



“The Relationship between Africa and the UN: From Disenchantment to a more Effective Cooperation”

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## 1 Introduction

The current relationship between the United Nations (UN) and Africa seems paradoxical: while there may be a lot of talk about Africa, there is not so much talk with Africa and even less so of Africa itself and its role at the UN. Historically, this bond has undergone several transformations. At the time when the UN Charter was drafted there were less than a handful of independent African states. However, as African countries decolonized throughout the 1960s, the status of Africa at the UN started to change. The newly independent African countries became members to the UN and learned to use the world organization as a podium to put forward interests such as economic development and decolonization. To date, African countries form the largest regional grouping at the UN, with over a quarter of all UN member states. Yet group size per se does not automatically translate into pro-active, unified decision-making. On the contrary, speaking with one voice at the UN and synchronizing their position has become an ongoing challenge for African Member States to the UN.

To strengthen the dialogue between African states and the UN, FES New York in association with the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), Cape Town hosted a day-and-a-half long conference on June 20-21, 2008. The conference addressed some of the outstanding challenges for the relationship between African countries and the UN. The organizers sought insights and policy guidance from a distinguished group of African diplomats, UN practitioners and scholars from the continent (see Annex for list of participants) on some of the challenges that both the AU and the UN face.

Special attention was given to the independent audit of the African Union (AU), conducted at the end of 2007, as Professor Adebayo Adedeji, Chair of the High-Level Panel that conducted the audit, was present at the conference to discuss its main findings and policy recommendations.

The subsequent report will therefore first reflect the debate of the state of the AU (2), followed by topical discussions on the challenges for Africa's social and economic development (3); the chal-

lenges for peacekeeping in Africa (4); reforming the UN's security and peace architecture (5). The report will conclude with an analysis of cross-cutting issues that emerged from the debates and an outlook on the future of Africa-UN relation (6).

## 2 The State of the African Union

The transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) towards the AU brought about some important political innovations such as: in the African Peer Review Mechanism, a mutually agreed instrument voluntarily acceded to by currently 29 AU Member States; the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) through which civil society can at least interact with the organs of the AU; and a more plausible move from non-interference to non-indifference, as evidenced by the exclusion of military regimes from Côte d'Ivoire, Comoros, and Guinea Bissau from African summits. However, only five years into its existence, in 2007 the AU subjected itself to a wide-ranging evaluation and commissioned a High-Level Panel to undertake an audit review of the state of the union. The Panel scrutinized all organs of the AU, namely the Assembly, the Executive Council, the Permanent Representatives Committee, the Pan-African Parliament, the Specialized Technical Committees, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), and the Peace and Security Council (PSC). The audit looked at these organs in terms of their individual effectiveness as well as their overall coherence and coordination.

In May 2008, 159 recommendations were submitted to the AU's Executive Council. The Council accepted 72 out of the 159 recommendations, referred 61 to the Commission for appropriate action, and rejected 26 recommendations for various reasons. In other words, more than four fifth the recommendations have been accepted for action. If implemented, they should improve the working of the AU's organs considerably.

As for the **Assembly** of Heads of States, which meets twice a year, it was found to lack focus and direction. In particular, the follow-up of decisions and treaties is insufficient. Since 2002, only ten

treaties have been adopted, and only three entered in force. It was therefore recommended to begin each Assembly with a review of implementation of previous decisions.

The **Executive Council** is currently composed of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (MFAs). It is functioning as an all-purpose body that is dealing with specialized issues not necessarily in the portfolio of MFAs. The Council rejected the High-Level Panel's proposal to have itself redesigned and composed of different ministers.

The **AU Commission** was given ample attention and was addressed by more than a third (70) of all recommendations. While statutory powers entitle the Commission to act not only as a Secretariat of the Union, but also to provide leadership and representation of the AU, the Audit found that key stakeholders within the Commission and external partners have different perceptions of its roles and responsibilities. Moreover, the relationship between Chairperson, the Deputy and the eight Commissioners was described as dysfunctional with overlapping portfolios, unclear authority and lines of responsibility. To overcome this, the audit suggested, among other things, that the Chair and Deputy Chairperson have known vision and commitment to continental integration and their election be unrelated to their regions. Commissioners should prove competencies and their election delinked from the portfolios that they will occupy. However, these proposals for restructuring the composition of the Commission were rejected.

