



Africa Today

15 October 2002

From our special envoy in Savalou (République Bleue)

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTATIVES FEAR A MAJOR HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN THE TRIBORDER AREA

ICRC and UNHCR delegations visited République Bleue and République Jaune during the last week. At the end of their tour, both participated in a common press conference where they expressed their concern about a potential major crisis to erupt in the tri-border area located at the junction of the border between the three republics (Bleue, Orange and Jaune).

These major IOs are concerned by the facts that the governments of Bleu and Jaune seem to be preparing offensives against the Chawombas separatists group.

These potential military actions that, according to governments' representatives, would not be coordinated, would be intended to restore peace and tranquillity in these areas that are considered to be "tomorrow's Kuwait" thanks to the oil reserves they contain.

Both governments justify any action they could undertake by claiming that Chawomba's attitude towards the foreign oil workers are intended to kick them out of the country and to get possession of the oil riches.

As a consequence of the governmental forces moves, moderate Chawombas could feel threatened and start moving southward towards Orange. Some movements have already started and the first refugees who crossed the border tend to get settled anywhere they feel to be safe without caring about where they are.

For the moment, it can be estimated that only 2 to 3,000 people are on the move but the figures could increase dramatically if the military offensives were to commence. The humanitarian situation could become very critical in the next few weeks or months.