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REPORT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE  
EVENTS OF JANUARY 16, 1977 IN COTONOU, REPUBLIC OF BENIN



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MICROFICHE

In response to the invitation of President Mathieu Kerekou of the Republic of Benin to the General Secretariat of the OAU to send a mission to Benin to investigate the atrocities perpetrated by the mercenaries who invaded Cotonou on January 16, 1977, the Administrative Secretary-General sent his assistant in charge of Political Affairs, Dr. Peter U. ONU to Benin. Dr. ONU was in Benin from 15th to 20th February, 1977 and the report which follows contains his observations concerning the incident of January 16, 1977.

2. The report deals first with interviews with Benin citizens who were on duty on the fateful day when the invasion occurred and with the questioning of Europeans who were victims of the said mercenary aggression. Second, it deals with observations regarding the targets which were attacked by the mercenaries. Third, it deals with the interview which the Assistant Secretary-General had with the only mercenary captured during the invasion. Apart from the oral testimony which the mercenary gave concerning his role in the affair, a written statement in his own handwriting is attached as Annex I (the original copy of his written statement is available in the Secretariat).

3. On arrival in Benin on 16th February, 1977, I was met by the Minister of Education Captain Vincent Gezudje, the Minister of Labour, Captain Adolph Biaou and a member of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Party, Mr. Montero Armand. All of them constituted a committee which was charged with the responsibility of taking me to wherever or whoever I thought would be useful for my investigation.

4. I started my investigation with a visit to the Cotonou airport. There I saw four officials who reported that they were taken hostages by the mercenaries during the operation. They were Samari Abou, a member of the Benin Gendarme, and three

civilian workers at the airport namely, Badou Emile, Atti Dehou Francois and Laleye Leonard. The fourth civilian hostage, Gbeji Simon was absent as he was on leave at the time of my visit. They all reported that in the early hours of the morning at about 7 a.m. of 16th January, 1977 they saw a DC-7 at the airport of Cotonou. The passengers to disembark from the aircraft according to them were blackmen followed by whites. Soon after they had been taken hostages they were asked by the mercenaries to off load the arms in the aircraft. They were quoted as saying: "you used to say EHUZU, meaning "Revolution". Today we are going to see if it is EHUZU".

5. Mr. Eugene ACCROMBESSI, the officer in charge of the control tower confirmed the testimony of the hostages when he said that at the time he reported for duty early in the morning of 16th January 1977, he saw a DC-7 landing at the airport. The only aircraft expected on that day was a DC-10 (UT 801) aircraft which used to arrive in Cotonou at 6 a.m. but as the time table had been changed, the plane was not expected to arrive till 11 a.m. It was surprising therefore to see a DC-7 aircraft landing unannounced and without clearance. The transmitting agent at the airport, Mr. Adinsi Pierre who was on duty on that day confirmed the story of the officer in charge of the control tower.

6. As normal, an escort car approached the aircraft to show it where it should park but the pilot of the aircraft chose instead his own parking lot which was a few metres away from the airport terminal.

7. According to the hostages, they saw the mercenaries disembarking from the aircraft by rope and when the first mercenary touched the ground, he fired a shot. At this point, the driver of the escort car who was parked behind the aircraft escaped and drove away to the town to alert the authorities.

8. Meanwhile, according to the same eye-witness report of the hostages, some of the mercenaries climbed to the roof of the airport and started to install their transmitters and heavy weapons. From what they could see the mercenaries who numbered about 100 (80 per cent of whom they considered to be whites) split themselves into four groups. The first group took charge of the installation at the airport and the responsibility for guarding the airport. The others broke into three columns: one took the road to the seacoast which led to the Presidential Palace; the other took the road leading to the Ministry of Interior and Broadcasting house and the third took the road to the town. The next time the hostages who had been all along guarded by two white men and two blacks at the airport saw the mercenaries was about 11.30 a.m. on the same day when they hurried back into the plane with wounded man and took off. The hostages said they recognised one Benin citizen by name Marc Soglo when there was a stampede among the mercenaries to board the aircraft.

9. The most important hostage who narrated his experience to me was Airforce Sergeant-Major FAVI Innocent Jean-Baptiste. Unfortunately I did not meet him when I visited the airport. Since his name was mentioned every now and again by his colleagues, I demanded to see him and he was brought to see me on 20th February 1977 from Ouidah where he was attending the anniversary funeral ceremony of his grandmother. Sergeant-Major FAVI said he was on duty at the Cotonou airport from Saturday 15th through Sunday January 16th 1977. According to him at about 6.30 a.m. on Sunday, 16th January 1977, he saw a plane landing on the runway from the seaside of the runway instead of at the opposite side which was usual. After landing, the aircraft taxied slowly and parked at the civilian aircraft parking area, a few metres from the terminal building. As soon as the aircraft landed, he saw some passengers disembarking by rope