On a more positive note, the **Peace and Security Council** was approved for having marshalled active response to threats to peace and security. Yet other components of the peace and security architecture – the Panel of the Wise, Continental Early Warning System, and the African Standby Force – should be effectively operationalized. The Panel encouraged African countries to contribute substantially to AU peace operations.

The audit came to a more complex verdict about the AU's relationship with **Regional Economic Communities** (RECs). The first, the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS), was founded in 1975. Over time, as more RECs

were established and countries decided to join several of them, there has increasingly been an overlap between the memberships of the eight recognised RECs and other regional integration entities. This has led to irrational configurations, negotiating positions, and inconsistencies with regards to harmonization and coordination of trade liberalization. The audit suggests member states implement more faithfully decisions at national, regional and continental levels while at the same time reviewing their multiple memberships to RECs.

Obviously, pan-African economic integration as a more effective interplay between RECs is only possible within a comprehensive process of transformation and integration of the continent. Towards this end, in addition to revamping the AU's organs and streamlining its relationship with RECs, the Audit advocates for a number of other accelerators:

- The free movement of peoples across borders as stipulated in both the Abuja Treaty in 1991 and the AU's Constitutive Act of 2000;
- An African Union that is people-centered, not government-centered;
- The development of transcontinental and inter-regional infrastructures;
- The early establishment of the continental financial institutions;
- The mobilization of multinational African firms as accelerators of Africa's integration.

As for the relationship of the AU with the UN, the only genuine UN body that the AU review addressed was the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). ECA was established in 1958 to encourage economic cooperation among its African member states, currently 53. It is one of five regional commissions under the administrative direction of the UN and reports to the ECOSOC. The High-Level Panel criticized ECA's current focus on governance issues and recommended that African ambassadors at the UN should assist ECA in refocusing on substantive development issues instead.

### 3 Challenges for Africa's Social and Economic Development

The AU Audit also addressed the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as a key initiative to promote Africa's social and economic development. It was acknowledged that NEPAD successfully operationalized the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). As of June 2008, 29 countries had voluntarily acceded to the APRM and five had undertaken their reviews. However, the decision of the March 2007 Algiers meeting to integrate NEPAD into the AU structures is still pending approval by the Assembly of Heads of States. Moreover, during the debate it became obvious that the implementation of NEPAD was hampered by different views about its function. Whereas most African countries thought NEPAD would attract aid from donors in large quantities, which would then be spent on pan-African and interregional projects, this was not the understanding of donor countries, many of which promised assistance without actually delivering it.

The story of NEPAD may therefore be yet another example of what one participant dubbed the "*dialogue of the deaf*," where developing countries' demands are greeted by industrialized countries' intransigence. In this vein, the outcome of the UN reform process of 2004-2005 was disappointing as it reiterated the target set by the UN General Assembly (GA) in 1970 that rich countries set aside 0.7 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) for overseas development aid. Although it was considered necessary to hold aid donor countries accountable to their promises, it was also highlighted how important structural imbalances of the international trading system and heavy debt loads were for African countries. One participant recalled the 1980s as a lost decade because African countries were bogged down in structural adjustment programs, whereas the loss of the 1990s was less obvious because governments focused on macro-economic growth and the increase in the GDP.

In this regard, it was questioned whether the UN's current focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will lead to sustainable development

in Africa. The MDGs, it was criticized, underestimate the nexus of growth, employment, and poverty. The MDG approach disaggregates them, puts them in a narrow context and isolates each of these important dimensions to the neglect of the others. For instance, taken in isolation, the MDG 3, which strives to achieve primary schooling for every child by 2015, is very laudable. However, in many countries, there are no jobs for these graduates and putting the scarce resources into educating the future unemployed will not lead to a sustainable, people-centered creation of wealth. Without an integral approach that links growth, human-centered development, employment and wealth creation instead of poverty alleviation, Africa is going to remain perpetually underdeveloped. Africa should also come up with an encompassing response to the current food crisis. It was argued that many African countries have enough arable land, and they also have many unemployed people. By bringing both together, African countries could embrace the current food crisis as an opportunity to get away from food aid towards a more sustainable long-term development.

