



Preventing Violent Conflict in Africa

An EWI Briefing Paper
by Matthew King and Dave Verge
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On November 23 and 24, 2009, the EastWest Institute, in partnership with the African Development Bank, convened a regional meeting in Tunis on preventive action in Africa. The meeting brought together representatives from the defense, diplomacy and development sectors, along with civil society, to identify action-oriented recommendations to strengthen African capacity to prevent violent conflict before it begins.

Participants at the meeting argued that peace, security, and stability in Africa demands a comprehensive approach towards conflict prevention. The African Union and Regional Economic Communities can mobilize more effective actions to prevent violent conflict, but they must be able to deal with:

- The democratic deficit and the gap between the interests of ruling elites and the needs of the people;
- The slow ratification of critical documents like the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and the lack of national implementation of regional and international commitments;
- The financial, human and technological constraints that limit regional organizations' ability to respond in a timely and effective manner; and
- The limited pressure for change on governments and ruling elites from parliamentarians and civil society.

Participants proposed the following steps to overcome these obstacles:

- The African Union and the Regional Economic Communities must encourage the ratification and implementation of instruments and programs that address the underlying causes

of violent conflict and harmonize their activities, building on the 2008 "Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Area of Peace and Security";

- Border demarcation programs should be fully implemented to mitigate the risk of interstate conflicts arising from disputes over the ownership of natural resources;
- Regional Economic Communities should establish Regional Electoral Commissions that provide long-term support to national election processes;
- The Pan-African Parliament and regional parliamentary assemblies must be strengthened in order to enhance parliamentarians' ability to provide oversight and raise awareness;
- Civil society's relationships with the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities must be strengthened through the establishment of new funding mechanisms from the regional bodies for civil society programs in the peace and security field.

The Current State of Affairs

The Organization of African Unity (OAU), Africa's first interstate body, was founded on the concept of sovereignty, the principle of non-interference and a respect for and preservation of territorial integrity. Its successor, the African Union (AU), has stepped well ahead of the OAU in terms of its mandate to prevent and respond to conflict. The AU has moved in principle from non-intervention to non-indiffer-

This briefing paper will feed into a global meeting on preventive action in late 2010. The meeting is aimed at galvanizing a global action plan to prevent violent conflict and help integrate conflict prevention approaches into security and development policy.

To learn more about the global conference, please visit www.ewi.info/globalconference

ence, and now has the right to intervene in member states in the case of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity; to restore peace and security; to help institutionalize respect for human rights, rule of law, and good governance; and to condemn and reject unconstitutional changes of government.

Africa arguably has the most advanced and extensive security architecture in the world. The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), consisting of the Peace Fund, the African Standby Force, the Panel of the Wise and the Continental Early Warning System, addresses conflict prevention, management and resolution, as well as post-conflict reconstruction. It also recognizes that the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) form an important part of the African security architecture and are mandated to adapt continental policies to their regions and to provide states with guidance to implement those policies.

Other instruments are also available to provide for conflict management and to support peace and good governance on the continent. The Constitutive Act of the African Union outlines a set of policies and strategies that contribute to the organization's mandate to maintain peace and security, including the AU Assembly and the Peace and Security Council. Other initiatives, like the African Peer Review Mechanism, have also been established and are slowly being implemented to strengthen democratic governance. Further initiatives, like the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance (also known as the Addis Charter), have been introduced but struggle to gain acceptance. Only three states (Ethiopia, Mauritania, and Rwanda) have ratified the Addis Charter. 15 ratifications are necessary to bring it into force.

Capacity Constraints

Limits to regional organizations' capacities are complex and take many forms, including financial, human resource, structural, and technological concerns. Often, these constraints limit regional actors' ability to adapt to situations of potential conflict. Financial constraints, for example, come not only in the form of limited funds, but also in restrictions on how these funds can be spent, which impedes regional organizations' capacity to respond to emerging and evolving threats to peace and security.

Complicating these capacity concerns is the fact that most monitoring and evaluation efforts undertaken by regional organizations are geared towards financial accountability. Financial accountability is

key function but such a singular focus misses the opportunity to learn from evaluation, advance organizational development and promote regional ownership of the development process. Monitoring and evaluation can help streamline decision-making bureaucracies and increase the ability to respond rapidly and effectively to early warning of conflicts.

Limited capacities and resources for early conflict analysis, prevention planning and response have resulted in a structural emphasis on conflict resolution rather than on conflict prevention; early warning is rarely followed by early action. Further, these limitations have resulted in poor connectivity between peace and security departments and political affairs departments in national, regional and continental bodies, which further hampers effective prevention. The lack of coordination also delays implementation of regional policies and instruments and ensures duplication of some efforts at the regional and AU level. At the AU, for example, there is overlap between the Peace and Security Division and the Political Affairs Division that potentially duplicates efforts and wastes valuable human and financial resources.

