

Burundi government calls for 1,000 peacekeeping troops

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BUJUMBURA, Oct 30 (AFP) - Burundi's government asked Saturday for 1,000 foreign troops to be sent here because they remain fearful of the army after a coup attempt that sparked widespread ethnic bloodletting across the country, a senior African diplomat said.

The plea was made to Organization of African Unity secretary general Salim Ahmed Salim, who met Saturday with Burundi ministers holed up in the French embassy following the coup by the army, which is dominated by ethnic Tutsis.

"We came to ask the government what they wanted," said an official travelling with the OAU chief, who left Burundi late Saturday.

Foreign Minister Sylvestre Ntibantunganya said that the government had explained to the OAU "why it is absolutely necessary to send a protection force."

"It's necessary because the gov-

ernment and people no longer have faith in the army," he said.

The force should be a joint OAU-United Nations operation and would ensure the safety of ministers and guard strategic sites such as ministries, broadcasting centres, the airport and communications facilities.

The minister said, however, that because of the "ethnic and historical realities in Burundi" troops from surrounding countries would not be welcome so the OAU would have to search further afield.

Said Rifaat, deputy Egyptian foreign minister and special envoy of President Hosni Mubarak, also attended the closed door meeting.

A regional summit on the crisis in Burundi is to convene on Thursday in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, with leaders from Burundi and the neighbouring states of Rwanda, Tanzania and Zaire due to attend.

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