Yet many participants argued against a full-scale dismissal of the MDGs. The issue here seems to be how much emphasis they should enjoy at the expense of other development goals. Ultimately the UN does not determine national economic policy. African nations that find the MDGs insufficient are not prevented from adopting their own national economic plans to link growth, human-centered development, employment and wealth creation.

### 4 Challenges for Peacekeeping in Africa

The facts as to why peacekeeping remains one of the most formidable challenges for the relationship between Africa and the UN speak for themselves. Between 1948 and 2007, about 40 percent, 26 out of 63, of the UN's peacekeeping and observer nations have been in Africa. Currently the continent hosts about half, 8 out of 18, of the UN peacekeeping missions. In theory, peacekeeping operations are successful when four minimum requirements are met: There must be a peace to be kept that is sustained by a viable political process among the conflict parties; there has to be unified

political support from the outside; there has to be a credible and achievable mandate, and last but not least, the mission has to have self-sustaining resources. In practice, not all these requirements are always met. Yet even more relevant are cases where none of the preconditions are fulfilled, but where the international community nevertheless sees a need to intervene. This was the starting point for the discussion of the hybrid UN-AU Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), which brought to the fore several interrelated issues around peacekeeping in Africa:

**The Importance of a Peace Agreement:** The first and foremost strategic challenge for any peace operation is whether there is a peace agreement in place that is to be kept and which is supported by the political will of the major stakeholders. This was the case for successful peacekeeping operations in Namibia and Mozambique at the end of the Cold War. By comparison, the Darfur peace agreement does not have the broad support of the parties who signed it and, as one participant pointed out: *"A peacekeeping operation, cannot serve as a substitute for the absence of a political process. What the peacekeeping operation can only do is to support a political process."* In part, the dilemma was conceived as an inevitable consequence of the much appreciated paradigm shift away from the OAU's non-interference towards the AU's principle of non-indifference in member states' domestic affairs. The AU's Peace and Security Council established the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) in July 2004, a time when no other actor was willing to intervene in Darfur.

**Resources for the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA):** While the AU has demonstrated that it surpasses its predecessor OAU in terms of political will, this is currently not sufficiently matched by an increase in resources for its security architecture. AMIS, for instance, lacked capacities from its beginning as it consisted only of 60 military observers, and 300 military for their protection. Such impasse should be prevented in the future by the establishment of an African Standby Force (ASF). The ASF is intended as a continental African rapid intervention force in times of crises under the direction of the African Union. 15,000

troops with both a civilian and police component should supposedly become deployable by 2010. So far this commitment is not paralleled by dedicated standby resources.

In terms of finances, the Special Fund, created to support the AU's peace and security activities is only 6 percent, about US\$ 2.6 million of the AU's annual regular budget of about US\$ 43 million. Obviously, contribution from the Special Fund has proven insufficient for the tasks at hand, all the more so as AU membership arrears have reduced the AU's general liquidity. Such figures are in stark contrast to the contributions by external donor. The EU, by means of its African Peace Facility, allocated €300 million until 2010, the bulk of which (€242 million) goes to peacekeeping operations run by African bodies.

To have Africa's vital security interests financed by outsiders was conceived as unsustainable, and one participant contended that *"nobody has ever gone to war with another man's purse."* However, this is exactly what is currently happening in UN peace operations. Institutionally, there is a large disconnect between those who pay for peacekeeping – US, Japan, and Europe are footing about 87 percent of the bill – those who are deciding on peace operations – an unreformed, non-representative Security Council, and those who provide the boots on the ground – largely from South Asia and Africa. This disconnect was seen as the result of a Western schizophrenia that acknowledges the need for peacekeeping in Africa and allocates some of its resources to it, while no longer putting the lives of its citizens at risk. But there is also a schizophrenic reaction in Africa towards Western peacekeepers. They are no longer wanted because they may have their own agendas, yet Africa demands their logistical and financial support to sustain its own peacekeeping operations. A way out of this impasse may be the deployment of regional organizations.

