

**REPORT ON THE
FIRST MEETING OF NATIONAL CO-ORDINATORS
OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR THE
GREAT LAKES REGION**

NAIROBI, 23-24 JUNE 2003

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I Introduction

1 - The 23rd and 24th of June 2003 saw the inauguration of the preparatory process of the International Conference for the Great Lakes region, co-chaired by the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU). The meeting took place in Nairobi and was chaired by Mr. Joab Omino, the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kenya, who addressed the opening session.

2 – The meeting was attended by the National Coordinators of the six core countries of the region: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Also present were the Special Representative and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the UN for Burundi and DRC respectively, the UNDP Resident Representatives or their deputies in each of the core countries of the region, as well as members of the Diplomatic corps in Kenya, UN agencies based in Nairobi and other members of the International Community and the Press.

The list of delegates is attached in annex.

3 - After the opening ceremony, the formal deliberations began under the co-chair of the UN and the AU, with the National Coordinators, the UN and AU Secretariat, the UN Regional Representatives, ECA, as well as the following agencies: UNDP and OCHA. UNIFEM was also invited as a participant, to mainstream gender issues in the process of the Conference.

II Political and Technical Framework of the International Conference in the Light of the Consultations with the Countries of the Region, Neighbouring and Interested States.

4 - The SRSG for the Great Lakes region Ibrahima Fall briefed the participants on the outcome of the consultation tours he undertook jointly with the Special Envoy of the African Union for the Great Lakes region, Mr. Keli Walubita, with the governments of the core countries of the region (November 2002) and with the governments of the neighbouring and interested states of the region (March-April 2003).

5 - In the Great Lakes region tour, all the countries consulted (Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, DRC, Tanzania and Kenya) gave their approval to the proposed International Conference. Many of them insisted that this Conference should have an added value by being focused on specific issues, should be action-oriented and that its outcomes should consolidate sustainable peace, promote concrete political stability and effective economic development and regional integration in the form of a Pact of Stability, Security and Development.

6 - All the core countries:

- Agreed on the principle of Convening the International Conference for the Great Lakes region;
- insisted on its ownership by the region and on the need to host all the meetings within the sub-region;
- agreed on its three themes;
- accepted to appoint a National Co-ordinator for the Conference;
- agreed to put in place inter-ministerial National Preparatory Committees;

- concurred that the preparatory process can be started immediately, but that the Conference itself should take place once the Arusha and Lusaka peace processes have reached a mature stage (i.e. the ICD is completed, the Transitional government in DRC is in place and an all-inclusive cease-fire agreement is reached in Burundi);
- no objections were raised to the participation of non-State actors in the process;
- accepted the concept paper as a working paper that could be used as a basis for discussions;
- invited the International Community, both at bilateral and multi-lateral level to commit itself to the process.

7 - In the consultation tour with the neighbouring and interested states of the Great Lakes region, the governments:

- expressed enthusiasm at being invited to participate in the Conference as observers, with some even wishing to be more than observers;
- highlighted the need to look at the root causes of the crises;
- supported the Conference's global and comprehensive approach to the crises of the region;
- expressed support for the three themes of the Conference and suggested the addition of a fourth one on Social and Humanitarian issues;
- offered their backing to the core countries of the region during the preparatory process of the Conference;
- showed consensus on the need to involve regional organisations, as well as the NEPAD programme;
- underlined the need to thoroughly address the refugee issue.

III Setting up and Modalities of Work of the National Preparatory Committees (NPC)

After thorough discussions the meeting reached the following conclusions;

A National Co-ordinator (NC)

8 - The NC is the contact person between the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region, the African Union Commission and the national authorities on all matters relating to the Conference.

9 - The NC will closely follow and inform the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region and the African Union Commission on any new developments regarding the International Conference at the national level.

10 - The NC will follow-up on the implementation of decisions relating to the preparatory process of the International Conference and liaise with the UN Resident Co-ordinators and the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General in Burundi and DRC on any matters of common interest relating to the International Conference.

11 - Finally, the NC may exercise any function conferred to him/her by the relevant national

authorities and related to the International Conference.

B National Preparatory Committees

- **Structure of the NPC**

12 - The NPC should be appointed by the relevant authorities and will be steered by the National Co-ordinator and supported by a secretariat to be established under the direct supervision of the former. It shall decide on its composition in consultation with the government.

