



Africa: Dynamics of Conflict, Promises of Renaissance

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Africa is a continent of exceptional diversity and immense riches. In addition to being home a great variety of religious traditions, including the three monotheistic religions, the continent also boasts a variety of languages and dialects that constitute 33% of the total living languages spoken in the world (even though only 10% of the world's population live here). Africa also enjoys a wide variety of climates and eco-systems, and has interacted with world cultures to produce a number of authentically African cultural traditions, including Arab, Anglophone, Francophone and Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) cultures.

However, for most of recent African history, the rich potential presented by this diversity remained untapped, even the source of conflict and instability. For while some African countries recognized and even celebrated this diversity and many countries proceeded to build the state on the basis of inclusive citizenship. Many others did not, making them into hotbeds of chronic inter-group tensions and conflict. Africa was the locus of 3 out of the 9 conflicts claiming more than a thousand lives a year that erupted in the world in the post-World War II era. Africa also witnessed 12 out the 33 conflicts which claimed fewer than a thousand lives a year. This is a disproportionate share, given the continent's population size. The resulting turmoil and instability hampered sustainable development and obstructed the pursuit of a united continent.

As Africa prepares to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity the coming year, African leaders want to highlight the progress made, and to project a more positive image of a continent that has for long been depicted as a region of conflict, bad governance, poverty and disease. This in no way means that the numerous problems and challenges should be neglected.

It is undeniable that many positive trends have asserted themselves over the past two decades: some countries that had symbolised humanitarian disasters and famine, such as Ethiopia, or arenas of chaos and the collapse of the state and the rule of law, like Uganda, or of both like Liberia and Sierra Leone, have become positive contributors to the African efforts geared towards reconstruction and hope.

Some conflicts in different parts of the continent have been resolved like those in Mozambique, Angola South Sudan, Zimbabwe and the Ivory Coast, largely through direct African intervention. In addition to the African Union (AU), as well as sub-regional bodies such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), have all played active roles in resolving conflicts and restoring peace.

The continent as a whole shifted towards espousing democratic openness, with the AU enshrining this collective will in a principled refusal to recognize any regime emerging from a coup against an elected government. The continent has also witnessed one of



the fastest rates of economic growth in the world and the destination of choice for new investments.

However, pockets of intractable conflict still exist in some parts of the continent. The ongoing conflict in Somalia, for example, is one of the longest running disasters on the continent and a cause of concern despite significant progress made so far towards resolving it. The Darfur conflict represents the other major continental disaster, and remains a major challenge to peace-making efforts. The new conflict in northern Mali, a country that was long considered a model of democracy in Africa, has, meanwhile, created a new spot of tension where several regional, continental and international agendas intersect. The security situation in Nigeria, the most populous country on the continent, is becoming a serious concern with the rise of an obscure Islamic group known as Boko Haram.

Conference Objectives

The aim of this conference is to examine the general trends prevalent on the continent, looking for the signs of the long-awaited renaissance, as well as examining the dynamics of disruption and conflict and the efforts to resolve them. We seek to bring together a selected number of key leaders and prominent thinkers from the continent to debate the pressing issues and offer answers to key questions. With their help, we will hopefully be able to determine whether conflicts are escalating or de-escalating on the continent, evaluate the successes achieved in resolving them and the viability of the Continent's conflict resolution mechanisms. We also aim to identify the lessons learned from the past, explore future prospects and identify the nature and causes of new conflicts and the new challenges they pose.

It is a much needed exercise of reflection, stock-taking and a hopeful look at the future.

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