

African envoy begins talks on foreign force presence

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BUJUMBURA, Nov 3 (AFP) - An envoy from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) began a scheduled three-day series of consultations here on Wednesday about the possible deployment of a foreign "protection" force in Burundi.

Envoy Louis Fall of Senegal, accompanied by two Congolese OAU officials, met with government members and church and political party representatives early on Wednesday, before consulting with military leaders later in the afternoon.

He is to meet on Thursday with the human rights league, various civil associations and the diplomatic corps to discuss further the government's request for a foreign protection force, which would help ensure law and order following the failed coup attempt of October 21.

Government spokesman Jean-Marie Ngendahayo said on Wednesday that although top military lead-

ers were willing to allow such a deployment, regional army chiefs had told Prime Minister Sylvie Kinigi that their troops refused any foreign military presence in Burundi.

Despite the differences of opinion that emerged from a meeting between Kinigi and regional military leaders and provincial governors on Tuesday, Ngendahayo said that the two sides had agreed to restore peace, but that "we must now judge by actions."

According to an official at army headquarters, "This meeting broke the ice to a point where things are now going to change very quickly."

Although Kinigi and other ministers have decided to leave the French embassy, where they had taken refuge after the coup which killed President Melchior Ndadaye and four other government members, officials said that the situation remained tense and that the ministers still feared for their lives.

In the meantime, sporadic clashes between ethnic Hutus and Tutsis were continuing, government officials said on Wednesday.

No official casualty estimates are yet available, but the International Committee of the Red Cross has said that between 60,000 and 80,000 peo-

ple have been displaced within Burundi, while the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees has estimated that more than 600,000 refugees have fled to neighbouring Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire.

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