



UNITED NATIONS  
SECURITY  
COUNCIL



Distr.  
GENERAL

S/12943  
12 September 1978  
ENGLISH  
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

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NOTE VERBALE DATED 11 SEPTEMBER 1978 FROM THE PERMANENT MISSION OF  
BENIN TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

The Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of Benin presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to communicate to him the text of the press conference given by the Permanent Mission of Benin on 7 September 1978 at Headquarters.

The Secretary-General is requested to issue the full text of the press conference as a document of the Security Council in connexion with the question of armed aggression against the People's Republic of Benin.

Annex

Text of the press conference given on 7 September 1978 by  
the Permanent Mission of Benin to the United Nations

EXPULSION OF BENINESE NATIONALS RESIDENT IN GABON

I. Background

Since the imperialist armed aggression of Sunday, 16 January 1977, and increasingly since the various investigations carried out have irrefutably established the active participation in this aggression of President Bongo, the Head of State of Gabon, the Gabonese régime is thrashing about, so to speak, in convulsions and making wild comments which ill conceal Bongo's guilt in this criminal operation.

1. President Bongo reacted by threatening to retaliate against the Beninese community in Gabon shortly after the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in February 1977 at Lomé.

In Libreville, itself, verbal threats against our country and its nationals are proliferating.

2. July 1977 - Fourteenth OAU Summit at Libreville. The issue of the imperialist armed aggression against our country was not placed on the agenda. Because it firmly upheld the view that Gabon was disqualified to act as host to the Summit, the People's Republic of Benin was not represented at Libreville.

In Libreville itself, and indeed throughout Gabon, the counting of Beninese nationals, in a barely discreet manner, had started. The idea of repatriation had already matured, but the process was not set in motion while the OAU met in Libreville and subsequently while the Head of State of Gabon was the acting Chairman of the Organization of African Unity. Nevertheless in Libreville and Port-Gentil the insults and direct threats were continuously uttered against Beninese nationals, who became the scapegoats of a régime desperately trying to find an explanation for its failures, and especially its crumbling economy. The bank accounts of Beninese nationals were frozen, and restrictions were imposed on the circulation of people and goods.

3. July 1978 - Fifteenth OAU Summit at Khartoum. The issue of the aggression against the People's Republic of Benin was inscribed in the agenda of the fifteenth session. Our great comrade in arms, President Mathieu Kérékou made a statement in the general debate and spoke of subversive manoeuvres of all kinds against progressive States and especially of armed aggressions, the most patent example being that perpetrated against the People of Benin and its Democratic People's Revolution on Sunday, 16 January 1977.

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(a) President Kerekou recalled a few facts. "On Sunday, 16 January 1977, in the early hours of the morning, a pirate aircraft of the DC7 type which had taken off at Franceville, Gabon, landed secretly at Cotonou International Airport, carrying on board a horde of mercenaries recruited and paid by international imperialism and equipped and trained at the military base of Ben Guerir, Morocco." (The full text of the statement is in document S/12817.)

(b) This simple recapitulation of the facts relating to the aggression against our country must have prompted the Libreville authorities to launch the process of repatriating Beninese nationals - a process the details of which had been elaborated ever since the OAU Summit in Libreville in July 1977.

## II. Events

1. In Khartoum President Kerekou made his speech on Wednesday, 19 July 1978, shortly after 7 p.m. While the speech was being delivered, the Head of State of Gabon and the delegation accompanying him tried to create a disturbance in the Conference Hall in order to distract the delegates' attention.

The following day, President Bongo held a press conference at which he stated, inter alia, that he would "review the situation of all Beninese nationals living in Gabon". He sent a telex to this effect to his Prime Minister, Mr. Léon Mebame, before leaving Khartoum on the same day for Libreville via Paris.

2. In Libreville: The Prime Minister of Gabon, speaking over the air on "La Voix de la Rénovation", launched the campaign for the repatriation of Beninese citizens. The "pursuit of the Beninese" was under way, enjoying the complicity of the Gabonese security forces. The scenario of the "Gabonese people's fury" was thus in place, with adequate assistance from the Libreville authorities.

On 21 July 1978, President Bongo, on his return to Libreville, stated inter alia, that: "All Beninese nationals living in Gabon will be repatriated to Benin within the next days, with the exception of the political refugees, whose security is guaranteed by Gabon".

The repatriation announcement made by the Head of State of Gabon prompted acts of vandalism, rape and murder, which began on 19 July 1978, and the sacking of Monbouet and Akebe markets. Then, under the pretence of affording protection, it was decided to place all the Beninese nationals awaiting repatriation in the State Lycée de l'Estuaire. Over 4,000 Beninese citizens (men, women and children) were exposed to bad weather, without food or medical care, penned up like cattle in miserable sanitary conditions.

Meanwhile, inhuman acts of all kinds were perpetrated against Beninese nationals, and they were stripped of all their belongings. Those who tried to resist police brutality and the assault of the thugs of the Libreville authorities, were bludgeoned and beaten to death.

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Blackmail. For more than 10 days, President Bongo invoked the pretext of an alleged unwillingness on the part of the authorities of the People's Republic of Benin to receive their nationals; he did this in order to maintain the latter in inhuman conditions in the concentration camp that the State Lycée de l'Estuaire had become. It must be noted that at the time when President Bongo was making this statement, the People's Republic of Benin had already set up a Permanent National Committee to receive persons deported from Gabon, and President Bongo knew of its existence. The People's Republic of Benin, confronted with this distortion of facts by the Gabonese President, had to give an accurate account of events in a communiqué. ...

