

Keynote Speech  
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CONFLICTS IN AFRICA AND  
CULTURE OF PEACE AND  
CO-EXISTENCE

SYMPOSIUM ORGANISED BY THE  
JAPAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (JIJA)

1. May I begin by expressing my deep appreciation to Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) for organizing this symposium on "Conflicts In Africa and Culture of Peace and Co-existence".

2. Let me say a big thank you to this world famous Institute for being so magnanimous by bringing to focus the problems faced by our beloved Continent of Africa.

3. I must admit the astounding magnitude and massive destructive tendencies associated with conflicts on the African Continent. This, as you know, has also been of great concern to all African leaders as they have been to the international community. Indeed, currently, Africa holds the unenviable record of having more armed conflicts than any other continent in the world.

4. Your Excellencies, at the turn of the century, Africa, particularly, Africa South of the Sahara, has suddenly found itself confronted with enormous challenges of how to curb its ever increasing conflicts and general state of insecurity. At a time when democratic norms and trappings are gaining roots and strength in the East and Central Europe; when Western Europe is strengthening its European Union, Africa's conflicts, instead of abating are on the increase with their attendant anguish and miseries.

## **OVERVIEW**

5. An examination of the African landscape would only reveal series of conflicts from its various regions. In the West, one would see the Liberian conflict only giving way to the Sierra Leonean crisis and thereafter that of Guinea-Bissau each with its attendant problems and sense of insecurity across the sub-region. In the Great Lake Regions of Central Africa, the long drawn conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi, the security impediments of the Kivu Province and the unfortunate case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) where thousands of fighters from neighbouring States and several insurgent groups are involved also come to focus. In the Eastern sub-region is the Somalian case and the Ethiopian and Eritrean cases to mention just a few. The North and the South are not spared of one form of conflict or the other. Indeed the African region is a troubled region.

6. The various open and usually protracted armed conflicts and general insecurity pervasive in African countries have had colossal and negative impact on the human and material resources of the continent. Today, Africa can only boast of the greatest number of conflicts, more than half of the world's refugees, the fastest growing population and least growing economies.

### **POST COLD WAR FACTORS**

7. Conflicts do not occur in isolation. In fact, I dare observe that conflicts are products of a series of events that may be political, social or economic in nature. In Africa, the traditional remedies for controlling such crisis have become strained and stretched to their limits of effectiveness. And in most cases, we can admit that there has been a break-down of the traditional system and no time enough to evolve or realize their modern effective alternatives.

8. While it was hoped that African conflicts will reduce with the end of the cold war since most of the conflicts were originally interpreted in terms of the East/West ideological contest, they are rather increasing in number and more brutal in their destruction of lives and property.

9. There are several post cold war factors that can be identified. First, the end of Communism which brought the ideological contest between East and West to an end in the 1980's and the unification of the two Germanys. These unsuspected events brought down the iron-curtain which had hitherto divided the world into two dangerously armed ideological blocks.

10. The second development was the emergence of the United States as the sole military Superpower with its democratic values and behaviors. This means respect for human rights, freedom of speech and the press and liberal economic pursuit. This means the US norms and behaviors have become yardsticks for all other countries' actions and behaviors. This also means that authoritarianism which had been the hallmark of most African governments must necessarily give way.

11. The third is the Gulf crisis in 1990. The Gulf war shifted attention away from Africa, as could, for example be seen from the crisis in Liberia then. While

thousands were being butchered and thousands more displaced, the world's attention and resources were focused on the Gulf war. This and so many other tragedies on the African continent rightly pointed out that there were no longer great power protégés in Africa.

12. The factors were to let loose in many areas individuals and groups who believed they were marginalized in the old order to now openly bid for power through the political process. The result is civil strife, armed conflicts and war and even collapse of states.

### **THE MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICTS IN AFRICA**

13. Africa certainly is not new to conflicts and as history shows it has also had not been the only continent that has not been spared the tragedies of conflicts, it is however a continent from time immemorial with a traditional culture of peace and co-existence. This mixture of the good, the bad and the ugly in African history is the same for other continents and cultures.

14. The early post-colonial African countries were characterized by military governments or one party States. This phenomenon set the stage for future crisis and conflicts, and since the internal state of their social and political development were weak or fragile, challenges to the various regimes that inherited the mantle of leadership from the retreating colonial masters were rampant; throughout Africa. Beginning with the Congo in 1960 some of these conflicts are still going on today at various levels.

15. As a result of this, the United Nations (UN), the Organization of African Unity (OAU), sub-regional bodies of the OAU as well as the international community have all stressed the need to employ a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention.

16. By the concept of comprehensive approach we are talking of all stake holders getting involved and nurturing the culture of peaceful co-existence and prevention of conflicts. This means that the traditional players on the international system which are nation states, have to embrace the civil society and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to ensure proper participation in the quest for democratization and peaceful co-existence.

17. In most African countries, civil societies have long been neglected and are seen as a problem to governments. This is partly because of the nature of the African States which creates authoritarian leaders and centralization of domestic political institutions. Because of this over centralization of power at the center, African countries tend to make:

i) Judicial and legislative power in a large number of African States subservient to the executive;

ii) The over centralization of power invariably provides avenues for its abuse where the powerful trample over the weak with ease, and impunity.

iii) Flowing from excessive centralization of power is also the stifling of civil society-labor unions, the media, university and non-governmental organizations. As a result of poverty, the middle class is wiped out in most of the countries and the center after a while no longer holds.

