

Negroponte encourages Ivory Coast peace

by UPI

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast - Deputy U.S. Secretary of State John Negroponte sidestepped questions about whether the United States would do more to promote peace in the Ivory Coast. Negroponte was in Abidjan to meet with President Laurent Gbagbo and Prime Minister Guillaume Soro before heading for Pakistan and talks with President Pervez Musharraf. Negroponte described his talks with Gbagbo and Soro as good and encouraged them to implement the Ouagadougou accord to end fighting with rebels and allow free elections. The country has been cut in two since September 2002, with New Rebels forces controlling the north and Gbagbo the south. Under questioning by reporters on his arrival Sunday, Negroponte sidestepped questions on whether the United States would take a more direct hand in the peace process, indicating the job is best left to the United Nations, and said it is unlikely sanctions against arms imports would be lifted. "I mentioned that there is a strong hope and expectation in my country that the different steps envisaged in the Ouagadougou accord must be carried out as quickly as possible," Negroponte said following his meeting with Gbagbo Monday. "And I expressed the hope that in my next trip to (Ivory Coast), the electoral process will have already been completed."

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