from the plane. The second group which alighted started firing at the military wing of the aircraft. His assistant GANDAHO told him that those firing were white men. When he confirmed what his assistant had observed, he rushed into the office and rang up the Commandant of the military aviation and reported what he had seen and later called the military headquarters to alert the authorities at headquarters. Meanwhile, the airport had been surrounded by some of the men who arrived in the plane. As they searched round the airport, they found him and asked for his name and rank. A white man then asked him what kind of armament they had at the airport and how many combat vehicles were available at the airport. He further asked how many security men were guarding the airport. When he said he did not know, he was threatened by the white man who was dressed in a camouflage military uniform. The white man then asked him to get into a near by jeep and drove him to the plane and as he observed he later drove away in the direction of the town. When he (FA/I) got into the plane, he said he recognised a Beninois among some of the passengers. He identified him as Marc Soglo who was a former Major in the Benin army and in charge of the armoury at that time. He said Major Soglo was involved in the January 1973 coup but escaped from the Natitingou prison later. In the plane, he saw about 15 blacks some of whom he recognised as former Benin gendarmes. Some spoke French, Fon, Dendi or Bariba. They asked him if the President had returned from the Festac in Lagos and told him "So you have changed the name of our country. We heard that people are starving in Benin", "All this will be over soon". They also asked him whether they still had machine guns and commandos in Ouidah. He replied that he did not know. He was then asked to help to off load the arms from the plane along with a gendarme Samari Abou who had then been arrested. They were later joined by four civilian workers at the airport.

10. After some time, he saw some of the men advancing to the town in some vehicles belonging to ASECNA Company, and in private vehicles which they found at the airport. He described the inside of the plane as full of arms and without seats. Two white men in civilian clothes (blue jeans and blue shirts) who spoke only English were supervising the off loading of the military cargo in the plane.

11. Meanwhile at about 8.15 a.m. he saw wounded people being brought back to the plane. He put the number of wounded around 40. At this time, the engine of the aircraft had started running. He then saw about 20 white men who earlier were guarding the airport joining the plane. He and other hostages were asked to join the plane but he told them that their Commanding Officer had instructed the hostages not to move from where they were. Later a white man alighted and wanted to shoot them but some one whom he thought was a Colonel prevented him from doing so. At about 10.03 a.m. he saw the plane taking off again from the wrong side of the runway. The aircraft circled round the airport and over the Presidential Palace and he thought it was going to carry out some bombing but it later disappeared into the clouds.

#### Damages done by the Mercenaries

12. I was told by the Benin authorities about the damages which the mercenaries inflicted upon the people and property in Cotonou. I was taken to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs where I saw many bullet holes in the building and shattered windows. I saw also traces of blood outside the Ministry. At the airport, I saw three small aircrafts in the hangar slightly damaged. There were two DC-3 Nos. 352 and 775 and a small Aero-commando aircraft No. 1110. At the Treasury building close to the airport, I saw shattered windows and bullet holes. I was told that the security guard of the Treasury building, one THOTO Paulin, who had only three months more to his

retirement from his long service was killed by the mercenaries while on duty. The T.V. building had bullet marks and so did the new building of the new Nigerian Embassy and the American Embassy which are situated near the Presidential Palace.

13. By far the worst damage was at the Presidential Palace which apparently came under long range mortar fires. The bedroom of the President, who apparently does not live in the palace, was all in ruins. I saw three missile shells among the rubbles in the room and I was told by military experts that these shells were fired from 81 mm mortars which I saw among the weapons abandoned by the mercenaries.

14. Having seen and heard from Beninois citizens about the mercenary invasion, I asked if any foreigner was victim of the attack. The authorities told me that there were some foreigners who were victims of the aggression. I was taken to 39th apartment building where I interviewed the tenants.

15. In Apt. A7 on the 4th floor, I met a Canadian family who told me that at about 7 a.m. to 7. 30 on 16th January 1977 they saw some armed Black and White soldiers outside the building of their apartment. The white men according to them spoke French with Paris accent. They were looking at their maps and enquiring where the Ministry of Interior and Security and the Broadcasting house were. On their way they started firing, sometimes on targets and later at random. One of the shots wounded one Lucs Belisle the son of Mrs. Morisette Madeleine Belisle. Lucs Belisle was in the sitting room of the apartment when the bullet hit him on his back. His twelve year old sister, Renee Belisle also confirmed that she saw white and black armed men firing shots but she thought it was a military exercise but when she noticed that there were some white men among the soldiers she thought there was something unusual about it. Mr. Belisle who works for the Canadian International Agency arrived in Cotonou in September 1976. I did not meet him at home. I only met his wife and two children. The injured son

Lucs who arrived in Cotonou only December 1976, was flown to Canada for medical treatment. He has since returned and was however improving.

