditional colors, lines and materials to create wearable basics suitable for city lifestyle. These designers are cutting their cloth in a different way, one that flatters the

more rounded figure of an African woman.

"We use a basic A-line skirt, small at the waist and full at the hips; 80 percent of women are built like that," said Vanya Mangaliso, creative director of Sun Godd'ess, one of the most successful of South Africa's new design houses.

The label, which Mangaliso runs with her husband, Thando, began with a few skirts, which the couple sold out of the trunk of their car.

Four years later, their business employs more than 30 people and produces garments from start to finish at premises in one of Johannesburg's busiest shopping malls.

Their elegant evening gowns, with geometric lines referencing the traditional layering of a Xhosa skirt, have featured at celebrity weddings, local award ceremonies and boutiques from the United States to Japan.

Their design philosophy is about creating a different standard of beauty.

"Women come in all shapes and sizes," Mangaliso said. "Each and every one has a right to claim to be beautiful."

South African materials are already prized overseas, with mohair and beadwork from the country making it onto the catwalks of Donna Karan and Gianni Versace. Now its designers are beginning to find an international market for their creations, too.

Buyers from Britain, Germany, Switzerland and the United States were among those attending this year's Fashion Week.

Craig Native, whose urban street-styled denim is worn by U.S. rocker Lenny Kravitz, presented a collection that deliberately avoids what is stereotypically African. Instead, his

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FAMILY GRIEF

The wives and children of three Kenyans taken hostage in Iraq made an urgent appeal to the kidnappers Friday to show mercy on the truck drivers just hours before a deadline set by the insurgents to behead one of them. The Kenyans were released on Sunday by their captors without harm.

Nigeria resumes polio treatment

TAKAI, Nigeria (AP) - Health workers took a polio vaccination campaign Saturday to villages in Nigeria's mainly Muslim north, ending a ban on inoculations that had caused a regional outbreak and threatened global eradication efforts.

Nigeria's Kano state — where a recent epidemic of the crippling disease started and spread to 10 other African nations, allowed vaccinations to resume Saturday after an 11-month boycott.

The ban was imposed after religious leaders alleged that foreign powers were spreading AIDS and infertility among Muslims with the vaccine.

"Thank God, our children are now being immunized," said Ai Jibrin, a 38-year-old mother of three, in Dausanga village.

"My baby is 6 months old, and we have waited so long for this to happen," she said from behind a black veil that covered her face.

About a dozen health workers, trailed by groups of curious children, went door-to-door along the small, dusty streets of Dausanga, squeezing drops of the vaccine into children's mouths.

Since the boycott began in August 2003, polio has spread from Nigeria across West and Central Africa, infecting polio-free countries and threatening a U.N.-backed drive to eradicate the disease worldwide by next year.

The number of cases in Nigeria has increased five-fold from last year, to 430 since January - nearly 90 percent of the 494 cases world-

wide.

"The suspension of immunization activities in the north led to a steep increase in polio cases," said Gerrit Berger, spokesman for the U.N. Children's Fund in Nigeria.

"Now UNICEF is very confident that polio has no hiding place anymore," he said, describing this new campaign as "the beginning of the very final push to eradicate polio from Nigeria - and the world."

Kano Gov. Ibrahim Shekarau had suspended the polio vaccinations last year, saying he wanted state scientists to investigate allegations by some Muslim groups that the vaccines contained contaminants causing AIDS or infertility.

On Saturday, he reopened the vaccination drive, assuring parents in Takai that the vaccines were harmless.

"I appeal to people to ensure that they participate in this program to stop the death and paralysis of children," Shekarau said during a ceremony before immunizing a

baby boy and girl.

The governor's action, broadcast on state radio and television, was the signal for health workers to move through Kano and seven other states to vaccinate as many children as possible before September, when epidemiologists fear a major Africa-wide epidemic at the start of the polio "high season."

A dozen other African nations will be immunizing later in the year.

Polio is a waterborne disease that usually infects young children, attacking the nervous system and causing paralysis, deformation and sometimes death.

The disease already has appeared in 10 other sub-Saharan African countries, after being limited to only two at the beginning of last year.

U.N. officials say Kano's vaccine boycott threatened a 15-year global campaign to eradicate the potentially crippling disease. U.N. officials have repeatedly assured the vaccine's safety.

U.N. officials admit the

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