



Brussels, 4 June 2003

S0123/03

**Remarks by Javier Solana,
EU High Representative for the CFSP, to the press
on the preparations to deploy a EU military mission
in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**

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"I am about to leave for a 3 days trip to the Balkans. I plan to visit today Pristina, tomorrow Skopje and Belgrade and on Friday Podgorica.

But before departing I would like to brief you on the final preparations in order to deploy a European Union military mission in the DRC.

You will recall that the Secretary General of the UN approached the EU a few weeks ago requesting support for the deployment of an emergency military operation in the DRC, in preparation for a strengthened UN (Monuc) operation.

The ministers of the European Union tasked me to explore the possibilities of responding to Mr Kofi Annan.

Today, I can tell you that we are very close to the moment of taking a formal positive decision. The preparations are very advanced. I just met with the ambassadors of the Political and Security Committee and I am pleased to announce that we have agreed on the Joint Action, which establishes the principle of launching an EU-led military operation.

We will submit immediately a formal proposal for approval of the Joint Action to the Council, tomorrow. The next step is going to be the approval of the military plan and the formal decision to launch the operation. I foresee this to take place next week.

Let me make some remarks of a general nature. The situation in the Ituri region constitutes a threat to the peace process in the Democratic Republic of Congo and to peace and security in the wider Great Lakes region. The EU is particularly concerned by the atrocities perpetrated in that region. That is one of the main reasons of our quick reaction to the request of Kofi Annan.

We are facing a humanitarian crisis. Time is therefore of the essence. The EU-led force is to be deployed very rapidly, as requested by the UN. It will have a limited mandate, both geographically and timewise. Our objective is to help stabilise the situation, pending the reinforcement of the MONUC contingent. The EU force is not going to substitute the MONUC: it will provide a bridging element between two phases of the latter. That's why the operation is set to end by September the 1st.

The key objectives of the EU-led operation that is being prepared will be

- First and foremost to improve the humanitarian situation in Bunia, the capital of Ituri. To contribute to the stabilisation of the security conditions. To ensure the protection of the displaced persons in the refugee camps in Bunia. If the situation so requires, to contribute to the safety of the civilian population, of UN personnel and of humanitarian agencies in the town. To secure the airport.
- The mission intends to assist the UN by providing a short term interim force, until the reinforcements of the MONUC are in place.
- We also want to give an impetus to ongoing EU and UN efforts in support of the overall peace process in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Great Lakes region.

Precisely, on the diplomatic front, I have had today a phone conversation with the President of the D.R. of Congo, Mr Kabila, and the President of Rwanda, Mr Kagame. I expect to speak in the next few hours with President Museveni of Uganda.

To all of them, I have explained the final preparations for launching the military operation. They all have welcomed and supported the EU engagement in response to the UN request. I have urged them to co-operate fully with the United Nations and the EU presence. I have told them that the EU expects all the parties concerned to redouble the efforts to implement the peace agreements for the region.

The EU Special Envoy in the region, Mr Aldo Ajello is currently in the region and is meeting all the leaders on my behalf.

France is going to be the framework nation for this military operation. Several other EU countries are going to contribute, as well as non-EU countries. They all deserve – particularly France – to be thanked for their generosity, and recognition for their efforts.

The European Union is getting ready and prepared to face this important challenge. We do not underestimate the difficulty of the mission. Yet we are determined to succeed in helping the UN overcome the current humanitarian crisis in the Ituri region."
