

Proposed resolution to add troops in Congo

Agreement provides fewer troops than requested, but allows for reevaluation in six months

BY EDITH M. LEDERER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

UNITED NATIONS — France introduced a Security Council resolution Thursday that would increase the U.N. force in Congo by 5,900 troops, less than half the amount requested by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

The draft resolution, backed by the United States and Britain, would reinforce the 10,800-strong U.N.

force in Congo. It would also give peacekeepers a broader mandate to deploy to potentially volatile areas to deter the use of force, seize illegal arms and protect civilians "under imminent threat of physical violence."

U.S. deputy ambassador Stuart Holliday said the sponsors "will be looking toward a vote" on Friday, when the force's current mandate expires.

In a report to the Security Council last month, Annan said the transition to peace in Congo is at "a critical juncture." He called for the U.N. force to be more than doubled to 23,900 troops to support the country's fragile peace process and move toward free elections in 2005.

But the United States, Britain and France — which pay a significant chunk of U.N. peacekeeping costs — decided on a smaller number and to re-evaluate the situation in six months.

The draft resolution would authorize an increase of 5,900 troops,

including 341 international police officers, and call for "the rapid deployment" of additional forces and logistics support to North and South Kivu in volatile eastern Congo.

Four new battalions, totaling about 3,550 troops, are earmarked for the two border provinces. Pakistan's U.N. Ambassador Munir Akram said his country, which already has a large contingent in Congo, would be providing two of the new battalions.

A June uprising in South Kivu launched the most serious military threat to Congo's transitional government since the end of the

country's devastating 1998-2002 war that claimed more than 3 million lives and involved six African nations. The clashes displaced thousands and heightened tensions with Congo's neighbor and wartime enemy, Rwanda.

A new divisional headquarters in Kisangani, a northeastern city on the banks of the Congo River, is expected to be established much closer to the fighting than the capital, Kinshasa. Diplomats said the idea would be to keep a rapid reaction force at the divisional base that could deploy quickly.

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