



Press Briefing

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PRESS CONFERENCE BY FRANCE ON SECURITY COUNCIL MISSION TO GREAT LAKES REGION

The Security Council mission to the Great Lakes region of Africa was taking place at an important time for that region, Ambassador Jean-Marc de La Sablière of France told correspondents at a Headquarters press conference this morning, as he briefed them on the agenda of that trip, scheduled for 4 to 11 November.

Among other events, he said that elections had recently taken place in Burundi and were expected soon in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. All Security Council members were expected to participate, with a large number of ambassadors among them.

The mission was scheduled to go first to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, arriving on 5 November, where it would meet with the President, Vice-President, the President of the National Assembly, non-governmental organizations and the Independent Electoral Committee.

The Council was heavily engaged in that country, he said, and it would emphasize that elections must be held in accordance with the election programme. For that to happen as planned by 30 June 2006, electoral laws must be adopted without delay and there must be a constitutional referendum in December.

In addition, he continued, the Council would stress that reconstruction and reintegration of ex-combatants must be sped up and resources must be utilized properly. It would also consider the training of police, the security situation in the east, and deployment status of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC). In that context, the Council would reiterate the zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation.

After its visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the mission would arrive on the evening of 7 November in Bujumbura, Burundi, to meet with the President and the leaders of the various parties, Mr. de La Sablière said. With its recent positive developments, Burundi was an example of success, and the United Nations remained committed to continue working alongside its people. Justice and reconciliation and an

evaluation of the post-election situation were among the most important issues for the Council in the country.

Starting on 9 November, the Council would visit Uganda, Rwanda and the United Republic of Tanzania, in that order, meeting with the political leadership of each, he said. In Entebbe, Uganda, the Council would speak with the President about supporting the Council's efforts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, such as the arms embargo. It would also discuss various approaches -- including non-military ones -- to ending the humanitarian crisis in Northern Uganda, considering the amnesty law and the International Criminal Court's interest in combating impunity.

In Rwanda, an important topic would be the situation in the Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including the continuing problem of armed groups there, he said. There had been progress, but cooperation was needed from everyone for the repatriation of respective nationals. At its last stop, it was important for the Council to pay tribute to the efforts of the United Republic of Tanzania in furthering the stability of the region, and confer with its leadership about peace consolidation.

At each stop, Mr. de La Sablière said, the Council would always start with working meetings with the respective special representatives of the Secretary-General. Council members would confer with Ibrahima Fall, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region, about progress in organizing the proposed Conference on the Great Lakes.

Responding to a question about the prospects for that Conference actually occurring, as opposed to it being a utopian vision, Mr. de La Sablière said that some meetings had already taken place, with the participation of non-governmental organizations. The Council strongly supported the process because it was important that all efforts fit together in a regional context. Good neighbourly relations were essential in security, politics and the economy, particularly because of external interference in certain countries, as well as problems within one country spilling over into another.

Correspondents then asked questions about the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. Asked whether the Council would take a more general focus on Syria, he said that Security Council resolution 1559 was focused on the situation in Lebanon and the truth about the assassination of its former Prime Minister. The Council would continue to follow up on Syrian cooperation in that context.

Asked what the Council could do to avert war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, he said it must strongly express the need for the exercise of restraint, for the end of the

flight ban on United Nations aircraft and for progress on the Boundary Commission. The matter would be discussed this afternoon.

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