



Addis Ababa - Ethiopia - Box 3243 Tel. 517700 Telex 21046 Fax (2511) 513036

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OAU,  
DR. SALIM AHMED SALIM AT THE SEVENTH EXTRAORDINARY  
SESSION OF THE CENTRAL ORGAN OF THE OAU MECHANISM  
FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION

AT THE LEVEL OF THE AMBASSADORS

ADDIS ABABA, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 30, 1993

Status of the OAU Mission of Protection and Observation  
for Confidence Building in Burundi (OMIB/MIPROBU)

Mr. Chairman,

I have requested this extraordinary session of the Central Organ at the Ambassadorial level in order to enable us to review the developments in the Burundi crisis and more especially the OAU's role there. Specifically, I see the purpose of this meeting being twofold. Firstly, to give you a brief on what we have done pursuant to the decision of the Central Organ at Ministerial level and consequently endorsed by the Summit in Cairo. Secondly, to assess together the current situation in Burundi and how best the OAU can be helpful in the context of assisting in the restoration of normalcy in the country through confidence building and full reestablishment of constitutional legality and thereby put an end to the tragedy of violence, blood letting, inter communal antagonism and the resultant devastation in the country.

2. I know that members of the Central Organ are fairly familiar with the tragedy that has unfolded in Burundi in the aftermath of the attempted coup of October 21. I therefore see no need to go through the ghastly details. Suffice it to say that besides the assassination of the elected president, the late Melchior Ndadaye and some of his close collaborators, the human and material devastation throughout the country has affected the entire population in one way or another. It is estimated that more than

100,000 people have been killed through ethnic violence. According to UN aid officials about 800,000 people have been forced to flee the country into Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire. As members are aware, the report submitted to me by the Chairman of the OAU Commission of Fifteen on Refugees, H.E. Bomina N'soni N. Longange, who has recently concluded a visit to the asylum countries of Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire, the total number of Burundi refugees in these countries is about one million. This figure was given to him during his discussion with the Government of the countries as well as by the international aid agencies representatives in the field. But whether the number is 800,000 or 1,000,000, the fact remains that more than 15% of the Burundi population has been forced to flee the country. The fact also remains that there are tens of thousands of displaced persons in the country itself living in fear and with very meager resources. The fact also remains that because of limited assistance being rendered by the international community to the refugees in Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire, there are reports of more than a hundred people mostly children and the most vulnerable groups are dying daily for lack of food or from common diseases. Such is the magnitude of the crisis.

3. It is with this background in mind and with the objective of trying to help that the OAU has with unprecedented determination and speed taken up the challenge of the crisis in that country. In this connection, it will be recalled that on November 19, 1993, the Central Organ meeting at the Foreign Ministers level here in Addis Ababa decided to establish an international mission of Protection and observation for confidence building in Burundi comprising of 200 persons including a civilian component of 20 and a military component of 180. This decision of the Central Organ was based on the request of the Government of Burundi. It also took into account the discussion which I, as Secretary General of the Organization had earlier held with the Government and the Army Command as well as the subsequent consultations and discussions held by my Special Envoy to Burundi, Ambassador Papa Louis Fall.



4. Immediately after the adoption of this decision by the Central Organ, we, in the General Secretariat put in motion the necessary consultations aimed at securing the personnel for the MIPROBU as well as the mobilization for logistic and financial support. As far as the military component is concerned, we approached a number of African countries with specific requests, in order to ensure that we have the necessary man power and in time. Although we needed contingents from a maximum of four countries, we approached altogether seven countries. These are Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Djibouti, Madagascar, Mali and Niger. The Cairo Summit of the Central Organ earlier this month gave me a unique opportunity to raise the matter on a bilateral basis with some of our leaders in Cairo. I was able to get the immediate commitment of President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso and President Mahaman Ousman of Niger, and by December 17 we had concrete commitments of four contingents - from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Cameroon. With the exception of Cameroun, the names of officers and men of all the other contingents have already been communicated to the General Secretariat.

5. Our contacts with potential donors outside the continent have proven very encouraging. So far we have concrete written offers from three Governments. These are Belgium, Germany and the United States. Indeed with respect to Germany, it is more than an offer. They have already deposited in our Account the sum of \$200,000 to cover transportation costs for the military personnel to and from Burundi. The Government of Belgium has pledged substantial assistance. This is both logistical and financial amounting to 1 million United States dollars (divided as follows :

- 25 million BEF for the per diem (i.e. special allowance)
- 10 million BEF for the equipment.)

