

LOAD-DATE: September 23, 2005

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Agence France Presse -- English

September 30, 2005 Friday 9:31 PM GMT

LENGTH: 350 words

HEADLINE: West African summit on Ivory Coast ends

DATELINE: ABUJA Sept 30

BODY:

West African leaders brought a summit on the crisis in the Ivory Coast to an end Friday but said that they would not immediately make public their decision on how to avert a looming political crisis in the bitterly divided country.

Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo's mandate expires on October 30 and all parties to the country's conflict agree that it will be impossible to hold an election to return or replace him before that date, leaving open the possibility of a dangerous political face-off.

Nine heads of state from neighbouring and nearby west African countries met in Abuja on Friday under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to decide on how to advise the African Union in its efforts to resolve the crisis.

"It was a very important meeting and we know that Ivorians anxiously await the results. I'm sure we're not going to fail them," said Nigeria's Foreign Minister Olu Adeniji as the leaders began to leave ECOWAS headquarters.

"Whatever has been concluded here cannot be publicised here because the recommendations have to be submitted to the African Union's Peace and Security Council on October 6," he said.

ECOWAS executive secretary, Mohammed Ibn Chambas, told an end of summit press conference: "It's not up to ECOWAS to make a decision but up to the African Union to decide based on the recommendations that ECOWAS will submit."

Adeniji would not be drawn on the position taken by the regional leaders, except to confirm that three options had been considered for Ivory Coast post October 30.

He said the present government could stay in place -- as Gbagbo has insisted it will -- or there could "minor changes" to the administration's line-up or finally that it could be replaced with an

entirely new team -- as the rebel forces controlling the north of the country have demanded.

But Adeniji appeared to play down the chances that Gbagbo would be deposed in favour of a transitional government, saying: "That is an option. I think that would be an extreme option."

Ghana's President John Kufuor said: "The situation in Ivory Coast is at a crisis point."