16. The next apartment which I visited was A14 on the 7th floor occupied by a Vietnamese Director working for the UNDP, Mr. LAM BINH THANK. I did not see Mr. Lam as he was reported to have been flown to Canada to be treated for the serious injuries he sustained. I met instead an Italian lady Mrs. Vittilo Romilda who was temporary renting the apartment. She showed me the bullet marks and the broken windows in the apartment.

17. In Apartment 16 on the 8th floor, I met a Canadian lady Lavoie Lise, the wife of Mr. Runner Pierre who works for the ILO. Mr. Runner was absent during my visit but Mrs. Runner showed me the damage caused by the fire from the mercenaries. She said that in the morning when they heard some firing, her husband and herself looked through the window and to their greatest surprise they saw white and black men in uniform. They were most surprised to see the white men in uniform as this was unusual in the Republic of Benin.

18. From the above eye-witness testimony given to me by the Canadian citizens as distinct from the report of Benin hostages, it was clear that the invaders of the Peoples' Republic of Benin comprised largely of white men. This was confirmed in my interview of the only mercenary who was captured during the invasion.

19. The authorities then took me to the mortuary where I saw the dead bodies of one white man and one black man who were described as killed mercenaries. I was told that the white mercenary was killed in front of the Ministry of External Affairs. I saw blood marks on the ground outside the Ministry. The other dead mercenary was killed near the airport, apparently when he was running back to the airport from the city. I was also shown the arms and the equipment which the mercenaries left behind. They were all stored

in a room at the military barracks. I saw among other things a huge Thompson transmitter, many boxes of ammunition, hand grenades of different types, two mortars, sub-machine guns and haversacks two of which had the inscription "Minerva Casablanca". The details of the arms which I checked with the Benin military authorities is attached as Annexes 2 and 6.

20. The Benin authorities told me that in view of the accuracy of the mercenary attack they thought that operations were co-ordinated from apartment 400 and from the airport where they had long range guns. I visited the apartment 400. Although, I saw the windows damaged but I saw no evidence that guns were mounted in the apartment. I saw only bandages and cotton wool soaked with blood. I was told by a guard of the apartment that in the early hours of the morning, he saw an armed white man carrying a small bag. He went upstairs and knocked at many doors but tenants refused to open their doors but on the third floor, he succeeded in getting into the room of one French man, Mr. Bussot, an engineer who works with GTEI. He overpowered the French man and tied him up and bundled him under the bed. He was later found tied up. From the traces of blood I saw on the stairs of the building, I got the impression that the white man was a doctor and wounded mercenaries were given first aid treatment in the apartment. I did not meet the French man who had already left the country after the expiration of his one month contract with GTEI. I was told that after undergoing temporary arrest and interrogation from the Benin army, he left the country.

21. By far the most illuminating part of my investigation was my encounter with the only mercenary captured by the Benin army. Mr. BA Alpha Oumarou, a Guinean citizen who said that he was a member of RRGE (Regroupment of Guineans abroad), described himself as a Peul (fulani). He had joined the organisation in the second half of



November 1976 following President Sekou Toure's alleged denouncement of Peuls, a denouncement which followed the arrest of Mr. Diallo Telli. He said that while he was in Dakar, Senegal one Diallo Boubakar approached him and sensing that he was prepared to fight for the dignity of his Peul tribe told him that he would be sending him on a mission.

22. On 30th December, 1976 he left Dakar together with 13 other Guineans in Royal Air Maroc Boeing 707 which was bound for Casablanca. For this journey, he was given the name DOGWU MOMODOU Mohammed. They arrived in Casablanca at 5.30 p.m. on the same day. When they arrived in Casablanca he was given the name DIAWARA BAKARY. After a drive of about 250 - 300 kilometres they reached a military camp near Marakesh. The military camp was guarded according to him by Moroccan Gendarmes. There they were joined by three Benin nationals.

23. On 2nd January, 1977, they started military training. The names of the instructors who were French were given as Major PARISOT and Sergeant Martin. He said that altogether in one part of the camp 16 cadres (13 Guineans and 3 Beninois) were given intensive military training. Others including some Europeans were trained in another part of the camp. Mr. Alpha in describing the secret military camp in Morocco where he and the European mercenaries trained said that the camp has an airport runway about 4 kilometres long. Vehicles which were used in the camp were marked FAR standing for Force Army Royal at the bottom and on top of which there is a crown and star. He also said that there was a huge portrait of King Hassan II at the camp. On every door in the camp was the inscription in Arabic "Allah hum Malekum Wadain". He said that on their way to the camp from Casablanca he saw a sign post marked 97 km. to Marakesh and was sure that Marakesh was not too far away from the camp. The restaurant which the mercenaries used bore the description "Restaurant d'application" in French and Arabic. Most

of the oranges which they served them had labels "Maroc" on them and the cigarettes bore the mark "Casasport". He said that he saw also two big paintings depicting old Morocco and modern Morocco: One portrait had the photograph of a black woman in white veil and the other a white woman with black veil. There were also two other paintings: one of a flute player and the other of a drummer. The Moroccan Gendarmes who guarded the camp numbered more than 100 wore bands with the inscription in Arabic - DARAKI.

