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**STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU,  
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM, AT A MEETING OF THE  
CENTRAL ORGAN (AT AMBASSADORIAL LEVEL) ON THE  
SITUATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO (BRAZZAVILLE)**

**ON MONDAY, 23 JUNE 1997**

*Addis Ababa*

Mr. Chairman,

The situation in Congo (Brazzaville) continues to be of great concern although thanks to the efforts of the International Mediation Committee under the chairmanship of President Bongo as well as the efforts of the National Mediation Committee, there has been some improvement as manifested in the overall de-escalation of the crisis. The Central Organ had discussed the situation in that country in its session of Friday, June 12, 1997 and issued a communique which, inter alia, called for cessation of hostilities and restraint as well as supported the mediation efforts being led by H.E. Al Haj Omar Bongo, President of Gabon.

2. During your meeting of Friday, June 12, you were briefed of the initiative I had taken in communicating with President Bongo and sending a Special Envoy to meet and consult with him. That envoy, Ambassador Mamadou Bah, Director of the Political Department went to Libreville and met with the President. He, together with Ambassador Sahnoun were involved in the discussion and the mediation efforts undertaken by President Bongo and other members of the International Mediation Committee. Shortly, with your consent, Ambassador Bah will be briefing you on the content of the mediation exercise which is aimed at arriving at an agreement on cease-fire and settlement of the present crisis in the Congo.

3. But the central reason why I have requested this meeting of the Central Organ deals with the initiative taken by President Bongo on behalf of the International Mediation Committee requesting the United Nations Security

Council to authorize the speedy deployment of an inter-African Force in Brazzaville. President Bongo in a letter dated 16 June 1997, has addressed separate communications to the Secretary General of the United Nations and the President of the U.N. Security Council. The President has also addressed communications to the Secretary General of the OAU and the Current Chairman of our Organization. The letter addressed to the Current Chairman and the Secretary General were received in the evening of Friday, June 20. Since then, I have been making consultations including a discussion with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Zimbabwe who is currently in New York accompanying President Robert Mugabe for the Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly on Environment. I am also informed that the UN Secretary General has been in touch with the Current Chairman in New York.

4. For the benefit of the members of the Central Organ and with a view to enabling you to take appropriate decision, let me recall the contents of the letters of President Bongo to the UN and the OAU.

5. First, in his letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations, the Head of State of Gabon states as follows:

" For more than ten days now, the Congolese capital has been the theatre of violent fighting between the forces faithful to President Lissouba and those supporting General Sassou Nguesso.

These clashes, which have resulted in thousands of victims, carry the seeds of more serious and dangerous developments. It was in the light

of this situation that the international Mediation Committee, meeting in Libreville on Monday, 16 June 1997, agreed to request the United Nations Security Council to authorize the speedy deployment of an Inter-African Force in Brazzaville.

I would be grateful for your Excellency's support for this initiative aimed at restoring peace and stability in the Congo. I am appending to this letter a formal request to be transmitted urgently to the President of the Security Council by Your Excellency".

6. Second, in President Bongo's letter to the President of the U.N. Security Council, the following is stipulated.

"The International Mediation Committee, meeting in Libreville on Monday, 16 June 1997, to consider the serious situation prevailing in the Congo has reached the following conclusions:

The cease-fire in force since 15 June 1997 is particularly precarious. Consequently, it is of imperative need, if we want to avoid a resumption of fighting with tragic consequences for the people and stability of the country, indeed of the whole region to speedily invoke the relevant provisions of the Charter of the United Nations to deploy an adequate force in Brazzaville.

The aim of that Force should be to have the cease-fire respected and to contribute as far as possible to the promotion of a climate conducive to the sound preparation and smooth proceeding of the Presidential election.

The Committee, which stresses the extreme urgency of the measures has obtained the consent of all the Congolese parties concerned and the assurance that they will cooperate with the Inter-African Force".

7. Third, President Bongo's letter to me as Secretary General of the OAU reads as follows :

" For more than ten days now, the Congolese capital has been the theatre of violent fighting between the forces faithful to President Lissouba and those supporting General Sassou Nguesso.

These clashes, which have resulted in thousands of victims, carry the seeds of more serious and dangerous developments. It was in the light of this situation that the International Mediation Committee, meeting in Libreville on Monday, 16 June 1997, agreed to request the United Nations Security Council to authorize the speedy deployment of an Inter-African Force in Brazzaville.

I am appending to this letter a copy of the letter which I have sent today, to the President of the United Nations Security Council.

I would be grateful to Your Excellency if you could take at your level and that of the Central Organ, the necessary measures to support this initiative and facilitate the establishment of the Force envisaged by the International Mediation Committee.

It will be particularly appreciated for the Central Organ to support the approach made to the Security Council and that urgently contact the Member States to request their contribution of the troops to the said force."

8. Finally, the letter to the Current Chairman of the OAU states as follows:

" For more than ten days now, the Congolese capital has been the theatre of violent fighting between the forces faithful to President Lissouba and those supporting General Sassou Nguesso.

These clashes, which have resulted in thousands of victims, carry the seeds of more serious and dangerous developments. It was in the light of this situation that the International Mediation Committee, meeting in Libreville on Monday, 16 June 1997, agreed to request the United Nations Security Council to authorize the speedy deployment of an Inter-African Force in Brazzaville.