18. Against this dire and often difficult environment, the UN, the OAU and its various sub-regional Organizations have decided to bring to the fore, the problems of security and conflicts and to examine how best to find the means of tackling those scourges. It is against this background that I had earlier posited that the topic of this symposium is indeed very apt and timely.

19. As a result of its concern, the OAU, dramatically, adopted in 1990, at its twenty-seventh Session the Declaration on the Political and Socio-Economic situation in Africa and the fundamental changes taking place in the world. This, in my view was an appropriate first step to contain conflict situations in Africa, at that time. The lack however of a comprehensive mechanism for implementing the OAU Declaration was corrected in 1993 when the Organization established its Mechanism for Prevention, Management and Resolution of Conflicts. The 1993 mechanism had to take into account the changing nature of the African conflicts which had largely become internal.

20. The Economic Community of West African State (ECOWAS)<sup>1</sup> followed closely with a similar mechanism which was designed to dovetail into the OAU mechanism and the UN Charter. The ECOWAS mechanism, the process of which began in 1997 in Lome, Togo, and Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso gained a lot of momentum when the draft was prepared in Banjul, The Gambia in 1998 and adopted in Abuja, Nigeria the same year 1998. The Protocol relating to the mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security (the Protocol) was finally signed in December 1999 again in Lome, the Togolese capital.

21. The ECOWAS Conflict Mechanism made very far reaching and very good innovations. It provides that ECOWAS can intervene, politically or militarily in cases of:

- a) aggression or conflict in any Member State or threat thereof;
- b) in case of conflict between two or several Member States;
- c) in case of internal conflict:
  - i) that threatens to trigger a humanitarian disaster; or
  - ii) that poses a serious threat to peace and security in the sub-region.
- d) in event of serious and massive violation of human rights and the rule of law;
- e) in the event of overthrow or attempted overthrow of a democratically-elected government;
- f) any other situation as may be decided by the Mediation and Security Council.

These provisions are a manifestation of the fact that non-State actors are indeed important and most can be used for conflict prevention and the promotion of

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<sup>1</sup> ECOWAS created in 1975 is made up of fifteen West African States, namely; Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

peaceful co-existence.

22. The ECOWAS Mechanism provides for the establishment<sup>2</sup> of a Council of Elders as one of the organs to assist the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council. It is worthy also to note that the Mechanism deals with the concept of early warning in which the sub-region is divided into four (4) zones, each with a zonal bureau to help monitor the political, security and economic situation with a view to collecting data that impact on the peace and security of the entire sub-region. The zonal bureau shall maintain working relations with host country and the local and international organizations within their sphere of operation.

23. Furthermore, and in recognition of the important role women play, the Protocol stipulates that “ECOWAS shall recognize, encourage and even support the role of women in its initiatives for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping and security. It also undertook co-operate with national, regional NGO's and even religious organizations; all with the sole aim of ensuring the security of the sub-region.

24. Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, all I have tried to show using the ECOWAS example is that the civil society, non-governmental bodies cannot be left out on issues of conflict prevention and management. It is now apparent that States are no longer the only active players in the pursuit of conflict prevention and management and peaceful co-existence among the people.

25. I must say that in the West African sub-region the civil society, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies and women are now very active and are involved in every sphere of conflict prevention and the promotion of good governance. In my country Nigeria, for example and talking from experience, the Nigerian media is indeed very active, and is a constant participant in the promotion of good governance. Its role is very satisfying. The Nigerian press is virile and constantly challenges the government on national issues. I must however say that sometimes they overdo it. The Nigerian women, the major hosts of democratic non-governmental bodies are now very busy promoting good governance and calling

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<sup>2</sup> Paragraph (b) Article 17 of the ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security.

for institutional checks and balances to reduce corruption and improve governance. They are also calling for transparency and accountability in all human endeavors.

26. My country Nigeria is not alone in this activity. Indeed civil society and NGOs are now very strong and active in all other countries in the West African sub-region like Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Guinea-Conakry, Niger and so on. In all these countries, the Press, the NGOs and the civil society are both partners and counterweights to governments. In this regard, it has been pointed out that the smooth and peaceful transfer of power in Ghana from an incumbent government of 20 years tenure to a democratically elected leader from the Opposition was due, in large part to the contribution of the NGOs and Civil Society there.

27. However, let me point out that in most African countries, because these civil societies are poor, they tend to look outside for financial support for their existence and or the pursuance of their own agenda and as such they are seen as pursuing the interests of their financiers who are often from the Western hemisphere.

28. To erase this view, it is advisable that these bodies should rely largely on their own resources generated from within their own countries and confines. Also the foreign financiers should, as much as possible, allow the organizations to pursue their agenda with little or no interference. The financiers should encourage the organizations towards influencing the formulation of national awareness, mobilizing the people in active and constructive manner to participate in the democratic process and to work publicly to influence the formulation of national security strategies. The funders should also be very careful in the kind of NGOs and civil organizations they tend to fund.

29. Today, the civil society has become both the "hope and threat" of Africa since a strong and active civil society ensures democracy, helps discipline the state, ensures that citizens' interests are taken serious and foster greater civic and political participation. It can also be negative and can cause chaos as such African governments must of necessity try to accommodate, encourage and assist them as they have become indispensable partners that must be encouraged, natured and promoted for the task of building and promoting peaceful co-existence and conflict prevention.



30. I thank you for listening.