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**REPORT OF THE INTERIM CHAIRPERSON ON THE
PROPOSED CONVENING OF AN INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON THE GREAT LAKES REGION**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The idea of convening an international conference on the Great Lakes region dates back to the beginning of the 90s, more specifically following the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. In 1995, the OAU Council of Ministers adopted a resolution requesting the Secretary General of the OAU, in close collaboration with the United Nations Secretary General, to work towards organizing such a conference. Subsequently, the Council of Ministers as well as the Central Organ of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, adopted other resolutions and decisions expressing their support for the holding of the conference.

2. The United Nations also underscored the need to hold an international conference on the Great Lakes. In its Resolution 1078 (1996) of 9 November 1996, the Security Council had invited the United Nations Secretary General, to determine immediately and in close collaboration with the OAU Secretary General, the practical modalities for organizing an international conference on the Great Lakes region, and take the necessary steps to convene the said conference. However, for various reasons, the idea of organizing such a conference did not obtain the required consensus.

3. In 1999, following the outbreak, a year earlier, of the 2nd war in The Congo, the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, appointed a Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region, whose main mission was to garner the opinions of the region's leaders on the proposed international conference.

4. For its part, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolutions 1291 of 24 February and 1304 of 16 June 2000, on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In its resolutions, the Council decided that «the security situation in that country constituted a menace to international peace and security and that there was a need to organize, at the appropriate time, under the auspices of the United Nations Organization and the Organization of African Unity, an International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy and

Development in the Great Lakes Region, in which all the governments of the region and all other parties concerned would participate».

5. There are three fundamental reasons underlining the holding of such a conference. The first is that the conflicts in the countries of the Great Lakes have a regional aspect; the second is that the populations of the Great Lakes region are so closely linked in ethnic, cultural and linguistic terms that the exclusively endogenous instability of each of the countries concerned rapidly spreads, creating and maintaining a dynamic of conflict throughout the whole region; and the third is that solutions to the conflicts and endemic instability of the countries concerned should be sought within a regional framework.

II. EXPLORATORY MISSIONS

6. Pursuant to the resolutions and decisions of the OAU and the United Nations, the two organizations decided to work in close cooperation to organize the conference. Thus, in December 2001, the first joint OAU/UN mission, including Ambassador Berhanu Dinka, then Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for the Great Lakes, and my Special Representative to Burundi, Ambassador Mamadou Bah, visited Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, to garner the opinions of the leaders of these countries on the proposed international conference.

7. In the light of these contacts and positive developments in the Arusha (Burundi) and the Lusaka (DRC) Peace Processes, the UN Secretary General and I, once again dispatched a joint mission to the Great Lakes, from 12 November to 3 December 2002. This mission included Mr. Ibrahima Fall, the new Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for the Great Lakes, and my Special Representative to Burundi, Ambassador Mamadou Bah. The latter was replaced during the mission by Mr. Keli Walubita, Special Envoy to Liberia, appointed on that occasion to represent me in the Great Lakes.

8. The mission visited Uganda, Burundi, DRC, Tanzania and Rwanda. It was unable to consult the Kenyan leaders, since Kenya was then in an electoral period. It should however be noted that Kenya, during the first mission, had agreed to the holding of the conference. The objective of the mission was to consult the leaders of the region on the appropriateness of an International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy, Good Governance, Economic Development and Regional Integration in the Great Lakes Region, and, if necessary, obtain their agreement on the

substance of the conference, the designation of focal points and the establishment of National Preparatory Committees.

9. All the countries gave their agreement in principle for the holding of such a conference, and accepted the themes chosen, namely, peace and security, democracy and good governance, economic development and regional integration. The countries also agreed to begin preparations for the conference, it being understood that the date of the conference should be fixed so as to enable the Arusha and Lusaka Peace Processes to enter into their operational phases, *i.e.* finalization of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue and establishment of a transitional government in DRC, and the conclusion of an all-inclusive ceasefire agreement between the transitional government in Burundi and the rebel forces that are not yet parties to the Arusha Agreement.