**Operationalizing the division of labor as stipulated in UN's Chapter Eight:** The UN's Charter stipulates in Chapter VIII that the Security Council, while remaining the primary organ responsible for maintaining international peace and security, can au-

thorize regional arrangements to use the power or force. It was pointed out that neither the Brahimi Report nor the High-Level Panel on Threats Challenges and Changes of 2004 touched upon the issue substantially. Only after Kofi Annan's Report "In Larger Freedom", which called for a 10-year peacekeeping capacity plan to strengthen the AU, talks about the advantages of a division of labor have gained momentum.

From the point of view of the UN, collaboration with regional organizations may alleviate overstretch of its own peacekeeping operations. Yet the rhetorical support for regional organizations has not been accompanied by a support in resources that many regional organizations would require to give them the capacity and the ability to do their job. One participant argued for a constellation in which troops were deployed by the regional group concerned, with a mandate given by the Security Council, and paid for by the UN. Others were of the view that this would still require the political will of the Security Council and in particular of its five permanent members (P5). It was pointed out that in the past the Council was much faster to respond to crises in such places as Kuwait, Kosovo, or Afghanistan than to endorse the interventions of the Economic Community of West African States' Monitoring Observer Group (ECOMOG), in the crisis that engulfed the neighboring States of Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Another set of challenges seems to be the linkage between sub-regional peacekeeping mechanisms, the AU's PSC in Addis Ababa and the UN Security Council. Whereas the UN has primary responsibility for peace and security globally, it is not clear that the RECs see the AU as having that role continentally in Africa. The relationship between the RECs and the African Union is not really defined properly, particularly since some RECs such as ECOWAS have more peacekeeping experience than the AU. ECOWAS, through its peace and mediation council and by boldly confronting conflicts in its own area was also ahead of the curve with regards to what is currently dubbed the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P): To intervene by forceful means even without the agreement of countries concerned.

As for the AU, this body made its first effort for peacekeeping operations in Burundi, where a purely African force with troops from South Africa, Ethiopia, and Mozambique was established in April 2003. The AU handed over the mission to the UN one year later, when, Security Council Resolution 1545 established the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB). To have this sequence as a model for future interventions, one participant demanded that "*Africans keep the UN's feet to the fire*", to make sure that the UN continues to contribute to peacekeeping missions and then takes them over. In the future, however, the question may rather be from whom to take over: the interventions in Burundi and Liberia were led by regional hegemony, respectively South Africa and Liberia. It was not clear whether such political and material leadership were readily available for future interventions.

It was therefore demanded that the organization build its own capacities, particularly with regards to quality staff. Otherwise the AU may not be in a position to absorb help provided by the EU or UN, let alone act as an equal partner. In this regard the hybrid mission in Darfur bears witness of the difficulties that come with a division of responsibility. Already it was felt that this experience may never be replicated and that the UN would, if it could, keep control of missions and prevent hybridity for its own sake turn into a monstrosity.

**The importance of power rivalries on the regional and global level:** Conflicts are always regional affairs and neighboring states as well as regional hegemony can make or break a peace accord. In this regard, it was recalled how Chad had changed from being part of the solution for the conflict in Darfur to a problem on its own. It was also highlighted what role the Security Council plays and how parties to a conflict may exploit discord among its members. Conversely, in particular the Permanent Five members of the Security Council may resort to great power politics that can determine the destiny of a mission. Recent interventions have shown that this cuts both ways. For instance, France, which is greeted with suspicion in Africa, and which has unilaterally helped the survival of the regime in Chad, now seems to multilateralize.

France could convince the Security Council to deploy peacekeepers in Chad and Central African Republic and even get its European Union allies, uncomfortable as they may be to agree to it. China on the other hand, after much criticism has played a positive role in convincing Khartoum to accept UN peacekeepers in Darfur.

