



**Dialogue on**  
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## **Peace Building in Africa**

*VOLKER LEHMANN*

This report summarizes a luncheon debate on peace building in Africa, which was hosted by FES New York on Tuesday, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2006. Some 45 participants, mainly from Missions of African countries to the UN and the UN Secretariat, joined a discussion that was started with presentations made by **Dr. Adekeye Adebajo**, Executive Director of the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), Cape Town, South Africa and **Dr. Tim Murithi**, Senior Researcher at the CCR.

The first speaker, **Dr. Adekeye Adebajo**, Executive Director of the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR), Cape Town, South Africa addressed the challenges of peace building in Africa in relationship with the UN. He argued that Africa's conflicts have both internal and external roots. Externally, colonialism and the cold war had a decisive impact on the shape of the African state system. Colonialism created the conditions for many of the ethnic grievances of the post-independence era through arbitrarily drawn colonial boundaries. The cold war affected the African state system by prolonging destabilizing liberation wars and by creating military stalemates. As the cold war ended, economic reforms mandated by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) further eroded the control of African states. Increasingly, governments could no longer exercise normal state functions of providing security, order and social services to their citizens and lost control over the monopoly of violence and state bureaucracies. Beside these external sources of conflict, Africa's post-independence leaders have also contributed to conflicts on the continent. Crafting federations and conceding autonomy to minority groups were rejected by many nation-builders who argued that one-party states were the only means to avoid destabilizing ethnic wars and to preserve the unity needed to build their nations. Ethno-regional differences were also exacerbated by nepotism and favoritism in appointments to military, political, and bureaucratic positions. The state became a cash cow to be milked for political patronage. Urban bias in development policies further created an aggrieved countryside full of a ready army of unemployed youth who have today become the cannon fodder of Africa's warlords.

Dr. Adebajo argued that the end of the cold war left a security vacuum in Africa, which regional organizations attempted to fill. Many of Africa's post-cold war leaders recognized that the continent can not achieve economic development and security without promoting democratic governance. Towards this end, in October 2001 African leaders from South Africa, Nigeria, Senegal and Algeria spearheaded the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). NEPAD seeks greater western aid, investment and debt relief in exchange for a self-monitored voluntary peer-review system of "good governance". Yet NEPAD has increasingly been criticized for its unclear and rivaling relationship with the African Union (AU), the "top-down" attitude of its governments vis-à-vis their citizens, and the South African dominance. For NEPAD to enjoy credibility and legitimacy, Dr. Adebajo demanded it promote human rights and democratic governance. He went on with an assessment of a number of initiatives throughout the UN reform process of 2005. *First*, regarding the "responsibility to protect," which outlines a framework for humanitarian intervention, Dr. Adebajo analyzed the opposition of many African leaders against this concept, being based on the fear that such interventions might threaten their own sovereignty by powerful states. This is ironic considering that the AU's Constitutive Act of 2000 has one of the most interventionist systems in the world in cases of genocide, human rights violations, unconstitutional changes of government, and other actions that could potentially lead to regional instability. *Second*, related to the idea of humanitarian intervention and conflict prevention, is the concept of peace building, which led to

the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). Due to pressure from developing countries, the PBC will focus largely on post-conflict reconstruction and not on conflict prevention. However, many Africans remain skeptical. Based on experiences with the UN in Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Central African Republic (CAR), they are worried that this new body will not make much difference in mobilizing the resources required for post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Africa.

Dr. Adebajo concluded his presentation by offering four peace building lessons from Africa's post-cold war experiences: *First*, a few well-governed African states should create an "inner core" within the AU to enshrine term limits for heads of state in regional and domestic constitutions. *Second*, African governments and the international community must provide the resources necessary to restructure national armies. *Third*, any successful post-conflict strategy must be sub-regional and take into account the interconnectedness of conflicts in Africa. *Fourth*, regional peacekeepers in West Africa and other parts of Africa must be provided with the logistical and financial resources they need if such missions are to achieve their goals. According to Dr. Adebajo, there is a golden opportunity to build peace in countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, Central African Republic, and Sudan. It must not be squandered by the frugality of an indifferent international community and the recklessness of undemocratic African leaders.

