

**Statement by Amb. Koonjul on Strengthening cooperation  
between the United Nations system and the Central  
African region in the maintenance of peace and security  
22 October 2002**

Speaking about Africa on one of his trips to the African continent, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw had this to say: "Africa matters. It matters if you want to produce a stable world. You cannot have four continents going forward and one going backwards".

May I extrapolate this quote by saying that all the sub-regions in Africa need to move forward at fairly the same pace for the progress of Africa? Therefore, any plan to strengthen cooperation between the United Nations system and the various regions of Africa is warmly welcomed and needs to be encouraged.

In January this year, the Security Council held a public, meeting with the participation of several ministers from Africa and elsewhere, to discuss the conflict situations in Africa in the presence of Mr. Amara Essy, Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and now Interim Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union. Following that meeting, the Council established the Ad Hoc Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa, which has a clear mandate to address the issue of cooperation between the Security Council and African sub-regional and regional organizations.

Today's meeting is therefore of particular importance, especially given the presence of many foreign ministers of the countries of the Central African region and representatives of the Bretton Woods institutions and of the United Nations Development Programme. We are particularly pleased to see the President of the Economic and Social Council at the Council table. We extend a very warm welcome to all of them.

We would also like to thank you, Sir, for the background note prepared by your delegation. It has been very helpful in preparing for this meeting.

Like other regions, several countries of Central Africa are still confronted with either armed conflicts or other forms of instability that keep claiming human lives and damaging the economic infrastructure. Those countries in the region which are in peace suffer from the indirect effects of the instabilities of their neighbours.

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), established in October 1983, has brought 11 countries of the Central African region together and, although cooperation in defence and security matters within the region has not been systematic, various efforts have been made by the countries of the region to address themselves to the security problems arising from the conflicts in Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, the Central African Republic, Burundi, Angola, as well as the Republic of the Congo.

With the assistance of the United Nations and through the Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, established in 1992, nine countries in Central Africa signed the Non-Aggression Pact in July 1996 in Yaoundé. More recently, in July 1999, the Council for Peace and Security in Central Africa (COPAX) adopted its early-warning mechanism as the basic instrument of preventive diplomacy for the region.

For the exercise of its functions, COPAX has been provided with three tools: first, the early-warning mechanism based in Libreville, which monitors the situation in the sub-region and can take decisive measures to prevent any potential disagreement that might degenerate into open conflicts; secondly, the Defence and Security Commission, which looks after administrative and logistics matters concerning peacekeeping; and the Central African Multinational Force to execute peace security and humanitarian missions.

In May 2002, the OAU - now the African Union - held a regional organizations consultative meeting on cooperation in conflict prevention management and resolution in Addis Ababa. That meeting identified the areas through which sub-regional organizations could be strengthened and their cooperation with the Peace and Security Council of the African Union and the United Nations further enhanced.

We value highly the role played by the United Nations missions in the Central African region in managing and preventing large-scale conflicts. The missions to the Congo, Burundi and Rwanda; the United Nations Peace-Building Support Office in the Central African Republic; and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes Region are contributing enormously to the maintenance of peace and security in the region. There is, however, scope for greater interaction and concertation between the United Nations offices and the sub-regional organizations for greater synergies, which would benefit the region.

Let me highlight some of the areas where greater cooperation may be beneficial. First, with the necessary assistance and expertise, the African Union and the sub-regional organizations, including ECCAS, could work very closely with the United Nations on the basis of comparative advantage in advocacy, preventive actions and peacemaking.

Secondly, the sub-regional institutions, in a given situation could play an important role in advising the United Nations as to whether the situation requires the Organization to play a lead role or that of a simple coordinator. The respective roles of the United Nations and regional organizations could then be clearly defined at the very early stages of an emerging conflict situation.

Third, the COPAX early warning system is yet to be developed and reinforced. There is an urgent need for financial assistance, appropriate training and logistic support in order to make it fully operational. The COPAX early warning system must be in a position to alert ECCAS, the African Union and the United Nations, in that order of priority, at the very early stages of any potential conflict situation. The success of an early warning system also depends on the political will of the leaders, who should be willing to look beyond their immediate national interests in order to forge regional alliances for peace, stability and development. We are pleased to note that the heads of State of the Central African region have signed a mutual assistance pact, committing themselves to help each other against threats of armed aggression.

Fourth, the efforts at organization at the sub-regional level in Africa must be fully supported, so that they can build their own peacekeeping capacities.

Fifth, with appropriate assistance, ECCAS could be equipped to provide relevant information on the proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons in the region in order to combat the illicit trafficking of such weapons, which, as we all know, are creating havoc in that part of the continent.

Sixth, likewise, in the area of illegal exploitation of the natural resources of the various countries in the region, ECCAS can be made to play a prominent role in monitoring the activities of companies and individuals engaged in such criminal activities.

Seventh, with appropriate assistance, it might be possible for ECCAS to develop a regional strategy to combat terrorism.

Eighth, the United Nations and the sub-regional organizations in Central Africa can also cooperate in the area of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration in order to ensure the irreversibility of the peace processes. Such cooperation could help define a regional approach to the problem of former combatants.

Ninth, the problem of internally displaced persons and refugees in Central Africa, as in any other region, could also be comprehensively addressed on a regional basis with the close cooperation and coordination of the relevant United Nations agencies and the respective sub-regional institutions.

Tenth, in post-conflict situations, the United Nations, in particular the Economic and Social Council, and the sub-regional organizations should coordinate their efforts in peace-building, **reconstruction** and rehabilitation activities. With proper planning and understanding, the sub-regional organizations can become the operational arms of the United Nations in the region.

The Central African region has a rich base and a great potential for development. It is unfortunate that seven of the 11 countries that belong to the region are, or have been, embroiled in conflicts. There

are, however, positive signs that the region is able to and wants to move forward. The recent summit, which decided on a multinational force to be deployed in the Central African Republic in order to assist the Government in peace-building and economic reconstruction, as well as the confidence-building measures among the countries of the region, are major steps in this direction. It is our duty and the duty of the United Nations to give its full support to ensure that such activities are fully implemented.