The equipment includes vehicles and communication equipment which remains Belgian property. According to the Belgian authorities the equipment in question will be delivered in Bujumbura on January 15, 1994.

The Government of the United States has offered to provide two hundred and fifty thousand dollars U.S. (U.S. 250,000) for acquisition of equipment such as vehicles, protective gear etc. which should remain the property of the OAU. The Government of France has also offered to assist in providing transportation for the military contingents. But in view of the German assistance in this field which we have already received, I have requested the Government of France through its Ambassador here to consider other avenues of assistance. I should also mention that the Government of Netherlands through its representative here has verbally informed the General Secretariat that it will contribute 500,000 Dutch Guilders equivalent to US\$ 260,000. The Ambassador of Sweden has also informed the Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs that her Government intends to contribute. There may be other offers. Thus on the whole the response in so far as the mobilization of resources is concerned is, as already stated, very encouraging.

6. The core civilian team of the OAU mission led by my Special Representative arrived in Bujumbura on Friday, December 17 and has begun its operations. I intend to gradually strengthen the civilian component on a need basis.

7. With respect to the military contingents, all plans had been finalized to have the contingents in Bujumbura by December 31, that is, by tomorrow. A Niger plane leased by the OAU was to have transported the contingents from Mali and Burkina Faso on December 29 and the contingents from Niger and Cameroun on December 31. At my request the Government of Tunisia agreed to provide the Commander for the military component. The Commander Lt. Colonel Abdeljelil Ben Yones accompanied by a core of Headquarters staff comprising of a Major, 2 Captains and 1 Sergeant Major would have arrived in Bujumbura prior to the arrival of the contingents.



8. Let me emphasize that we were all ready and the military component would have been in Bujumbura before the beginning of 1994. Indeed it is no exaggeration to state that things have moved very swiftly and here I wish first to place on record my gratitude and appreciation to the contingent contributing countries - Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and Cameroun for their cooperation as well as to Tunisia for providing a Commander. I also wish to thank our partners from outside who have shown interest and support. This notwithstanding, at the eleventh hour, I have to defer these elaborately prepared plans and postpone the deployment of the military components. This was done specifically at the request of the Government of Burundi conveyed by the Minister of Defence at a meeting with my Special Representative on December 23. The Minister urged the delay of the arrival of the Military Contingent until January 12, 1994 at the earliest. The Minister inter alia alluded the following reasons for such a postponement:

- the present internal security situation in the country is not conducive to the arrival of the contingent;
- Apart from the political demonstration against the military deployment planned by the opposition groups for December 26, there were some extremists who are planning to impede by all means, including physically blocking the runway of the Bujumbura Airport.

In addition to these reasons, the Minister of Defence also explained that some physical arrangements including accommodation for the personnel, were not ready and hence the request for postponement. I want to emphasize that my decision to postpone the deployment was based on the Government's request.

9. Let me now turn to the events that have unfolded in the last 10 days in the country in relation to the OAU's decision to deploy the military component. On December 20, my Special Representative reported to me that "there is still a firm opposition to the arrival of the military component of the MIPROBU (OMIB) from some

Political Parties which are arguing that the presence of foreign troops in Burundi is anti-constitutional". Members will recall that the opposition to military component from some opposition parties is not an entirely new element. During the session of the Central Organ at the Ministerial level here in Addis Ababa, reference was made to this. Distinguished Ambassadors will also recall that in my report to the Summit Session of the Central Organ in Cairo I did also mention this factor. In this connection, I had reported to our leaders as follows :

" Regarding the establishment of the OAU Mission in Burundi, I wish to stress that both the Government and the Army Command have assured us of their cooperation. I should mention that the opposition groups have told us that they believe that in view of what they consider positive developments in the security situation, they do not think that it is necessary to have military personnel....."

10. It is however quite evident that this opposition has become much more intense and more pronounced with attendant veiled threats against the security of the military personnel.

11. On October 22, a group of opposition parties wrote to the United Nations Secretary General Special Representative in Burundi requesting him to urge the UN Secretary General to intercede with the OAU Secretary General so that the OAU does not send a MIPROBU (military contingent). Meanwhile, preparations went ahead and the anti MIPROBU demonstration took place in Bujumbura in the morning of Sunday, December 26, 1993.

12. The anti-MIPROBU demonstrators - some thousand strong (estimates range from 5,000 to a maximum of 10,000 people) gathered at Independence Square before marching into the streets. They marked a pause when they arrived in the vicinity of "Hotel Source du Nil" where the civilian component of the MIPROBU is staying.