Finally, only those Beninese nationals who could afford to buy air tickets were able to return to the People's Republic of Benin. In general, they were taken as far as Cotonou by CAMAIR (Cameroon Airlines) aircraft. The Gabonese authorities refused to use their own means of transport to carry out the operation that they themselves launched, on the grounds that "they were uncertain of the reception that might be accorded to their aircraft at Cotonou." (Cf. the statement made by Mr. Martin Bongo, the Foreign Minister, in the Gabonese daily newspaper L'Union, No. 784, 5 and 6 August 1978.)

Wearying of the long wait spent in anxiety and subjection to provocation, the Beninese nationals rebelled angrily because of the blackmail aimed at compelling some of them, mainly the highly trained personnel, to remain in the Republic of Gabon. There followed a bloody repression by Gabonese security forces. No one will ever know for sure how many were killed in this deadly attack by policemen, in which, according to eye-witnesses, hand-grenades, tear gas and submachine guns were used.

3. Cotonou. The Beninese nationals expelled from Gabon started to arrive in Cotonou on 1 August 1978. On that day, the first CAMAIR aircraft took to Cotonou 76 Beninese nationals, all of whom paid their airfares themselves.

On the same day, 1 August 1978, a ship of the Christian Vieljeu Company, chartered by the Gabonese Government, brought to the Port of Cotonou 473 Beninese people.

(a) Progress of the repatriation operations

CAMAIR. Between 1 and 15 August 1978, CAMAIR organized several flights from Libreville to Cotonou, the deportees paying their own airfares. On 17 August 1978, there were two flights from Port-Gentil to Cotonou.

Air Afrique. A few flights from Libreville. Trip entirely at the expense of the repatriated persons.

UTA. Two flights from Libreville; travel expenses borne by those repatriated.

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Sabena. A single flight from Libreville at the request and at the expense of the Gabonese Government. It was not a special flight but a regular flight diverted to Cotonou.

Liberia. Six (6) special flights Libreville-Cotonou on Wednesday and Thursday, 16 and 17 August 1978, to bring to Cotonou the remaining Beninese residing in Libreville.

Trans-International Airlines. An American chartered aircraft made two flights on Thursday, 17 August 1978, to take to Cotonou Beninese citizens residing in the Gabonese hinterland (Port-Gentil, Franceville, Mouanda, Akeni, Tchibanga, Mayouba, Lambarene, N'Djolle, etc.)

In summary, as of 20 August 1978, a total of 10,000 Beninese nationals who were living in Gabon have come back to the People's Republic of Benin, 260 of whom returned via Lomé and Lagos.

(b) State of health of the deportees

Among the deportees were a large number of injured people, some in a serious condition. There were also cases of miscarriages and premature births.

(c) Miscellaneous information

The Government of the People's Republic of Benin was informed by the Zairean Ambassador in Cotonou that his country was requesting overflight and landing authorization for Air Zaire aircraft chartered by the Gabonese authorities to provide special flights for Beninese nationals repatriated from Gabon.

The Libyan Government donated food-stuffs for the repatriated.

The Algerian Government suggested to the Beninese authorities that it should send relief.

The People's Republic of Benin received goodwill missions dispatched to Cotonou by President Sekou Touré of Guinea and President Gafar el Nimeiry of the Sudan, in his capacity as acting Chairman of OAU.

A Permanent National Committee was set up by the People's Republic of Benin to welcome Beninese citizens repatriated from Gabon.

As the Gabonese authorities had decided and announced over the air that Beninese teachers, physicians, and other highly trained personnel would not be repatriated, the Central Committee of the People's Revolutionary Party of Benin and the Revolutionary Military Government made three appeals, which were reiterated several times by the media, inviting all Beninese nationals to come back home, whatever their qualifications and their occupations in Gabon.

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At the end of the first joint session of the Central Committee of the People's Revolutionary Party of Benin and the Revolutionary Military Government held on 2 August 1978, President Mathieu Kerekou sent a telex message to President Bongo asking him not to exclude from the scope of his decision (to repatriate Beninese citizens living in Gabon) any Beninese national, regardless of his qualifications or his occupation in Gabon.

The Government of the People's Republic of Benin expressed a desire to send to Gabon its Ambassador in Kinshasa to see first-hand the treatment being meted out to the Beninese deportees, but the Gabonese Government categorically rejected its request.

### III. Position of the People's Republic of Benin

The position of Benin with regard to the expulsion of Beninese nationals from Gabon was stated during the three joint sessions of the Central Committee of the People's Revolutionary Party of Benin and the Revolutionary Military Government.

According to the relevant documents, "the Central Committee of the People's Revolutionary Party of Benin and the Revolutionary Military Government are resolved to meet fully their responsibilities". In addition, it was stated that "President Bongo is alone responsible to history for the despicable, criminal, inhuman and anti-African acts of which our compatriots living in Gabon have been the wretched victims."

At the joint session of 11 August 1978, the Central Committee and the Military Government appealed to international opinion to bring about an end to the pressures and the maltreatment to which the traitor Bongo was subjecting our compatriots as they awaited repatriation.

The People's Republic of Benin was therefore not surprised by the return of the sons that helped to construct Gabon. The militants of the People's Revolution of Benin were ready from the beginning to give a fitting and warm welcome to their compatriots. The Permanent National Committee set up for the purpose has taken all necessary measures to welcome the Beninese nationals and has successfully carried out its task.

It must be acknowledged that, although they underwent maltreatment and blackmail of every description, our compatriots have returned home in large numbers to the People's Republic of Benin and are happy to be back in the free African land of Benin.

Ready for the Revolution.

The struggle continues.

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