

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Brussels, 17 February 1997

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Presidency Declaration on Zaire on behalf of the European Union

1. The European Union is greatly concerned at the military build-up in the east of Zaire, which may well aggravate the political problems and widen the humanitarian crisis in the region. The European Union strongly condemns all interference in the conflict and calls for the withdrawal of all outside and mercenary forces. In this connection, the European Union insists on full compliance with the standards and principles of international law, in particular the spirit and the letter of the Lomé Convention, and especially Article 2 thereof.
2. The European Union calls on the parties to the conflict to negotiate a cease-fire without delay and to facilitate access to the region for humanitarian organizations so that they can assist those in distress. The European Union fully supports the current mediation efforts of the African leaders.
3. The European Union calls on all parties to seek a political solution to the problems of Zaire and of the region, on the basis of the following five principles:
 - (a) respect for the territorial integrity, inviolability and security of the frontiers of Zaire and of the other countries in the region;
 - (b) respect for the rights of citizens in accordance with internationally recognized principles and the relevant international legislation;
 - (c) voluntary repatriation of refugees, affording them a genuine opportunity to return home without intimidation or risk to their safety on the journey or at destination, in compliance with humanitarian law;

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- (d) compliance with the principle of non-aggression between States and restoration of good-neighbourly relations, including effective prevention of all illegal activity by groups in opposition to the Governments of neighbouring countries;
 - (e) the process of democratization of all countries in the region and continuation of the process of transition to democracy and holding of free and fair elections in Zaire.
4. The European Union reaffirms its support for this process in Zaire, illustrated by the appointment of the head of the European Electoral Unit, who will be acting in close cooperation with the special representative whom the Secretary-General has decided to appoint for the elections in Zaire.
 5. The European Union reaffirms its support for the early holding of an international conference on peace, security and stability in the Great Lakes region, under the aegis of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity. The conference should take its cue from the mediation efforts of the organizations and Heads of State in the region. The European Union will continue to lend its full support to these efforts, inter alia through its special envoy. It is also prepared to implement substantial aid for economic and social rehabilitation at regional level as soon as political circumstances and the security situation so permit.
 6. The European Union fully endorses the declaration made by the Chairman of the Security Council on 7 February 1997 and welcomes the appointment of Mr Mahmoud Sahnoun as joint special representative of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity for the Great Lakes region. It advocates close coordination of Mr Sahnoun's efforts with those of other mediators and representatives of regional organizations, including the European Union.
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