

# **The Role of Nigeria in Peace Building, Conflict Resolution, and Peacekeeping since 1960**

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The organizers of this workshop have asked me to speak on Nigeria's role in what can only be very broadly termed conflict management. Conflict management encompasses a wide range of issues such as peace building, conflict resolution, and peacekeeping. To undertake an analysis of Nigeria's role in conflict management since 1960 therefore is to focus on its various efforts towards building, supporting, and enforcing peace across Africa and the rest of the world. Such efforts are grounded concretely not only in the fact of our material resources and military capabilities; they are also historically grounded in our commitment to peace, justice, and equality of all peoples, as well as in the belief in, and respect for the right of all peoples to collectively determine their destiny. It is these commitments that have informed our role in peace building regionally, continentally, and globally.

## **1. Experience**

Over the past twenty-five years, Nigeria has emerged from a relatively obscure position under colonial domination to a major power in international affairs. This position as well as the commitment underpinning it has been expressed more forcefully in the defence of Africa which, in cooperation with other countries within the continent and in the Diaspora, has helped in keeping alive the pan-African ideal. Thus between 1960 and 2005, Nigeria has been actively involved in various ways in the struggle against colonialism in Southern Africa; in demonstrating the cultural richness and diversity of Africa (FESTAC); in building and maintaining peace

throughout the West African region; and in helping to establish, and continuing to support the Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS (1975)] the Organization of African Unity [OAU (1963), now AU (2001)], the Non-Aligned Movement, and other organizations concerned with bringing peace to regions and peoples across the world. It was in defence of these objectives that Nigeria broke off diplomatic relations with France in 1961 over the latter's nuclear tests in the Sahara desert. Similarly, its membership of the "Frontline States" during the struggle against Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa; its long-term chairmanship of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid; and its leadership of peacekeeping missions in Chad (1979-82), Liberia (1990-98), Sierra Leone (1996-00), Guinea Bissau (1998-00) and Côtê d'Ivoire (2000-Date) are all reflections of its commitment and role to peace building, peace keeping, and conflict resolution.

## **2. Engagement**

It is on this basis that it becomes imperative to grasp the historical significance of the ongoing United Nations reforms efforts, and for us to correctly locate Nigeria's position and role in this reform process. The contemporary manifestations and complexities of conflicts across the world require influential members of the United Nations across continents that have the capacity, the resources, and commitment to peace to intervene in order to prevent the reoccurrence of humanitarian catastrophes such as those that have occurred in Somalia, Rwanda or the Democratic Republic of Congo. Rwanda and similar events send chilling signals that the international community is either too tired of Africa's conflicts or that the dominant interests within it are busy fanning such conflicts in the struggle to control her resources. In either case, there seem to be a general fatigue and reluctance to intervene in such conflicts. Africa must seize the opportunity, within a reformed, democratic Security Council that gives all peoples irrespective of race, an equal status and voice in the management of world affairs. This is precisely why we need to squarely reject the current calls from certain quarters in the Nigerian foreign policy community and their international collaborators for a disengagement from Africa's problems based on the spurious and untenable position that just as economic liberalization requires a minimalist, less interventionist state domestically, so too is a minimalist state required internationally. Since Nigeria, so the argument goes, is facing enormous domestic

economic difficulties, it should draw back into its shell and face its own problems (Okpokopo: 1999).

### **3. Recolonization**

This position overlooks both the simple connection between previous and contemporary forms of imperialist domination, appearing today more intrusively as globalization, and how both are implicated in many of Africa's current conflicts. Nigeria's commitment to peace in Africa and the rest of the world must be contextualized and justified not just in historical terms as a relic of past achievements; that commitment must be reinvigorated and informed by the imperatives of contemporary global events. Africa possesses a substantial share of the world's fossils and fuels; yet, it is also one of the most marginalized continents in the world. It is a fact that this marginalization is intensifying to the extent that notions of 'recolonization' are today re-echoing in scholarly circles. And there are concrete reasons for this; the deployment of military resources by the West (military training/aid, military bases, arms sales, and increasing reliance on mercenaries (now with a respectable name, Private Military Companies) in 'outsourcing' arrangements) are real manifestations of this growing marginalization, and an expansion of what Nkrumah warned against in the case of the Congo: the continuing struggle for the control of Africa's resources (Kuna: 2003). It is common knowledge that the State Department has estimated that in the next 10-15 years, the bulk of the energy requirements of the United States will come not from the Middle East, but from the Gulf of Guinea. In anticipation of this, there are already military training programmes with, and attempts to secure military bases in a number of countries in West Africa by the United States. Indeed a large deep sea military base is being contemplated by the US in the Gulf of Guinea.

