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**AFP**

## African Union demands 'immediate' halt to Libya attacks

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The African Union's panel on Libya Sunday called for an "immediate stop" to all attacks after the United States, France and Britain launched military action against Moamer Kadhafi's forces.

After a more than four-hour meeting in the Mauritanian capital, the body also asked Libyan authorities to ensure "humanitarian aid to those in need," as well as the "protection of foreigners, including African expatriates living in Libya."

It underscored the need for "necessary political reforms to eliminate the causes of the present crisis" but at the same time called for "restraint" from the international community to avoid "serious humanitarian consequences."

The panel also announced a meeting in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on March 25, along with representatives from the Arab League, the Organisation of Islamic Conference, the European Union and the United Nations to "put in place a mechanism for consultation and concerted action" to resolve the Libyan crisis.

The AU committee on Libya is composed of five African heads of state. But the Nouakchott meeting was only attended by the presidents of Mauritania, Mali and Congo. South Africa and Uganda were represented by ministers.

The committee said it had been unable to get international permission to visit Tripoli on Sunday but did not elaborate.

Libyan generosity and Moamer Kadhafi's role in the creation of the African Union could explain the continental cautious stand, experts said.

The AU was born in the 1999 Sirte Declaration, named after a summit hosted by Kadhafi in his hometown on the Libyan coast.

The declaration said its authors felt inspired by Kadhafi's "vision for a strong and united Africa."

"The AU as an organisation has benefited significantly from Kadhafi's wealth," said Fred Golooba Mutebi of the Institute of Social Research at Kampala's Makerere University.

The pan-African body has taken a firmer stance on three west African crises: most recently Ivory Coast and previously Guinea and Niger.

Handouts aside, Libya has invested billions of dollars in sub-Saharan Africa.

It has interests in more than two dozen African countries, while its petroleum refining and distribution unit Oil Libya has interests in at least as many.

Libyan telecommunications unit LAP Green is present in five countries in the region and expanding rapidly.