I would be grateful for Your Excellency's support for this initiative aimed at restoring peace and stability in the Congo.

I have also informed the Secretary General of the Continental Organization so that he could take the necessary measures to support the ongoing efforts and to identify the Member States likely to contribute troops to the force. "

9. Members of the Central Organ are aware that as a result of the efforts made by the International Mediation Committee and the National Mediation Committee, there has been a temporary cease-fire. These efforts were very much assisted by Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun who, as the Representative of both the UN and OAU Secretaries General in the Great Lakes Region, has also served as the Representative of our two Organizations in the crisis ably assisted by Ambassador Bah and other officials of the OAU General Secretariat. It would be recalled that both Ambassador Sahnoun and Ambassador Bah had been involved in mediation efforts in the Congo in 1994 as my representatives under the overall guidance of President Bongo. The challenge now is how to consolidate the cease-fire and create conditions for a political solution to the crisis. The purpose of the Inter-African Force when deployed is expected to make a significant contribution to the attainment of these objectives.

10. I should now like to inform members of the Central Organ that on June 20, the UN Secretary General has formally written to the President of the UN Security Council. With respect to the issue of the Force, the main elements of the United Nations Secretary General's letter are:

" The proposed force would aim at assuring the implementation of the cease-fire and contribute as much as possible to the establishment of an environment appropriate for the preparation and good conduct of the Presidential elections in the country. The Committee has also agreed to refer the request to the Central Organ of the Organization of African Unity so that it can consider assisting the operation.

One option for the formation and deployment of such a force is that a group of Member States would decide to establish and contribute to a multi-national force and to seek the Security Council's authorization to do so. The second option would be to deploy a United Nations peacekeeping force, composed mainly of African contingents provided with adequate military capability and with sufficient financial and logistical support to fulfil the challenging tasks entrusted to it. Given the gravity of the crisis and the experience of the international community in dealing with similar situations, it is estimated that the initial size of the force should be not less than battalion group strength, i.e., approximately 1,600 to 1,800 troops, with the necessary support units (400 to 500 men) plus United Nations military observers. A force of that size would have the capacity to secure the airport, it being understood that wider deployment would require greater strength.

Experience has shown that a force of that size and configuration could be fully deployed only with adequate preparation, which would require sufficient time. However, delays in deployment could adversely affect the fragile cease-fire arrangements mediated by the International Committee.

While the States of the region and other Member States concerned continue to discuss the modalities including the composition, structure, command and control and other requirements for such a force, I believe it would be important for the international community to take urgent steps in support of this regional initiative.



In the circumstances, and in order to avoid the creation of a vacuum, I intend, subject to the concurrence and authorization of the Security Council, as well as agreement by the Congolese parties, to request countries with proven military capability to dispatch to Brazzaville an advance military detachment to be entrusted with the establishment of a secure environment for the deployment of the eventual force. Such an advance detachment would operate under command and control arrangements agreed between potential contributors and would also include a limited number of United Nations military observers to provide liaison with the warring parties and to verify the cease-fire. The advance military detachment could consist of troops fielded by regional States as well as by other Member States, especially those who could ensure rapid deployment and adequate logistical support. In view of the positive role played by the French troops in Brazzaville in recent weeks, their support would be highly desirable during this transitional phase. The United Nations would also be ready to provide, on a temporary basis, 40 to 50 military observers who could be drawn from existing United Nations peacekeeping operations to be deployed to Brazzaville on short notice. "

11. I am informed that at a private (informal) meeting of the Security Council held in New York on Saturday, June 21, the Secretary General was authorized for the time being to make preliminary approaches with respect to the deployment of an advanced detachment. The issue of the Inter-African Force and whether it should be a UN Peace Keeping Force or a Multinational Force will, I presume, be a subject of further consultations.

12. I believe that ~~the~~ deployment of a Force to serve as a buffer between the belligerents is of crucial importance and a matter of urgency.

13. Given the specific request of President Bongo and bearing in mind that the Security Council is still consulting on the matter, I believe the Central Organ can make an important contribution by, *inter alia*, taking the following measures:

- (a) Reiterate our appeal for the establishment and maintenance of a cease-fire and calling on the parties to exercise maximum restraint.
- (b) Reaffirm our full support and appreciation for the efforts being made by the International Mediation Committee under the leadership of President Omar Bongo of Gabon.
- (c) Fully support the request by the President of Gabon on behalf of the International Mediation Committee for the Security Council to authorize a rapid deployment of an Inter-African Force in Brazzaville.
- (d) Appeal to all African States especially those with capability to make available contingents which can serve as part of the Inter-African Force.

- (e) Request the UN Security Council to facilitate such a deployment without delay.
- (f) Call on the **parties** to the conflict to cooperate fully with the Force by, *inter alia*, committing themselves to the cease-fire and to a **political solution** to the dispute.

14. Finally, I should like to request your Excellencies to get in touch with your respective governments concerning the appeal for contribution of troops. Those in a position to **do so** should kindly inform me so that I can also get in touch with the U.N. Secretary General on this urgent issue.