These are disturbing facts, and seem to lend credence to the general idea of the recolonization of Africa. This is all the more reason why Nigeria's commitment to peace and development in Africa should be strengthened. If it helped fight colonialism and apartheid as manifestations of imperialist domination and marginalization from in the 60s and 70s, its role in conflict management within contemporary global contexts ought to be a logical extension of the struggle of the 60s. This is because we need realize that the current conflicts in Africa are largely

manifestations of these new and emergent forms of imperialism. They should and must be addressed vigorously.

#### **4. The Background**

An analysis of the role Nigeria has played in conflict management within and outside Africa must necessarily be situated historically and within the context of its foreign policy objectives. Although these objectives have themselves evolved over time, and that an independent, pan-African and anti-colonial foreign policy became increasingly evident during and in the aftermath of the civil war in 1967, it seems to me that the dominant approach to conflict management could be located in the notion of the four “concentric circles” of national interest. At the core of these circles lies a concern with Nigeria’s own security predicated on the cultivation of good neighbourly relations especially with our immediate neighbours: Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger. This is in recognition that our security is inextricably tied to the security of West Africa, and it is for this reason that the second circle expands to include the whole West African region. Continental Africa then constitutes the third circle, and just like in the previous two circles, the major focus is the promotion of peace, economic integration, development, and the fight against all forms of colonial domination. The fourth and final circle focuses on Nigeria’s relations with bodies and countries outside of Africa.

#### **5. The Practice**

These concerns constitute the bases of understanding Nigeria’s commitment to peace building, conflict resolution, and peacekeeping within and outside of Africa. The promotion of peace both within and outside of the Africa is based on a policy of non-interference, respect for inherited borders, commitment to African unity, economic integration, and to decolonization. It was in furtherance of these objectives, that these concerns began receiving legal and constitutional backing as from the late 1970s. Thus, in both the 1979 and 1999 constitutions, the promotion of African unity; the political, economic, social, and cultural liberation of Africa; the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of cooperation across the world became central tenets in the conduct of foreign policy. Section 19 sub-sections (a) to (e) of the 1999 constitution for example clearly support this role by emphasizing the

promotion of 'African integration and support for African unity' (b) as well as of 'a just world economic order' (e). Although such clear constitutional provisions were rare prior to 1979, Nigeria's concrete actions in the years 1960-1979 very clearly demonstrated the same commitments. Thus the recognition in 1975 of the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola's (MPLA) in Angola provided a major encouragement to the liberation struggle in southern Africa, marking the beginning of a more engaged commitment to decolonization and African integration. Nigeria's success in isolating UNITA, its role in the struggle for Zimbabwean independence and particularly its role in the Lancaster House Accords; its support to Namibia not just during the struggle but also in post-apartheid reconstruction in which it contributed about US\$20 million in assistance to the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) in the 1989 elections, as well as financial and military support to other liberation movements in Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and South Africa were notable planks in the commitment to a free and united Africa. Nigeria's support for the conduct of elections in several countries such as Niger Republic, are clear indications also to a commitment to the democratisation of Africa.

These goals were also pursued on the economic and cultural levels through various forms of aid, technical assistance, and civil and military training to various African countries. The provision of scholarships/grants/fellowships, training facilities, medical supplies, as well as equipment must also count as part of the general commitment to these objectives. Indeed, it was these forms of assistance that culminated in the Technical Aid Corps Scheme in 1987 wherein Nigerian professionals enlist to serve in Africa, the Caribbean, and Pacific countries that need their services. All these form the general background of Nigeria's commitment to peace, development, and the economic integration of Africa. They are also the broad guidelines that inform our interventions in conflict situations across the continent in various capacities as mediators, negotiators, facilitators, and peace keepers.

## **6. The New Situation**

The emergence of a New World Order heralding the demise of bipolarity has had dramatic and far-reaching implications on the nature, form and intensity of war and conflict in Africa. African wars and conflicts have become more lethal, violent, and complex in terms of the multiplicity of interests and alliances between states,

multinational corporations, militias, criminal gangs, and vigilantes within and across state boundaries. More specifically, conflicts have become increasingly intra-state rather than inter-state. Although largely intra-state, the impact of these conflicts in terms of their deep humanitarian problems (refugees, child soldiers, small arms proliferation etc) is difficult to confine within specific borders. In other words, these conflicts have become borderless, and the crises they unleash in consequence are also borderless. The character of these new conflicts also dictates changes in the nature, organization, and delivery of peace. Just as conflicts have become borderless, so should peace efforts be. It is therefore appropriate that Nigeria seem to be redefining its role in peace building from a more cautious one in the 1960s to one of greater involvement especially in the West African region.