24. On the 14th January, 1977 a meeting was summoned in which one Colonel Maureen addressed them. He introduced one Mr. OUAKOU as the President of Benin Liberation Movement and another Beninois whose name was not given but was introduced as the spokesman of the movement. They inspected the passing out parade. During this meeting one Beninois by name Joseph told them that they had to go on an important mission with the Europeans. At this point, he saw about 70 - 75 Europeans and 5 Benin nationals. Mr. Joseph told them that three more Benin nationals had arrived and that that had been a change of plan and that the mission had to go to Benin. They were told that the Europeans and the blacks had just finished their training. Mr. Ba said that he and other Guineans protested but there was nothing they could do. They were told that arrangements had been made to pay their money into their accounts. In respect of the Guineans, Alpha said they were under the assumption that their money would be paid into the account of their organisation, RGE. The only money he received was 500 Francs for taxi fare in Dakar. They were divided into four groups, Red, Yellow, Black and Blue. He belonged to the Red group which comprised three Europeans, four Beninois (one called Bernard who was the guide) and himself. The leader was one Major GARNIER and their assignment was to occupy the road to Ouidah in Benin.

25. On January 15, 1977 at 2.30 p.m. they took off from the airfield in the camp near Marakesh - all the 70-75 Europeans, 13 Guineans and 13 Beninois - in a DC-7 aircraft with the inscription LZY with green

markings in the tail of the plane. At about 9 p.m. they arrived in Franceville Albert Bongo International Airport in Gabon. At the airport, they disembarked in the night and changed planes. There he noticed that additional arms were loaded in the new plane. He saw a Gabonese soldier walked past. The new plane had no marking. Every passenger was given a brown tablet before boarding the new aircraft and while on board one other tablet believed to be tablets to prevent sleep was given to them. At about 1 a.m. the plane took off from Gabon, and landed in Cotonou around 6.30 a.m. He said there were no seats in the plane and they had to sit on the floor of the plane. In Cotonou, they disembarked by rope and got some Benin hostages to help them off load arms from the plane. He further said that at the time it was announced that there was a change in their assignment. Instead of going to Ouidah they were asked to guard the installations on the roof of the airport. One Colonel, two Benin nationals, a Benin Guide called Scorpion, three whites and four Guineans including himself took charge of the heavy weapons mounted on the roof of the airport. When they arrived in Cotonou, Mr. Ba was given the name Mendoza and his task was to watch the road leading to the coast. At about 10.30 a.m. he discovered that his colleagues on the roof of the airport had deserted the place. When he came down, he saw that the plane had taken off. He then found his way to the seaside where he later gave up himself to the Benin army. Asked if he could identify the two mercenaries killed from their photographs, he identified the white mercenary as Melvis or Levis and the black as Kataria. He said that he could not be too sure about their names for all of them bore false names. It has to be stressed that the prisoner Ba Alpha Oumarou alias DOGWUMOMODOU Mahammed, alias Diawara Bakary, alias Mendoza spoke to me freely. He spoke very good French and some English. I would like to add that during my visit to Benin, a UN delegation in Cotonou conducting its own inquiry into the events of January 16, 1977.



26. After my investigation, I had audience with the President of the Republic, Mathieu Kerekou. He told me that from the information I had received, and from my investigation it was up to the OAU to decide whether the Organisation was a Mafia group determined to subvert independent African states or an Organisation of African Unity dedicated to fostering African Unity. He said that an International Enquiry comprising of Guinea, Nigeria and Benin had just finished its report. He had to study the report and send copies to Heads of State of countries represented on the commission before making the report available to other Heads of State of the OAU.

27. The Administrative Secretary-General in presenting this report would once more, like to underscore the urgency in dealing with the scourge of mercenaries in our continent. A convention on mercenarism is long over due. Yesterday it was Congo (now Zaire), Nigeria, Sudan and Angola. Today, it is Benin. Nobody knows where the mercenaries will strike next. The report also shows that the sovereignty of an independent African state, member of the OAU, had been violated by a band of mercenaries. From the arms captured, it was obvious that big money was available for their purchase. The big question is who were responsible for financing the operation.

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# Report of the Administrative Secretry-General on the Events of January 16, 1977 in Cotonou, Republic of Benin

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