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URGENT APPEAL TO AFRICAN HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT
BY PIERRE SANÉ, SECRETARY GENERAL OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL.

On behalf of Amnesty International, I am sending an urgent appeal to you as African heads of state and government meeting in Nairobi on 5 November 1996 to seek measures to prevent further massive human rights abuses in the Great Lakes region. The current crisis in the Great Lakes demands that you give priority to action which would end the human rights abuses which have caused the current crisis in eastern Zaire and are continuing throughout the Great Lakes region - not only in Zaire, but also in Burundi and Rwanda.

I am appealing to you to adopt the following measures immediately:

- Stop and prevent the transfer of weapons and ammunition to the armed forces, militia and other armed groups in Zaire, Burundi and Rwanda. The current human rights abuses in Zaire should be seen as a much broader pattern of atrocities carried out by all sides in the conflict along the Zairian border with Rwanda and Burundi. Regional governments have a crucial role to play in preventing the further transfer of weapons which would contribute to an escalation of human rights abuses.
- Recognize that years of human rights violations in Zaire, Burundi and Rwanda and almost total impunity for the perpetrators of these violations are at the root of the current violence racking the Great Lakes region. Make comprehensive proposals to all three countries to put in place a justice system which conforms to international standards of fairness and which ensures that those who violate human rights are promptly brought to justice.
- Make it clear to the leaders of the Zairian security forces and to the Tutsi-led armed group and its supporters in Rwanda and Burundi that anyone responsible for ordering, condoning or encouraging human rights abuses will be brought to justice.
- Remind those in charge of the security forces and of armed opposition groups that they have the responsibility to maintain strict chain-of-command control to ensure that officers and troops under their command do not commit extrajudicial executions or deliberate and arbitrary killings of unarmed civilians. Members of these forces should be reminded that they have the right and duty to refuse to obey orders to participate in such killings.
- Seek immediate measures to protect all vulnerable groups in Zaire affected by the present conflict, including Rwandese and Burundi refugees and the local Zairian population.
- Demand that Zairian authorities and political leaders refrain from making inflammatory statements which are serving to incite members of the Zairian security forces and civilians to carry out violence against members of the Tutsi ethnic group. Similarly,

demand that Rwandese government officials desist from making statements likely to fuel human rights abuses in Zaire.

-Seek independently verifiable guarantees from the Rwandese and Burundi governments that refugees who return to Rwanda and Burundi will not be subjected to human rights violations such as extrajudicial executions, “disappearances”, arbitrary arrest and detention without charge or trial in intolerable conditions.

The opportunity of this meeting should not be missed. Your role is indispensable in preventing further bloodshed in the Great Lakes region.

Yours sincerely,

Pierre Sané
Secretary General