The limited capacities and resources for early conflict analysis and prevention planning have resulted in a structural emphasis on conflict resolution rather than on conflict prevention. The limited connectivity between peace and security departments and political affairs departments also hampers effective moves to preventive approaches.

Power and Resources

National elections and democratic processes are too often manipulated, resulting in mistrust and tension between citizens and the state. This problem is difficult to overcome at the national level. Local populations rarely have the resources they need to force free and fair elections and outside pressure is often necessary to convince elites to correct the flawed processes from which they benefit. Regional organizations can exert significant pressure and could play an important role in ensuring free and fair democratic processes and good governance with regard to elections in their member states.

Power is linked directly to resources. Where citizens have little or no power, they see little or no benefit from the natural resources of their country. This exclusion widens the gap between citizens and the state. One way to address this gap is to devise and enforce regional standards on issues such as the use of mineral resources for regional growth and

development. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), for example, issued a Directive on the Harmonization of Guiding Principles and Policies in the Mining Sector that calls for the implementation of a Common Mining Code to address these issues by the end of 2012.

The need for equitable distribution of resource benefits is not limited to extractable resources like coltan, diamonds, and oil. Land and water must also be used more effectively to provide for opportunities such as farming and fishing. Inclusive distribution of the benefits from these natural resources will help to ensure comprehensive and sustainable socio-economic development.

The issue of resource ownership is particularly crucial in border regions, where disputes have the potential to escalate to interstate conflict. The 2002 Memorandum of Understanding at the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa stated that all borders should be clearly delineated by 2012. As of May 2009, only 25% of land borders have been demarcated. Progress is even slower on maritime borders, which may have implications on future offshore exploration for oil.

Another significant aspect of resource governance is the global marketplace. As one participant stated, "Africa is the well, but there are many drawing the water." The African Union simply does not have the capacity to track resources like coltan and diamonds all across the world. End-users in the developed world must also bear some responsibility. This issue is similar to the illegal financial outflows from Africa to private bank accounts in the North. Much more money leaves the continent this way than comes in from diaspora remittances. The impact of these issues on Africa's capacity to provide development for its citizens cannot be underestimated.

Observations and Proposals

The following observations and proposals are aimed at strengthening regional peace and security effort in Africa:

Ratification and implementation of existing documents and programs

1. **The Addis Charter and the African Peer Review Mechanism:** The African Union Commission, where possible in collaboration with the Chair of the Assembly, should undertake a focused campaign of quiet advo-

cacy with states for ratification of the Addis Charter and completion of the African Peer Review Mechanism process to reinforce transparency and accountability as norms on the continent;

2. **Border Demarcation:** The AU and RECs should facilitate the completion of border demarcation programs across the continent to mitigate the risk of inter-state conflict over resources. The international community, through initiatives such as the German African Border Project, should make support of the full implementation of the African Union Border Programme a priority;
3. **Regional Integration:** The AU and RECS should speed up efforts at regional integration by advancing collaboration and coordination efforts through the 2008 Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the Area of Peace and Security. Such regional integration would provide practical support for states to implement decisions taken at the regional levels. It would also enhance coordination between countries' foreign affairs departments, which are often responsible for coordination with regional organizations, and their interior affairs departments, which are often responsible for implementation of regional agreements.;

Development of new initiatives

4. **Governance of Resources:** The AU should develop an African Charter on Resource Governance, to provide for accountability at the continental level, given the strong relationship between poor resource governance and violent conflict;
5. **Electoral Support:** The RECs should establish Regional Electoral Commissions that provide long-term electoral observer missions, offer dispute-settlement mechanisms, and impose sanctions for tampering with democratic processes. Regional electoral commissions would also provide significant costs savings to states and the international community through equipment-sharing and ballot printing programs;
6. **Emergency Assistance Mechanisms:** The AU and RECs should advocate for the direction of emergency assistance and aid activities through regional organizations;

International support

7. **Flexibility of International Aid:** Donors should allocate more unrestricted funds to regional organizations to allow for greater flexibility to respond to rapidly changing priorities and objectives. This would improve capacities for timely and effective responses and also encourage greater regional ownership of different processes;
8. **Oversight Capacity:** The international community should help strengthen the Pan-African Parliament and regional parliamentary assemblies in order to enhance the oversight functions and awareness raising role of parliamentarians; and
9. **Strengthening Civil Society:** The international donor community should support AU/REC-led funding programs for civil society activities in the field of peace and security to build local capacities, ownership of preventive activities and a greater collaboration between RECs and civil society.



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