

U.N. Team Finds Three Mass Graves

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ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast – A U.N. team has found three mass graves with nearly 100 bodies from a firefight last month between rebel factions in Ivory Coast, the world body said Monday.

Rebel officials previously said only 22 died during the July 20-21 fight between two rival insurgent leaders.

But U.N. investigators looking into violence at Korhogo, a major city in the west African nation's insurgent-controlled north, found three mass graves holding 99 dead from the battle, a spokesman for the U.N. mission in Ivory Coast, Jean Victor Nkolo, told The Associated Press.

It wasn't possible to determine if the dead were rebel fighters or civilians, Nkolo said.

Ivory Coast's civil war resulted from a failed attempt to oust President Laurent Gbago in September 2002, with rebels taking the north and government forces the south.

A January 2003 peace deal brokered by France largely quelled fighting between the two sides, but the pact has not been fully implemented.

All parties pledged last week to observe the peace deal at a summit in Ghana called by the United Nations and African leaders amid fears that Ivory Coast's crisis could ruin a new peace in the region.

France has more than 4,000 peacekeeping troops in Ivory Coast and a U.N. force is gradually building up to 6,240 troops. Both help patrol buffer zones between north and south.

Ivory Coast, the world's largest cocoa exporter, was considered a regional model of economic advancement and calm between its 1960 independence from France and its first coup in 1999, a violent outbreak that contributed to instability.

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