10. The countries of the region also accepted the principle of appointing senior executives as focal points, and taking the necessary steps to establish National Preparatory Committees.

11. Some countries of the region insisted on the issues of security at the borders with DRC and the central position of that country for the re-establishment of peace and stability in the region. They suggested that the UN establish a security mechanism at the borders to monitor and observe the «the negative forces», which constitute a constant danger. They also invited the United Nations and the African Union to play a more active and effective role in DRC, particularly in the Eastern part of the country.

12. All the countries agreed that neighbouring States, African regional organizations and development partners should be closely associated, as observers, in the preparation, holding and follow-up on the Conference.

13. After obtaining the consent of the countries of the Great Lakes region for the organization of an international conference, a joint UN/OAU mission visited the neighbouring countries of the Great Lakes, as well as other African countries, from 17 March to 16 April 2003. The joint mission comprised Mr. Ibrahima Fall and my Special Envoy, Mr. Keli Walubita. The mission visited the following countries: South Africa, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria, Gabon and the Republic of Congo.

14. The Central African Republic, initially included in the itinerary, could not be visited due to the coup d'état in that country on 15 March

2003. Moreover, during its stay in Nigeria, the mission was unable to meet the Nigerian authorities owing to the foreign trip of the Nigerian Head of State who, at the time, was in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, attending the First Council of Ministers of the Government for National Reconciliation, together with the Foreign Affairs Minister.

15. The objective of the mission was to brief neighbouring countries on the proposed International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, on the outcome of the mission to the countries most directly concerned and enlist their support for the proposed conference.

16. The countries consulted applauded the mission of the joint UN/AU delegation and gave their full backing to the proposed International Conference, and underlined its importance for the Great Lakes region. They welcomed the ownership of the process by the region and supported the three proposed themes of the Conference.

17. The refugee issue was seen as one of the many indicators of the interconnection between the crises in the Great Lakes region and also with neighbouring countries. Suggestions were made that it should be integrated in a fourth cluster on humanitarian and social issues.

18. All the countries showed enthusiasm at being invited as observers at the proposed Conference, with some countries expressing the wish to play the role of "active" observers. One country went further and requested to be part of the first circle, because it considered itself to be too affected by the regional crises, to be kept out of it. Some countries offered their diplomatic help whenever needed during the preparatory process, and all encouraged the delegation to consult them as often as needed.

19. All the countries supported the idea that the international community and the donors should also play an important observer role in the process, from beginning to end (preparation, holding, implementation).

20. In highlighting the complexity of the Great Lakes situation, they concurred that there was need to look at the root causes of the crises, and approved the proposed International Conference's approach to tackle the issues in a global and comprehensive way. All agreed on the centrality of the DRC in both the crises affecting the Great Lakes region and their resolution, as well as on the strong interlinks between the

crises (political, social, economical, human, ethnic), with each of them affecting the rest of the region.

21. A number of countries concurred with the fact that the existing peace processes should reach a mature stage before holding the International Conference, but agreed that the preparatory process could start immediately.

22. There was consensus on the need to involve regional organizations, such as SADC, COMESA, CEMAC, ECCAS and CEPGL, in the process, while there was also emphasis to involve NEPAD in the economic development and regional integration cluster.

23. It should be pointed out that between these two missions, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in the Great Lakes carried out consultative missions with bilateral and multilateral development partners to brief and sensitise them on the on-going process and obtain their support. The reactions were both positive and encouraging.

III. STRUCTURE OF THE CONFERENCE

24. Firstly, the conference concerns the six countries of the Great Lakes region: Burundi, Kenya, DRC, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania. The conferences at Summit level, as well as the other meetings, shall be held in those countries. Neighbouring and other countries (Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Gabon, The Sudan, Zambia, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Nigeria) will be invited to participate as observers, in the same capacity as non-African countries, as well as African and international organizations.

25. The conference will be organized under the joint auspices of the United Nations and the African Union. In addition to the governments, the conference will be open to non-governmental stakeholders of the countries of the region who should contribute to the formulation of the decisions and recommendations of the conference, as well as their implementation.

