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## **Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Tri-borders area**

(excerpts)

In response to a request from the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS), members of the Security Council expressed their alarm at the serious deterioration in the political, military and humanitarian situation in the Tri-borders area (i.e. the region where the borders of the Republic of Blue, the Orange Republic and the Republic of Yellow join together). In the resolution 4802 (2003) of 28 August 2003, they requested the Secretary-General to send an assessment team in the region and to submit a report on the situation.

The present report is submitted pursuant to that request.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The intensification of separatist activities by a political group called the Parti Indépendantiste Vert (hereinafter the "PIVERT") has caused serious deterioration to the overall situation in the Tri-borders area

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### **DESCRIPTION**

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The Tri-border area is constituted by the province of Abomey in the Blue Republic, and the Province of Za-Tanta (Hizan Kogede) in the Republic of Yellow where a majority of the

population, all belonging to the Chawomba ethnic groups, demand their independence from the republics of Blue and Yellow. In addition, members of some villages belonging to the Orange Republic and located in the immediate vicinity of the two above mentioned provinces claim that their ethnic origin should entitle them to be attached to a “to-be-created” autonomous Green country.

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### BACKGROUND

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In both republics of Blue and Yellow, the uncoordinated attitude of the governments towards the Chawombas had always been a bit condescending. When oil was discovered and exploited, things changed. The Chawombas who had felt that oil could bring them richness were expecting a lot from the central governments. They were disappointed when they understood that their condition was not to change rapidly. A small group of autonomists took advantage of the situation and created the Parti Indépendantiste Vert (hereinafter the “PIVERT”) whose main claim was “autonomy now for all Chawombas and foreigners out of our country”; by “foreigners” they understood at the same time the oil experts who had not brought to them the wealth that they were expecting, and the non-Chawombas whom they accused of having exploited them for centuries.

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### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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Blue and Yellow government regard the PIVERT claim as a rebellion against government central authority. Both of the countries have recently decided to stop what is called “insurrection” in the Republic of Blue and “Rebellion” in the Yellow one. Armed operations have been conducted in an uncoordinated manner on both sides of the border.

During these operations it appeared that the Chawombas were not the only ones to fight. Several groups of retired soldiers have been spotted when participating to armed activities.

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Although human rights are commonly well respected by most of the regular armed forces involved in the crisis, it appears that there could be some lack of discernment when force has to be applied. An unconfirmed report stated that in the early day of July, a platoon belonging to the regular Blue forces could have voluntarily burned houses in a village suspected of hiding “Forces de Liberté”,(herein after FL) members. The Government of the Blue Republic is conducting investigations and has promised to take to court those responsible for such an action, if proven. A PIVERT representative has claimed that Chawombas could become the target of an organised ethnic cleansing by the governmental force.

PIVERT members had until recently conducted rather peaceful demonstration and very few terrorist actions (bombing of official cars...). During the last few months, they started to be more violent. A movement called Forces de Liberté (FL) alleging to be the armed wing of the PIVERT has bragged about having forced non-Chawombas to leave the “Green country”.

FL has also claimed to have recovered stolen Chawombas properties when they attacked and kept for a few days the MADJE oil facilities in Za-Tanta province. The Yellow forces took

back the pumping plant after a few days of skirmishes and the FL fled leaving two dead rebels on the ground. Yellow judges are investigating the case of a woman being raped during the Madje attack by FL members who accused her of serving foreign interests by working as a baby sitter for foreign oil workers.

A Lalo (Northern Orange Province) storage hangar used by an NGO to keep food and tools has been looted by FL on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August 2003. The guard, an Orange national who didn't belong to the Chawomba group, was killed on the spot.

In the small town of Onhoun, 7 km north of Abomey, FL terrorists blew up a pipeline connection which caused great damages to the Blue Republic export capabilities and an important environmental damage to the waters of the wells.

The groups constituted by Former Blue and Yellow armed forces members have been accused of committing crimes and atrocities against unarmed civilians and foreign citizens. Their goal seems to be only to get money or any other valuable good. They do not seem to be motivated by any kind of ideology. Their only goal seems to be getting money or any other valuable by any means.

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### REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS

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The repeated armed operations conducted by FL, regular armed forces and other groups have sufficiently worried the local non-Chawomba populations for pushing them to seek refuge in safer places. The domino effect is such that it can be feared that several thousands of people could be soon on the roads. The most common direction taken by the displaced persons is south. There is already a makeshift encampment that has been discovered in the vicinity of Lalo in Orange Republic. The local authorities evaluate the number of displaced persons and refugees (DPREs) to about 2000. Orange government has warned the NGO representatives that it had not the capabilities to accommodate these DPREs nor to feed them. It can be assessed that water and food are already in short supply; sanitation is inexistent there is no health evaluation available for these DPREs. The humanitarian situation could soon become untenable.

It is assessed that more than 60% of the foreign oil workers have left the Tri-borders area and that 90% of them have sent their families back home.

It has been reported that arms and military equipment could have been smuggled towards the more violent terrorist groups. Although no firm evidence has been presented, it seems that arms and equipment could come from neighbouring countries.

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### PEACE MAKING EFFORTS

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The ECOWAS' President and Secretary intended to hold an international reconciliation conference at ACCRA on 1 August 2003, and efforts were being made to secure the participation of representatives from the Presidents of the Republic of Blue, the Orange

Republic and the Republic of Yellow as well as the presence of a representative of the PIVERT.

Although representatives from the three countries had arrived to ACCRA , PIVERT representative made it be known that the PIVERT would only participate to a meeting if he was officially endorsed as being the "GREEN" country representative, GREEN being the name of the country that the independent's movements of the three countries would like to be created and internationally recognised in the Tri-borders area. Representatives of the Republic of Blue, the Orange Republic and the Republic of Yellow said that they would never accept that condition and the meeting was adjourned

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WORK OF THE NGO

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Several NGOs assessment teams are already in the vicinity of the Tri-borders area. However, since they have been accused by PIVERT representatives to be serving the interests of the Blue and Yellow government, they feel that their life might be threatened and wait for an improvement of the general security before they feel comfortable to send additional workers.

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POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES

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Humanitarian disaster

It is assessed that more than 20 000 DPRES could be on the roads within a few months if no solution can be found to stop the armed confrontations in the Tri-borders area. In addition, the rumours spread by the PIVERT and according to which an ethnic cleansing could be conducted by the regular armed forces against the Chawombas could produce a displacement of moderate Chawombas looking for protection in neighbouring areas or countries.

The humanitarian conditions are so precarious that in addition to the already present malnutrition, epidemics could soon appear.

Economical disaster

The departure of most of the foreign oil workers could endanger severely the regional economy since they are those who run and maintain the oil pumping and pipeline facilities. In addition the Madje oil Research and Development centre was bringing most of the Za Tanta province's resources (taxes and consumers for the local economy)

Disastrous example for other nations

Important minorities can be found in most of the countries neighbouring the three that are involved in the current crisis. Several of these minorities are currently requesting peacefully more autonomy for them and they would like as well to be better represented within the regularly elected governments of their respective country. If nothing is done to settle

peacefully the Tri-border area crisis, it could constitute an example that other minorities could follow in order to achieve their goals.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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The United Nations should firstly condemn firmly all actions against humanitarian laws and incite all parties to settle the crisis. ....

..... In order to incite the three countries involved in the crisis to settle it peacefully through diplomatic channels, and to avoid the constant increase of the local and regional arsenal, a first step should be taken that would impose an embargo on all arms and military equipment importation to the three countries involved in the crisis.

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