13 - The NPC shall be inter-ministerial in nature. However, countries should expand its structure by including Civil Society and NGOs. They can participate either by organising themselves autonomously, or by their total or partial inclusion in the governmental preparatory process.

14 - The NPC shall take into account the gender and age balance to reflect the diversity of the population.

15 - The main objective of the Committee is to review proposals and assist in articulating national positions and contributions to the International Conference, map out plans and carry out activities for the effective participation of each country in the International Conference.

16 - Its optimal size should take into account three parameters. It should be flexible - freedom shall be given to the countries to decide on the size of the NPC; operational - the size of the NPC shall not constitute an obstacle for its functioning; and relevant to the issues of the Conference. The work of the NPCs should reflect the various approaches of governments, Civil Society and NGOs, experts, and sub-regional organizations.

17 - The UN and AU will examine the possibility of dispatching experts to assist the NPCs.

18 - Most delegations raised the issue of financial assistance to NPCs to help them organise meetings at the national level. While recognising the importance of the issue and the financial constraints that some countries are facing, governments of the region should show their commitment to the International Conference by pledging funds and contributing to financing national NPCs.

- **Stage of Preparation of the Six Core Countries in the Establishment of NPCs**

- **Rwanda**

19 - Rwanda has established its NPC based on the three themes of the Conference. It is committed to enlarging the membership of its NPC in order to take into account the fourth theme on Humanitarian and Social issues. The Rwandan NPC reflects the gender and age balance. It

will also include national NGOs, Parliament, and developmental and regional organizations.

➤ **Burundi**

20 - Burundi has established its NPC, currently composed of eleven representatives from various ministries. Burundi is committed to integrate gender and age balance as far as possible and to integrate representatives of organisations from Civil Society and the private sector in the composition of its NPC, as actors which are not part of the Civil Service.

➤ **Tanzania**

21 - Tanzania has not yet set up its NPC. Regarding the participation of Civil Society and NGOs in the preparatory process the Tanzanian National Co-ordinator highlighted the difficulty of their identification. He furthermore raised the issue of the harmonisation of the methodology of work and the adjustment of the NPCs to the specificity of each country.

➤ **Kenya**

22 - Kenya will soon establish its NPC. The National Co-ordinator indicated that it would have no difficulty in incorporating Civil Society and NGOs into the NPC. He concurred with the view that harmonisation is important. Each country should have the flexibility to shape its own NPC as well as the freedom to discuss issues it deems pertinent to the International Conference.

➤ **Uganda**

23 - The National Co-ordinator emphasised the fact that regional problems require regional solutions. He indicated that a National Preparatory Committee does already exist in Uganda and has different sub-committees. The gender and age balance is taken into account in each and every sub-committee. He also underlined that the National Co-ordinator of the International Conference for the Great Lakes region is working closely with one of the Assistants to the President in charge of the Great Lakes. They have very good working relationship with NGOs and are determining a time frame for holding their preparatory meetings.

➤ **DRC**

24 - The establishment of the NPC will be completed as soon as the transitional government is in place. DRC has nominated a National Co-ordinator, established criteria of membership to the NPC which includes, among other things, competence, multidisciplinary and inclusiveness. DRC would like to benefit from the assistance of AU/UN experts in the formulation of a work plan for its NPC.

IV Discussion and Adoption of a Tentative Programme of Work on the Plan of Action for the Preparatory Process

25 - The rationale of the proposed tentative programme of work is:

- to give a clearer picture of the chronology of events leading to the first summit;
- to identify the different actors involved in the process (National Coordinators, National Preparatory Committees, Civil Society and NGOs, regional experts, sub-regional organizations, women, youth etc.);

- to create a debate on the feasibility of the programme.

26 - The discussion centered around the following points:

- Structure and timetable of the preparatory process
- The role and involvement of Civil Society and NGOs
- Relation between the National Coordinators, National Preparatory Committees, the UN, the AU, sub-regional organisations and the international partners.

A Structure and Timetable of the Preparatory Process

27 - There was an agreement that the draft tentative calendar prepared by the UN was too tight and cumbersome. Various proposals were put forward to readjust the calendar. There was therefore a need to:

- clarify and restructure it and spread it over a longer period to allow for better preparation and mobilization of resources;
- set clearly defined objectives to be reached at each stage of the process;
- simplify it by having two preparatory committee meetings, each time composed of four thematic groups and a plenary;
- allow for the NPC to work at the national level in between the two preparatory committees meetings and bring their input to the process;
- organise consultative meetings with national experts and various national actors.