Both facts – changing nature of conflicts and security, as well as changing nature of our involvement in peace are influenced by other pertinent historical and contemporary factors. To begin with, the size (population, land mass and economy) makes Nigeria the only power especially in West Africa that can contemplate long-range power projection, and thus about the only country in the region, and one of possibly three in the continent with South Africa and Egypt, capable of sustaining a fairly large military contingent over a long period of time far away from their borders or shores. Its population is almost twice the population of the combined population of other West African countries, with an army of about 94,000 that seem to overshadow the combined military forces of all the other West African states. Secondly, the sheer diversity of West Africa and the many obvious cultural ties between peoples across colonial boundaries, itself makes Nigeria's security inextricably tied to the security of that of all West Africa. In face, in today's global context, conflict management is particularly impossible outside of a collective framework. Thirdly, it is significant to recall that the international community is getting fatigued and increasingly reluctant to intervene in Africa's conflicts. The refusal of the United Nations and the rest of the international community to intervene in Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, and Sierra Leone - even with very clear warnings that these countries were on the verge of collapse are indicative of this fatigue. Finally, Nigeria is only country in the world with the largest concentration of black people. And the most populous country in Africa, it is perceived, and perceives itself as responsible for Africa and its problems. Certainly its actions in peace building and conflict resolution demonstrate this fact. All these

seem to define a new, more involved role in the furtherance of Nigeria's central foreign policy objectives.

## **7. Peace-Building**

Nigeria's effort at peace building has been predicated principally on the pursuit of domestic security through the promotion of peaceful relations between herself and neighbours, and between neighbours themselves. It is against this background that Nigeria's role in peace building across Africa should be examined. Nigeria strives to put its neighbours at ease and attempts to stave off problems that could arise especially over inherited colonial boundaries by establishing bilateral agreements as the case of relations with Equatorial Guinea since 1988 demonstrate. The dominant role in the mediation of the crises between Liberia and Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Mali, and Togo and Ghana are some of the clearest indications of this peace building role. The biggest effort to date however could easily be seen in the case of the conflict with Cameroon over the Bakasi Peninsula. The extreme restraint that Nigeria has demonstrated and its acceptance of the International Court of Justice ruling that ceded the Peninsula to Cameroon is a supreme example of its quest for peace.

This commitment to the peaceful resolution of conflicts was one of the major catalysts in the formation of the Economic Community of West African States in 1975. Besides securing its overall objectives of regional economic integration, ECOWAS served, by that measure, to reduce the reliance of other West African countries on Western foreign powers for economic and military assistance. Although colonial divisions, especially between British and French West Africa still exist, ECOWAS has the singular effect of weakening these divisions, contributing to greater regional integration and stability, providing an atmosphere for the resolution for border disputes, creating a mechanism for conflict management, and strengthening West Africa's hand within Africa and in the international community. More specifically, through social and cultural policies, trade agreements, investments opportunities, customs agreement, monetary policies, and mechanisms for conflict management such as the Early Warning System with its four observatories based in Banjul, Cotonou, Monrovia and Ouagadougou, as well as ECOMOG, ECOWAS sought, and has gone a long way in creating a broad framework within which

economic integration, peace, democracy and regional development could be realized. Article 42 of the *Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security* (1999), in recognition of the significance of the peace building role of ECOWAS, establishes its role in stemming social and political upheavals, in addition to being...

...involved in the preparation, organisation and supervision of elections in Member State... [ECOWAS] shall also monitor and actively support the development of democratic institutions of Member States. [ECOWAS] shall endeavour to assist Member States emerging from conflicts to increase their capacity for national, social, economic and cultural reconstruction. In this regard, all [ECOWAS] financial institutions shall develop policies to facilitate funding for reintegration and reconstruction programmes.

In addition, there are numerous roles Nigeria has played towards peace building that have rarely come to public notice. Such efforts include those in the Sudan, in the recent crisis in Benin after Gnassingbe Eyadema's death, and others. This is not to say that there have not been problems, such as lingering border disputes with Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, and Chad. But Nigeria's preference remains the peaceful resolution of such disputes.

