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BENIN: THE FRANCOPHONE SUMMIT AT COTONOU MUST BECOME A FORUM FOR THE PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

For the first time Amnesty International has been invited to observe the work of the Francophone Summit, which this year will be held in Cotonou, Benin, between 2-4 December. Amnesty International's Secretary General Pierre Sané has taken this opportunity to urge the participants to give particular attention to the subject of human rights.

In the past human rights have been far from a priority issue for the Francophone States. The agenda has generally been concerned with other matters.

"We hope that this year," said Pierre Sané, "the Francophone States will adopt specific measures in respect for and defence of human rights on the basis of the Cairo Declaration, which affirmed that respect for human rights and the constitutional State constitute the foundations for the establishment of a lasting peace."

With regard to the Cotonou summit Amnesty International is proposing that action be taken in three specific fields:

- the situation in Rwanda and Burundi
- the international judicial system
- women's rights.

The resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations require that all States co-operate in full with the International Tribunal on Rwanda, in particular by adopting new legislation allowing them to arrest, detain and transfer suspects. To date only six States, none of them Francophone, have agreed to change their legislation to this end, or have stated that such changes are unnecessary.

Nevertheless, the existence of the tribunal does not exclude the Rwandan authorities from bringing to trial those who are suspected of committing atrocities in that country. Tens of thousands of people accused of genocide or other crimes against humanity are being held in inhuman conditions. Hundreds of them have already died.

"These detainees must be brought to trial without delay, or they must be released," said Pierre Sané.

Amnesty International urges the summit to reaffirm the commitment made by the justice ministers, in the Cairo Declaration, to "accelerating the drawing up and implementation of internal legal provisions, making available the personnel and paying the financial contributions that would allow effective operation of the international tribunals on the former Yugoslavia and on Rwanda," and to agree to hand suspects over to these tribunals on request. Moreover, the States should help Rwanda and Burundi to re-establish a judicial system capable of ensuring fair trials without recourse to the death penalty, by offering assistance in the form of human, technical and other resources.

This organization recommends that the Cotonou summit urges the Rwandan authorities to adopt legislation enabling foreign experts to take part in the reconstruction of the judicial system. This procedure is used in several countries. As regards Burundi, the summit could help the commission of inquiry to shed light on the *coup d'Etat* of October 1993 and on the massacres that followed.

Rwanda provides a good example of the urgent need for a permanent international criminal court that is empowered to pass judgement on those who flout international human rights, when the national authorities cannot or will not act. While supporting the two ad hoc tribunals set up in response to the atrocities committed in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, Amnesty International calls upon the Francophone States to demonstrate their willingness to commit themselves to the creation of an international criminal court, as set out in the Cairo Declaration, by taking part next year in the United Nations preparatory committee responsible for drawing up the statutes for this court, and by ensuring that in 1997 the General Assembly of the United Nations will convene a diplomatic conference to adopt a resolution confirming the creation of the court.

During the last few months Amnesty International has been campaigning to focus attention on human rights violations against women and it has made a series of recommendations to all governments. The organization has urged the Francophone States to ratify without reservation -- should they not have already done so -- all international agreements protecting the human rights of women; to take effective steps to prevent rape, sexual cruelty and other forms of torture; to implement all means of protecting the human rights of women in time of armed conflict and to prevent violations being perpetrated against women refugees and asylum seekers.

After the summit the Francophone sections of Amnesty International will make contact with their governments to ensure that the commitments made with respect to the promotion of human rights shall be effectively followed through.

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