Escorted by gendarmerie forces, a detachment of slogan carriers rallied at the hotel entrance shouting their hostility to the coming of MIPROBU and waving their placards in protest. The themes used by the marchers to adamantly oppose the arrival of the OAU contingents in Bujumbura were the following:

- As the situation in the country is improving MIPROBU's presence is no longer justified.
- MIPROBU exercise is unconstitutional and very costly.
- MIPROBU will be used by the government to trap the national army and to delay the inquiry on the genocide.

The Special Representative of the Secretary General was also chosen as a target of criticism for having recommended MIPROBU.

13. Mention must also be made of the position of the Army and especially the Army Command. In taking the decision on the deployment of MIPROBU military component, the Central Organ was guided by the request of the Government and the assurances of cooperation, albeit not enthusiastic, on the part of the Army Command. It does seem however that the position of Army Command has, to put it mildly, hardened. This is evidenced by the discussion which the Command had with the military officers of the Organization which I had sent to Bujumbura for the purpose of having frank dialogue, discussion and understanding with the Army Command prior to the deployment of the MIPROBU military component.

14. In this meeting between OAU officers and the Army Command, the latter made it very clear that the Army does not see any need for the deployment of the Military component of MIPROBU. The Army Command has inter alia given the following reasons for discouraging the deployment of the OAU military component:

- i. That it has presented its paper on that subject to the

Government to revisit its previous decision to invite the military component of MIPROBU.

- ii. That the timing is not right in the sense that previously the situation truly had demanded the presence of such foreign military/security personnel, but now the security situation is returning to normal and everyone sees no reason for such a presence.
- iii. That the same 10-12 Ministers who up to now felt the need to have tighter physical security are presently protected by Burundi soldiers even when they go outside Bujumbura.
- iv. That the same Ministers are getting already "foreign" physical protection from 20 French military/security personnel. The High Command says that the Ministers are so satisfied with the protection services of these French that they don't think they would be ready to accept replacing them with any other.
- v. That presently the French are training new officers and men to protect the same Ministers. The officers and men are from the army but selected by the Ministers themselves (their relatives, their personal acquaintances and persons they know and have confidence in them). - and not by the High Command of the Army. When these officers and men finish their training, they will directly go to protect these Ministers. What other confidence do these Ministers want, they ask.
- vi. that despite the putsch of October - which the Army is maintaining to have involved just a few junior officers and men, the Army has maintained its loyalty; it has managed peace and security; it has put into arrest some of those who are suspected to have been involved; it had



constituted its Board of Inquiry etc. That all those are positive steps taken by the Army which in addition to that is also ensuring the security of Government leaders even now. The High Command is asking "to restore confidence" - of whose confidence against who?

vii. That while it is true that the political situation was very bad previously following the putsch, however the political situation has evolved very positively to an extent that the National Assembly has started functioning. It has elected a new President of the National Assembly and soon a new State President will be put in place. With this positive political development taking place in the right direction, the High Command is urging the O.A.U. to assist by having the civilian component in Bujumbura to help to achieve this political success - which is very much needed, and not to bring the military component which in their view might impede the process.

viii. that most of the political parties have openly manifested their displeasure at the coming of the military MIPROBU. If the OAU goes ahead with the process as per Government's request - the Army has no objection at all to that but that since it cannot ensure the harmony of the military component vis-a-vis the opposition, it should not be taken responsible for whatever may occur later - just in case."

15. This then is a factual recapitulation of the situation. We have the military component ready to go. We have significant financial and logistical backing. We have postponed action at the request of the Government. But we do also have the hostility of the opposition parties and the less than satisfactory attitude of

the Army Command - indeed its apparent opposition. In the circumstances, where do we go. What is the best course of action in our desire to assist the people of Burundi?

Mr. Chairman,

16. From the outset it was my firm view that the mission could function only if it had the support and or cooperation of the Government and the Army. That is why in drawing out the twin mandate of the mission of helping in collaboration with the Burundi Security forces to provide protection to the members of the Government and of helping in the restoration of confidence, we predicated it on that cooperation. It is also why before reaching agreement on the various aspects of the mission including the size and function of the military component, we took time to consult as broadly as was possible. We were aware of some reservations but which we were initially clearly told, would not be allowed to stand in the way of the emplacement of the full complement of the mission. As I have related to you, we proceeded on this understanding to work out the modalities of the mission.

17. But we are now faced with dramatically changed circumstances. We are faced with open hostility from the political parties and a section of the population. There has been a hardening of the position of the Army which now opposes the deployment of the security component of the mission. In view of the new situation we face, there is need to reflect on how we are to proceed. Is it opportune to send the troops under these circumstances of open hostility? Do we need to review the nature, size, capability and timing of the deployment of the security component or indeed to we need to review the whole mission altogether?



