

Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region

December 4, 2003 meeting

Co-Chairs' Report

The Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region held its first meeting on December 4, 2003, at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The 28 national delegations and 10 multilateral institutions approached had responded to Canada's invitation, thereby creating the Group of Friends. Opening the meeting, the Head of the Canadian delegation and Director General of the Africa Bureau at the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ms. Anne-Marie Bourcier, noted the importance of holding the International Conference on the Great Lakes soon as great strides toward peace have been made in the region. The Group of Friends thus created would be an important partner, providing political, diplomatic, technical and financial assistance throughout the initial process of the Conference. This partnership would be based on principles of mutual responsibility and the need for Africans to find African solutions to the region's challenges. She also confirmed that the Netherlands had accepted Canada's invitation to co-chair the Group and to handle the management of financial assistance.

2. In their opening remarks, both Ms. Bourcier and Mr. Norbert Braakhuis, Head of the Dutch delegation and Deputy Director for Africa at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, linked the Conference process and the importance of its ownership by the countries of the region to the new pan-African policies and the international community's support for NEPAD. They also stressed that the presence of all the countries and institutions invited to join the Group clearly demonstrated the international community's interest in the region and its support for the International Conference on the Great Lakes.

3. Ms. Bourcier and Mr. Braakhuis then introduced the two co-chairs of the meeting, Mr. Marc-André Brault, Canada's Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, and Mr. Frédérick Racké, Ambassador at large at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They then give the floor to Mr. Brault. He too stressed the importance of the participation of all delegations and indicated that he will convey this international community's support to the countries of the region. Following the adoption of the agenda, Mr. Brault introduced the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for the Great Lakes Region, H.E. Mr. Ibrahima Fall.

International Conference on the Great Lakes

4. The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), H.E. Mr. Ibrahima Fall, spoke of the Conference's present status. He mentioned the important interconnection among political, economic and social problems of the countries of the Great Lakes region, whence the need for a regional approach to finding solutions. The Conference will focus on four themes: peace and security; democracy and good governance; economic development and regional integration; and social and humanitarian issues. The six countries of the Conference (Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Tanzania) have appointed a national coordinator and set up a national preparatory committee which includes representatives of the concerned ministries and of civil society. The national coordinators met for the first time in June in Nairobi. There they decided on a schedule of preliminary activities leading to a first Summit of Heads of State of the Great Lakes region in June 2004, in Tanzania. At the first Summit, the Conference's countries will adopt general principles. Subsequently, ministerial committees would assume the responsibility for the Summit's decisions and prepare policies, projects and other arrangements to be adopted at a second Summit, which is scheduled for December, 2004. SRSG Fall said that at this second summit the Heads of State will adopt a stability, security and development pact for the Great Lakes.

Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region

December 4, 2003 meeting

Co-Chairs' Report

- 2 -

5. SRSG Fall then explained the three levels of the Conference dynamic. Nationally, there is the establishment and activities of the national preparatory committees which, as they include representatives of the civil society, must also ensure ownership of the Conference by the population. The regional preparatory committee, comprised of the national committees, should meet regularly and will hold a planning meeting on December 19, 2003, which will be followed by three preparatory meetings (PrepCom). The regional dynamic will be complemented by meetings of women's groups, youth groups and African sub-regional organizations, the latter sponsored by the African Union. Meetings for certain other civil society stakeholders are also possible. The SRSG said that it will be important to associate the neighbouring countries in the process - not just geographic but also political neighbours - as well as the sub-regional organizations. In this regard, Angola and the Republic of Congo have clearly indicated their desire to participate as members of the group of Conference countries. As for the international dynamic, SRSG Fall emphasized the creation of the Group of Friends which has observer status at the Conference and whose members will be able to participate actively in Conference discussions. He hoped that the Group of Friends would be able to serve as an advocate for the Conference within international fora.

6. The Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the Honourable Keli Walubita, pointed out that the Union at its second Summit of Heads of State meeting in Maputo, had supported holding the Conference. Furthermore, the creation of the Group of Friends demonstrates the international community's willingness to support the efforts of the countries of the region, an indispensable condition for the success of the Conference. Mr. Walubita also raised certain issues which should be considered by the Conference, notably the root causes of conflicts, determination of nationality in the DRC, and the participation of certain other countries and of civil society. He said that, during consultations with the countries of the region, some had pointed out the central role of the DRC, and indicated that there would be no peace or security in the region until there was stability in that country.

7. During the debate following the two presentations, the participants expressed their pleasure at the creation of the Group of Friends and supported holding the Conference, underlining the importance of regional ownership. Many emphasized that peace and security should be the priority theme of the Conference and that the central group should be expanded to include other countries of the region (particularly Angola and the Republic of Congo). Many also took the opportunity to stress the importance of the international community strengthening its coordination in order to avoid duplication of technical and financial assistance. Some echoed the opening remarks made by the heads of the Canadian and Dutch delegations noting the synergy of the Conference and NEPAD. The European Union's Special Representative for the Great Lakes, Mr. Aldo Ajello, recommended that the Conference's objectives be clear and proportional to the capacities of the region. SRSG Fall confirmed to the participants that the private sector would be fully involved in the process and that the NEPAD Secretariat would be invited to all Conference meetings.

Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region: terms of operation

8. The discussion next turned to the modus operandi of the Group of Friends. Canada's Special Envoy, Mr. Brault, informed the Group that the Netherlands would be responsible for receiving, coordinating and allocating financial resources, while Canada would take responsibility for all other subjects. The Group will be consulted on all key issues, for example, if another country wished to join the Group. Canada and the Netherlands will jointly co-chair the Group until after

.../

Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region

December 4, 2003 meeting

Co-Chairs' Report

- 3 -

the second summit is held, whereupon the Group would have to re-evaluate how to proceed. On the frequency of the Group's meetings, it was finally decided that the Group of Friends will meet formally with delegations from the capitals during the two summits of Heads of State. For their part, the co-chairs will ensure that the Group is well represented at the various other Conference meetings. Finally, it was agreed that Group decisions would be made by consensus as far as possible.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

9. At the working lunch offered by Canada, the EU Special Representative, Mr. Ajello, shared his views on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) following his recent trip there. He said that a number of important areas of the transition were perhaps advancing more slowly than expected, but in the end net progress was being made. The various government's components are generally working in a coordinated fashion and making every effort to respect deadlines. Despite efforts by the international community, however, there are substantial and worrying delays regarding reform of the armed forces, the police and the territorial administration.

Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region: funding mechanism

10. When proceedings resumed, the Dutch co-chair of the meeting, Ambassador Racké, introduced the Head of the Dutch delegation, Mr. Braakhuis, who explained the possible mechanisms of financial assistance. Given the need to mobilize funding quickly in support of the Conference, the Netherlands stressed the importance of harmonizing and coordinating efforts thus ensuring that resources are effective and well utilized. He suggested using the UN Voluntary Fund, or if that is not possible, creating a trust fund. A Board of Trustees composed of members of the Group of Friends invited by the co-chairs would oversee the selected financial mechanism, decide projects to be subsidized and mobilize donors. The Board of Trustees should also define the criteria for project approval and the mechanism's administrative procedures. If the option of the UN Voluntary Fund is selected, it would then be necessary to negotiate an administrative agreement between the Group and the UN, with the latter retaining financial management of the fund. Finally, Mr. Braakhuis indicated that once the mechanism was in place, the international community's financial commitment would have to be ensured. He mentioned the budget estimates submitted by SRSG Fall, to which funding for the National Committees and the regional organizations would have to be added. He concluded indicating that the Dutch co-chair would strive to coordinate multilateral and bilateral initiatives in order to avoid duplication.

11. In response to questions from several delegations, the co-chairs clarified the following points with respect to funding mechanisms:

- " the donors will pay the management fees associated with the funds operations;
- " funds will be used to cover the approved activities, which will end no later than the second Summit of the Heads of State;
- " the structure established for project approval must permit a quick assessment of projects within a short time (about one week);
- " coordination is very important to avoid any duplication;
- " the co-chairs noted the importance that the Group of Friends attaches to the peace and security dimension of the Conference.

.../

Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region
December 4, 2003 meeting
Co-Chairs' Report

- 4 -

A number of delegations, including Italy, Canada and Switzerland, announced that they would provide financial assistance for the Conference. The participants were pleased with the suggestion by the African Union's Special Envoy that the countries of the Conference themselves contribute financially to the process, even if only in a symbolic manner.

Contribution of multilateral institutions

12. Ambassador Racké then invited the representatives of multilateral institutions and specialized UN agencies to present their programs' contribution to the Conference process. The representatives underlined certain problems, such as that of displaced persons and poverty, which have an impact on the peace and security theme. In conclusion, the African Union's Special Envoy declared the first meeting of the Group of Friends a success, noting the large number of Friends and multilateral organizations in attendance. For his part, SRSG Fall said he was encouraged by the results of this first meeting, which provided proof of the international community's determination to support the Conference.

Formation of Board of Trustees

13. Immediately after this meeting, the Canadian and Dutch co-chairs held a follow-up meeting with certain countries and the Conference secretariat. In addition to SRSG Fall, the African Union's Special Envoy and the two co-chairs, the participants included: Belgium; the European Commission and Union; Japan; the United Kingdom; and South Africa. France and the United States were unable to participate for logistical reasons. The purpose of the meeting was to form the Board of Trustees and to establish the premises for the project funding eligibility criteria.

14. The participants agreed to sit on the Board of Trustees. During the discussion of project eligibility criteria, all agreed that funded projects should aimed at the Conference's successful functioning; be directly related to one of its four themes; and be effective mechanisms for helping the Conference to meet its objectives. However, certain priorities or quotas could be considered in awarding funding. The funding mechanism will have to be effective, expeditious and transparent, and permit equitable distribution of funds among the national committees.

15. It was decided that the co-chairs would as soon as possible meet with the UN in New York, to discuss the financial mechanism modalities and the use of the UN Voluntary Fund as the preferred administrative financial mechanism for the Group of Friends.

.../