The second presenter, **Dr. Tim Murithi**, Senior Researcher at the CCR, further elaborated on the UN Peacebuilding Commission. As the PBC carves out a niche for itself within the UN system, it is important not to lose sight of the meaning of peace building. According to Dr. Murithi, Peace building is an ethical process that requires a close partnership, respect and dialogue among all the actors. It is not something that governments and inter-governmental organizations can do to their people. Rather peace building is something that governments and their people have to do together. In this regard, he demanded that the PBC ensure that gender is mainstreamed into all aspects of peace building, thereby living up to the promises made under UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

While Dr. Murithi explained that many PBC member states acknowledge in principle the importance of civil society to peace building, the contentious issues are around how to operationalize this "consultation" process. He recommended establishing within the Peacebuilding Support Office a staff member dedicated to liaising with civil society particularly in countries under consideration by the country-specific configurations of the PBC. In turn, peace building NGOs in countries under considerations should establish national and regional civil society focal points to facilitate the timely and effective engagement, interaction and partnership with the PBC.

According to Dr. Murithi, the added value of the PBC, particularly to Africa, is in its ability to bring the institutional memory and lessons learned from previous peace building efforts over the last 15 years. The knowledge that has been generated over the years should be deployed strategically to ensure effective peace building. The second value added by the PBC will be in focusing the

attention of the international community and building strong partnerships with regional organizations, like the AU, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC, to ensure that there is a complementary collaboration between all the actors working on peace building in a specific country.

In his final analysis, Dr. Murithi highlighted the need for bringing back ethics into the activities of the UN system, to make peace building more effective. Conversely, the echoes of ineffective peace building in Africa in the Middle East, particularly Iraq, will continue to impact upon our international relations for several decades to come. The establishment of the PBC offers an opportunity to bring about a paradigm shift in the way that the UN works, particularly in the way the UN relates to civil society. As a small contribution to the process of bringing back morality into the UN system, Dr. Murithi urged the Organizational Committee to institutionalize the participation of both national and international civil society in all future country-specific meetings.

The subsequent discussion was chaired by **H.E. Mr. Joe Pemagbi**, Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the UN.

One Ambassador from Africa contended that funding for the Peacebuilding Fund is voluntary and that there will be a bias towards the agenda set by the (western) donors. Other African diplomats pointed to the weak position of the PBC within the UN system, because of its consultative nature. Moreover, so far there has been barely any mentioning of the underlying economic root causes for conflict. This holds true both prior to as well as after

an armed conflict. It is particularly difficult to accuse a country after the end of an armed struggle, and when its governance structures are defunct, that it misuses donor monies. Only when infrastructure, jobs, and other initiatives for economic development are re-installed does the peace process have a chance to unfold. Yet as a representative from Asia, recalling how his own country 'bootstrapped' itself out of conflict recalled, countries should not solely rely on the international community, but have to create their own ideas. In a similar vein, it was emphasized that war-torn societies should learn from one another. For example Central America has a rich history of post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction.

In their last round of responses to the comments, the two speakers reiterated that a lack of funding could make the PBC meaningless from the beginning. At the same time, one should retain and mobilize the optimism for the PBC, because its failure would otherwise be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Beyond the PBC, it was emphasized that the task of building peace is ongoing and does never stop. The speakers urged for a paradigm shift in the work of the UN by acknowledging that a constitution of democratic states is the best final arbiter to peace.

About the author:

*Volker Lehmann is a Policy Analyst at the FES office in New York.*

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung  
Hiroshimastrasse 17  
10785 Berlin  
Germany  
Tel.: ++49-30-26-935-914  
Fax: ++49-30-26-935-959  
Roswitha.Kiewitt@fes.de  
[www.fes.de/globalization](http://www.fes.de/globalization)

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung  
New York Office  
400 Madison Avenue, Suite 6C  
New York, NY 10017  
Tel: ++1 (212) 687-0208  
Fax: ++1 (212) 687-0261  
[fesny@fesny.org](mailto:fesny@fesny.org)  
[www.fes-globalization.org](http://www.fes-globalization.org)