

OAU agrees on conflict-prevention mechanism

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ADDIS ABEBA, 18 fev (AFP)- Foreign ministers in the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) have agreed to set up a conflict-prevention bureau for the continent, OAU Deputy Secretary-General Ahmed Haggag said here Thursday.

Consensus was reached after a dispute among member countries as to whether the OAU should ask for financial help from non-African partners to set up the office or rely on the continent's resources.

But Haggag said the establishment of the bureau, its operating mechanism and its funding "must be the object of further consultation, which will be held among the African ambassadors in Addis Ababa."

He was speaking to a press conference on the fourth day of the 57th ordinary session of the OAU, due to end here on Friday.

OAU Secretary General Salim Ahmed Salim this week said the organisation had set aside 250,000 dollars for the conflict-prevention office, but warned that the sum was endangered by the failure of member states to pay their dues.

Calling the financial state of the OAU "very precarious," Salim said the total amount of unpaid dues was 70 million dollars.

During the session, Algeria, Djibouti, Kenya, Rwanda, the Seychelles and Tunisia came up with a total 3.6 million dollars, while Libya and Uganda each promised 2.5 million by the end of the month.

Ministers raised the option of sanctions against bad payers, including the loss of any priority to have nationals employed by the pan-African body.

Other motions approved during the week included a decision to send a fact-finding mission to Togo, whose military ruler General Gnassingbe Eyadema is at loggerheads with transitional authorities seeking to introduce multi-party democracy.

Ministers also called on the main political players in South Africa to negotiate to set up an interim government and press ahead with elections to a constituent assembly to introduce multi-party democracy as soon as possible.

They decided that the OAU should play a greater role in resolving political crisis in Somalia, where the U.S.-led military Operation Restore Hope to protect relief supplies is due to be replaced by a new U.N. mission by the end of April.

The council called on OAU member states to provide contingents of troops to work alongside the American soldiers and take part in the U.N. operation.

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