28 - Some delegates suggested that the NPC would be represented at the meetings by one team leader for each theme, as well as the National Coordination team of two, plus one representative for women and one for youth. Therefore, each government will be represented by a delegation of 8 persons.

29 - Many delegates expressed the need to establish a mechanism for reporting of activities carried out in the country during the preparatory process.

30 - There was consensus that a minimum of a year was needed between the first meeting of National Coordinators (June 2003) and the first Summit of Heads of States.

31 - It was agreed that each of the six capitals of the region would host at least one substantive meeting.

B The Role and Involvement of Civil Society and NGOs

32 - The role of Civil Society and NGOs was deemed essential during the whole process, both in terms of input and participation.

33 - There was an emphasis on the need to clarify the definition of what was meant by “Non-State Actors”, a term that was sometimes used during the meeting. Some delegations privileged more universally accepted terms to define this category of actors: “civil society and NGOs”. The Rwanda delegation objected to the use of the term “Non-State Actors” given its negative connotation in the region because it is used to refer to armed groups as defined in the Agreement for a Cease-Fire in the DRC. In the case of Rwanda, it means ex-FAR and Interahamwe. The

chair clarified that the term “Non-State Actors” was not used during the meeting in the same meaning as in the Lusaka and Arusha Agreements. The chair also clarified that the composition of that category would be determined and finalised by the Representatives of the core countries themselves, as already indicated in paragraph 44 of the concept paper. Following a lengthy debate, it was decided to no longer use the term “Non-State Actors” and replace it with “Civil Society and NGOs”.

C Relations between the National Coordinators/National Preparatory Committees and International Partners

34 - Participants underlined the need to rationalise the relations between the NC/NPC on the one hand and the UN, AU, sub-regional organisations and international partners on the other hand.

V Calendar of the Preparatory Process

35 - It was decided that there was a need to reschedule the programme of the preparatory process as follows:

- August 2003 at the latest: setting up of the NPC;
- September 2003: meeting with regional organisations and development partners;
- Before October 2003: first preparatory committee meeting and meeting with development partners;
- Meeting of women (date to be determined);
- January 2004: second preparatory committee meeting;
- April 2004: third preparatory committee meeting;
- May 2004: first meeting of the Foreign Affairs Ministers;
- June 2004: first summit of Heads of States.

36 - It was suggested to have one comprehensive meeting with regional African organisations in which would participate the UN, the AU and the NCs. The same setting was recommended for consultations with other international partners. There is need for a focused approach towards the Bretton Woods institutions, ADB, EU and USAID, among others.

37 - This list is not exhaustive and remains open.

38- The calendar should take into account the UN General Assembly debate; the AU summit and the elections in Rwanda.

VI Support from the African Union Summit

39 - It was agreed that the African Union should pass a strong resolution in support of the International Conference in the forthcoming Maputo summit of July 2003. The core countries should push for this resolution to be adopted.

VII Meeting Venue

40 - As far as the venue is concerned, Tanzania reiterated its offer to host the first summit; Rwanda offered to host the first meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs; Burundi, Uganda

and DRC offered to host some of the meetings upon confirmation from their respective governments; Kenya expressed its willingness to host the second summit.

VIII Status of the Observers

41 - No final decision was reached and delegations decided to report to their Heads of State for decision. However, the debate took place and the following suggestions were made:

42 - Regarding Zambia, it was proposed that it should be given full membership status alongside the six core countries taking into account its geographical proximity, its involvement in the peace processes of the region and the impact of the crises on that country.

43 - The other neighbouring countries and the bilateral and multilateral development partners were granted observer status and the list remains open. The involvement of development partners from an early stage and through the whole process was deemed necessary.

IX Regional Preparatory Committees

44 - It was tentatively suggested that the meetings of the Regional Preparatory Committees be held over a period of five days. However, the question of the duration remains open.

45 - The first day will be devoted to the opening session, the two following days will be dedicated to discussions on the four themes, the fourth day, thematic groups will report to the plenary and the final day will witness the closing session and the adoption of the report.

X Meetings of Experts

46 - The countries decided to resort to national experts from the region with the possibility of requesting the assistance of experts from outside the region as resource-persons whenever necessary.