In conclusion, it was broadly agreed to prevent false choices between either regional or UN peacekeeping. The importance of developing regional capacities in Africa should not lead to a wholesale dismissal of UN peacekeeping, not the least due to the UN's unrivalled legitimacy. Both should therefore be strengthened, so that, depending on the situation, a real choice exists between a regional or global answer to a peace threat.

## 5 Reforming the UN's Security and Peace Architecture

Kofi Annan ended his tenure at the helm of the UN by initiating an extensive debate about reforming the UN. However, much fanfare about reforming the UN did not lead to a reform of the UN Security Council. Instead, one of the few tangible outcomes of the 2005 World Summit was the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), which, in the words of one participant, was like "the elephant giving birth to a mouse." The ensuing debate inquired the relationship between the stalled Security Council Reform and the establishment of a UN Peacebuilding Commission and whether or not these outcomes have benefitted Africa.

With the majority of UN-mandated peacekeeping operations taking place in Africa, the need to improve Africa's representation in the Security Council is obvious. All the more so, as the continent that musters almost a quarter of all UN member states remains the only major region without a permanent seat and veto power in the Security Council. In 2005 African leaders therefore endorsed the Ezulwini Consensus, which proposed a reformed Council in which Africa would have five non-permanent seats and two permanent seats with veto power.

Some participants saw Africa's insistence on the maximalist position as a sign of strength of the African block. In their view, a permanent seat for Africa without veto power would be detrimental to the African region. Yet others deplored that Africa had lost the strategic momentum and had better followed the approach of the Group of Four (G4) Japan, Germany, India, and Brazil Germany and Japan. In the run-up to the 2005 Summit these countries courted the African block to gain support for the G4's reform proposal, which dropped the demand for a veto in exchange for permanent representation. But Africa could not overcome its differences, as one participant deplored: *"In the end, Egypt was simply too Arab, South Africa all too democratic, and Nigeria too anarchic to agree."*

There was ample agreement that for the time being, the chances for SC reform are close to nil. However, the verdict was less decisive about the PBC, an advisory body that was established to prevent countries from relapsing into violent conflicts. Some participants argued that the establishment of the Commission was indeed a milestone for the UN's peace and security architecture. But after two years of the PBC's working existence, it was also asked why all the countries that requested to be advised by the PBC so far are in Africa. Recalling at times painstaking PBC meetings where one country is advised – or put on the spot – by up to 50 others raises the question what the added value for those African countries - Burundi, Central African Republic, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone – indeed is, particularly as states from other regions – at times despite massive donor pressure – refused to be advised by the PBC. The financial support that can come through the PBC is certainly not negligible, but the US\$ 250 million of the PBC's adjacent body, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has, can only have a catalytic function and not sufficiently endow peace building and reconstruction. Therefore, the more important effect of the PBC's advice for a country may be that, by being put in the spotlight, it can better demand from the international community a sustained engagement in the peace process. In this regard the PBC should not compete with UNDP's longer-term development work,

but rather focus on two or three critical issues that could make the difference in a country's peace process. Such added value will enhance the PBC's reputation and credibility that would mark out its niche in the UN system.

This niche will also be determined by the position of the SC vis-à-vis the PBC. In absence of a full-fledged reform, changes in SC working methods have made the body more inclusive and transparent. For instance, the Council now holds more open debates of a variety of topics in their relationship with security (e.g. AIDS pandemic, climate change), attended by a variety of actors. As for peacebuilding, on May 20, 2008 the government of the UK launched an open debate in the Council on early conflict recovery efforts. Whether or not this "PBC-ification" of the Security Council has its merits depends on whether it is conceived as scavenging of the mandate of the other UN organs.

As one participant highlighted, forwarding issues to the SC should also be seen as an encouragement of the other UN bodies to improve their own efficiency. Ironically, the SC continues to be the UN body functioning best exactly because its extension failed: More members make any body more representative, but normally this comes at the expense of its effectiveness. Given the current experiences with the PBC, it remains to be proven to what extent a more deliberative, PBC-like, SC would serve better African interests.