26. The international conference will provide a framework and a procedure to deal with factors behind the recurrence of internal conflicts in the States and in the region as a whole on several fronts. It should not be an isolated and unique event, but a continual process endowed with a regional mechanism for monitoring and overseeing the implementation of

its decisions according to modalities to be decided on by the countries of the region.

27. Thus, rather than a single conference, there will be a series of conferences. The First Summit of Heads of State will adopt principles, guidelines and directives, and coordinate the establishment of thematic working groups at ministerial and regional experts level, and adopt any other relevant guidelines. Subsequently, ministerial and experts meetings will discuss at length the themes selected and propose solutions to overcome the different sources of instability in the region.

28. The ministerial meetings should also discuss the establishment of a regional mechanism to follow-up on the decisions of the conference, after the second summit, which will adopt the decisions and recommendations adopted by the meeting of ministers and experts.

29. As earlier stated, the themes of the conference are peace and security, democracy and good governance, economic development and regional integration. Social and humanitarian issues, particularly issues pertaining to refugees, could constitute a fourth theme, as suggested by some countries.

30. At the moment, it is difficult to fix a specific date for the first Summit. However, it is planned to immediately begin the preparatory stage and hold the first summit as soon as the Arusha and Lusaka Agreements have reached a certain level of implementation. The conference would thus be a consolidation of these peace processes, giving them a regional perspective.

31. To ensure peace, security, democracy, good governance, economic development and regional integration, the conference could adopt a series of instruments, within the framework of a stability and solidarity agreement between the countries of the region.

32. As part of preparations for the conference, focal points were designated and a first meeting, followed by a meeting of National Preparatory Committees is scheduled for the end of June.

IV. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

33. The proposed International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy, Good Governance, Economic Development and Regional Integration in the Great Lakes Region is pertinent more than ever before.

The holding of the said conference would consolidate the national peace processes, particularly in Burundi and DRC, and would give a global and all-inclusive dimension to peace, security, and economic development and integration in the region.

34. The partnership between the United Nations, the African Union and the governments of the countries of the region in the planning and organization of this conference would ensure and guarantee its integrity and ownership by the countries of the region. Representatives of the government as well as those of civil society organizations will be involved in the different stages of preparation, holding and implementation process of the conference.

35. In my opinion, it is essential that the proposed conference be underpinned by the relevant declarations and decisions adopted by the OAU/AU in recent years on various issues such as conflict resolution, democracy, good governance, human rights and economic integration and development. In this connection, special attention should be given to the Solemn Declaration on the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA) of July 2000 and subsequent decisions on the CSSDCA Process, including the Memorandum of Understanding adopted by the Inaugural Summit of the African Union in Durban, in July 2002. Indeed, the Conference on the Great Lakes is, in many respects, merely the CSSDCA reduced to a regional scale.

36. I feel that this Executive Council Session should provide an opportunity for the countries concerned to hold consultations and agree on a common approach to guide the actions of the AU and the UN in the preparation of the conference and to enable the region to take ownership of this initiative. On the basis of the position of the countries of the region, Council will provide the necessary guidelines for the Commission to pursue its joint efforts with the UN. To this end, Council may:

- a. Welcome the proposed International Conference on Peace, Security, Democracy, Good Governance, Economic Development and Regional Integration in the Great Lakes Region, and undertake to provide political and diplomatic support for the holding of the said conference;
- b. Express satisfaction at the fact that the countries of the region have unanimously welcomed the proposed international conference and have made their

recommendation to the effect that the preparation process can begin immediately;

- c. Also welcome the political and diplomatic support of neighbouring and other countries of the Great Lakes region for the preparation process and the holding of the conference;
- d. Encourage the Commission to continue its joint efforts with the United Nations and take the necessary steps to this end;
- e. Express satisfaction at the active partnership and fruitful cooperation between the UN and the AU, particularly through the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in the Great Lakes region and the Special Envoy of the Interim Chairperson of the AU Commission, in all the initiatives to prepare the international conference;
- f. Urgently appeal to the international community, particularly the bilateral and multilateral development partners, to provide their support and multiform assistance, to ensure the success of the conference.