Mr. Chairman,

18. My view is that the OAU can not, even in the face of these difficulties, walk away from Burundi. I still believe that it is possible to sort out the misunderstandings, some real, some deliberately created, about the nature and purpose of the security component and ultimately deploy it soon. I say it is possible because I do not in the least, believe that the Army Command or the political parties, seriously consider one hundred and eighty men armed with simple pistols can pose any threat to the Army of Burundi. But as we continue to consult on this aspect of the mission, we shall, in the days ahead, seek to strengthen the civilian component and broaden its work. I feel it has the central role to play in helping all sections of the Burundi society, bridge the confidence gap and recommence dialogue aimed at ending the present political polarization in the country. In seeking to strengthen the work of the civilian component of the mission, I am too well aware of the enormity of the task at hand. The ethnic-political divide which has engulfed the country poses long term problems for that country unless there is real effort on the part of all segments of the Burundi Society to address it. The OAU civilian team will help, but it too will need cooperation and support if it is to function. My concern at the serious and long term implications of this ethnic-political divide is shared by the countries neighbouring Burundi, which have called upon the Burundi people to seriously reexamine the social fabric and put in place the kind of policies which will ensure that cyclical violence is brought to a definitive end.

Mr. Chairman,

19. Notwithstanding the view of the Army Command and the opposition parties, I still believe that the OAU initiative, including the security element represents the best hope for Burundi. It will help in the restoration of confidence and give

opportunity to every segment of society, including the Army to look inward and willingly see what could be done to bring an end to the present political polarization, and allow the country to begin on the road to national reconciliation and healing. The reality is that confidence has been shattered and no matter the appearance of positive evolution of the situation, strong undercurrents of distrust and fear still exist. And these can not be overcome by our mere wishes for calm and peace but by concrete action, by assuring everyone and by inspiring trust and confidence in everyone.

20. I would like to add that in the meantime, I received communication from the Minister of External Relations and Cooperation of Burundi. This correspondence dated 28 December 1993 was handed to me yesterday by my Special Representative whom I had called to Addis Ababa for consultations. In the correspondence that he addressed to me, the Minister inter alia stated as follows:

"I also would like to express, on behalf of my Government, our deep appreciation for all that you have already done and are still doing to ensure that peace and confidence return to Burundi. Your efforts to hasten the arrival of MIPROBU is in itself an unquestionable illustration of your profound commitment to the cause of democracy in Africa.

The Government of Burundi has unfortunately had to ask you to postpone the date of arrival of MIPROBU. Far from being of its own making, the Government's request for postponement was caused by the level of unpreparedness of the Burundi Army High Command to receive the Military Mission.



At this point in time, in view of the negative attitude adopted by the National Army and by certain political circles with regard to the arrival of MIPROBU, it has now become urgent, more than ever before, to hasten their arrival. Indeed, the diverse manouvers being carried out in various quarters to delay the arrival of MIPROBU might suggest the existence of some "hidden agenda" incompatible with the presence of the OAU Mission.

At the Cabinet Meeting held this Tuesday, 28 December 1993, the Government decided to propose to OAU that MIPROBU be present on the spot by 6 January 1994 at the very latest instead of 12 January as previously suggested. A Technical Commission has just been established to ensure that by the end of this week all arrangements would be made to welcome MIPROBU."

21. In the present circumstances, it would rather be difficult to proceed with the deployment of the military component of MIPROBU as per this new request by the Burundi Government: firstly, because of the reservations and hostility shown towards the arrival of the military component of MIPROBU by the Opposition Parties and the Army; and secondly because the troop contributing countries had already been informed of the postponement of the date of deployment of the military component to the 3rd week of January 1994 on the basis of the initial request made by the Government of Burundi.

22. While the objective of deploying the Military Component should remain, there is indeed need to create more propitious conditions for its deployment and to sort out the current misunderstanding with regard to the nature and purpose of that military component. In this regard, I intend to despatch the Commander of the Military Component of MIPROBU together with some military experts to Burundi to assess the situation and advise accordingly. Before doing so, I will need to be guided by the report that my Special Representative will be submitting to me on his return to Bujumbura. In the meantime, we will have benefitted from the views of this meeting of the Central Organ. Clearly if circumstances allow, we shall endeavour to have MIPROBU earlier than the third week of January.

23. Finally, as my Special Representative, Amb. Papa Louis Fall is present here with us, he would provide any further details required in the course of this meeting.