

# Ivory Coast Rebels Call for President to Quit

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ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast, Dec. 26 -- Rebels in Ivory Coast said today that only the resignation of President Laurent Gbagbo and new elections would provide a lasting solution to the crisis that has engulfed the once stable West African state.

Ivory Coast's war erupted after a failed Sept. 19 coup attempt and has increasingly fractured the country of 16 million along ethnic lines. Hundreds of people have been killed in fighting, and tens of thousands forced to flee their homes.

The rebels' demands came as France sent more reinforcements to halt rebel advances in the cocoa-growing west. A French ship bringing in heavy equipment and more troops was expected to dock in the main city of Abidjan this weekend.

French troops were initially mandated to observe the truce between the Patriotic Movement of Ivory Coast and the government, but since two rebel factions emerged last month, French soldiers have taken a stand in the key town of Duekoue, halting a rebel advance using heavy weapons.

The rebels said afterward that another clash would be deemed an act of war and trigger an all-out offensive. They issued the same warning on Thursday to a regional peacekeeping force of 1,200 troops due in Ivory Coast by the end of the year.

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