## 6 Conclusions

Before coming to a final conclusion about the prospects for collaboration between Africa and the UN, it is worth revisiting the two most relevant themes that emerged from the debates on the various levels: political leadership and democracy.

In terms of political leadership, it was asked where the best prospects for effective, political leadership in Africa were today as the momentum for regional integration at the AU's inception currently seems to have run out of steam. Without such guidance and investment of political capital it is hard to conceive how peacekeeping operations – be they conducted by the AU or subregional

organizations – could come off the ground. And without it, no agreement on how Africa could weigh in on the SC reform may be achieved either. Moreover, implementing the recommendations of the High-Level-Panel's Audit towards an economically and politically more integrated and more people-centered AU hinges on who throws his weight behind it. This seems to be all the more important as previous champions such as Nigeria and South Africa are currently embroiled in domestic problems that are also a reflection of the tension between political leadership and democratic accountability.

Not only for those two regional hegemon, the process of democratization in Africa has so far led to mixed results. Whereas it is a huge achievement that in many countries elections have become an accepted means to change political leadership, the recent experiences in Kenya and Zimbabwe also show the limits. Nevertheless, opinion polls indicate that Africans clearly prefer democracy over any other type of government system and the appreciation of democracy is even more pronounced than in other parts of the world. Although there may be disagreement about defining democracy more in Western liberal rather than specifically African terms, it is uncontested that a simple transfer of the Western democratic experience to the African continent is neither possible nor desirable.

What remains a point of contestation is the practice that many elections in Africa are in part or completely aided by donor countries from the North. Taking over what should be a genuinely national responsibility creates an unsatisfactory situation. It generally raises the question whether outsiders, be they donor countries or other international actors, play a constructive role in promoting democracy in Africa.

An important aspect of democracy is the state of political parties. Having dozens of political parties is not necessarily an indication for a functioning multi-party democracy. Many African parties are relatively young and are often grouped around individuals that form these weak assemblages for



the purpose of winning elections and redistributing the spoils afterwards within their respective ethnic groups. Yet if, as one participant gloomily contended, elections in Africa had become another means of war, this may be a positive development after all. At the same time, it will take more housekeeping on the national level before the AU can become a functional continental organization. A critique of the AU's current hypocrisy when condoning Zimbabwe's fraud presidential elections is certainly in order. It should, however, not come at the expense of tolerating broken promises by others, such as the Group of Seven industrialized countries plus Russia, who, in their latest meeting flouted their aid commitments to Africa given at Gleneagles in 2005 for the third time in a row.

What then can realistically be expected from an institutionalized cooperation between multilateral bodies such as the AU and the UN? First, both organizations struggle with major internal disfunctionalities. As for the AU, the Audit brought many of them out into the open; the hard part is now in the implementation of the proposed reforms. As for the UN, the latest reform efforts have created a new body (PBC), relabeled an old one (Human Rights Council), and solidified one other (Security Council). Most of all, these efforts have led to a reform fatigue among UN Member States.

Second, there are no simple either/or alternatives. As the challenges in peacekeeping continue to demonstrate, global, regional, and sub-regional bodies all have their comparative advantages and shortcomings. There is no blueprint for conflict resolution that predetermines the competitive advantage of either of them. Similarly, for Africa's sustainable social and economic development the current focus of the MDGs may be too narrow. But this should not prevent governments from pursuing their own policy preferences. Also, it may not be too late to re-assess the MDGs and establish the nexus between growth, human-centered development, employment and wealth creation. The next opportunity for the UN will arise in September 2008, when the UN will host a High-

Level Meeting of Heads of States to address Africa's development needs.

This meeting will also be an opportunity to see where a whole range of Africa-related initiatives of the UN stand, as many of them such as the AU-UN ten year capacity building program look good on paper, but have little concrete outcomes to offer so far. This mismatch may be emblematic for the current relationship between the UN and Africa. A flurry of activities on the side of the UN is not necessarily reciprocated, as demonstrated by the AU's Audit, which barely mentions the world body. In the end, with or without the UN, there is no doubt that the future will see more African solutions for African problems.

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