## **8. Conflict Resolution**

As in peace building, the role of Nigeria in the resolution of actual conflicts has been vigorous. Two main examples will suffice. The first is our role in the liberation struggle in Southern Africa and the second is the resolution of the West African crises.

In the specific case of conflict resolution, various protocols endorsed by Head of States and Governments provide an effective institutional framework for the resolution of disputes. The ECOWAS *Mechanism for Conflict Prevention* mentioned earlier, the *Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development* (PCASED, 2002), the *Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance of Defence* (1981), and the *Protocol on Democracy and Good*

*Governance* (2001) are all mechanisms for the resolution of both domestic and regional conflicts. Some of these protocols have led to the establishment of specialised institutions such as the Mediation and Security Council, Defence and Security Commission, ECOMOG, the Council of Elders, and the office of Political Affairs, Defence and Security (PADS). While these mechanisms have a number of shortcomings, their value in creating a framework for the early detection and resolution of ongoing conflicts is inestimable.

Some of these mechanisms created the grounds for intervening in some of the conflicts in West Africa such as those in Liberia (1990-98), Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, and Cote d'Ivoire. In the case of Liberia, the situation by December 1989 was serious with Charles Taylor's offensive launched from Cote d'Ivoire's border with Liberia. By early 1990, there was real possibility that Liberia would slide into anarchy. With the refusal of the United Nations and the International Community to intervene, it was left to ECOWAS at the instance of Nigeria to quickly act to stem the threats to law and order not only in Liberia, but also in the throughout the Mano River Union, and possibly across West Africa. The Standing Mediation Committee established after its Banjul meeting failed to address the crises, and ECOWAS had to later that year raise a 3,000 strong army constituted of troops from Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone and the Gambia to intervene in the Liberian crisis. These troops helped to stabilize that situation that culminated in the Liberian warlords negotiating for peace leading to the elections of July 1997. In monetary terms, it contributed up to ten (10) billion U.S Dollars in maintaining her troops in Liberia and Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone (1996-99), ECOMOG forces first intervened early in 1998 to reinstate President Ahmed Kabbah. At the peak of the operations ECOMOG had 13,000 troops in the country which conducted both peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations. Late in 1999, the disputants in the Sierra Leonean conflict signed an agreement in Lome, Togo to end the crises, thus paving the way 2000 for UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone).

## **9. Peacekeeping Roles**

The history of Nigeria's participation in UN peacekeeping operations dates back to 1960 in the Congo just few days after her independence, wherein she not only contributed troops, but also commanded the UNOC operation. Since then, Nigeria

has been involved in many UN peacekeeping operations in many parts of the world some of which are in Bosnia Herzegovina, Iraq, Kuwait, Western Sahara, Rwanda, Somalia, Mozambique, Cambodia, Lebanon, Angola, Beirut, India and Pakistan. Nigerian troops are still serving in many UN missions in places like Kuwait, Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leon. By December 2000, Nigeria had 3404 troops serving under the UN, making her the second largest contributor to UN peacekeeping missions in the world after Bangladesh with a total contribution of 6040. Over 100,000 Nigerian troops have served in UN peacekeeping missions around the world since her first participation in 1960 and four of these missions have been commanded by Nigerian senior military officers (Congo, Angola, and Beirut). The first major peacekeeping role however was that of Chad which Nigeria undertook under the auspices of the OAU. That operation cost Nigeria about \$82m which had to be written off. Nigeria has also been, for a long time, the chair of the UN Special Committee on Peace Keeping Operations. Finally, its leadership both as Chair of the Security Council at various times, as well as in other areas in the UN System has given it the opportunity not only to build peace, but also to push for positions favourable to Africa. This long history of participation in peacekeeping operations has given the Nigeria's military sufficient exposure and experience that is valuable not only to the country but also to the entire sub-region.

## **10. Conclusion**

Given these contributions in the maintenance of regional peace, given its enormous human and natural resources, given its experience and capabilities in conflict management, and given the changing nature of global conflict, Nigeria stands in good position to represent Africa and Black people all over the world in the Security Council. Regionally, its efforts in institutional capacity for conflict management clearly demonstrated in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Togo, Guinea Bissau, and Equatorial Guinea, as well as its support for democracy and development have become indispensable in the dealing with crises. Continentally, concern with pan-African economic integration, and bringing in experiences learnt in ECOWAS and ECOMOG has helped it demonstrate leadership in affairs affecting Africa.

If this leadership role were to be relevant to Nigeria and Africa in the coming years, it must be placed at the service of pan-African integration, an active

engagement and struggle, in conjunction with other countries in Africa against its marginalization, and an insistence on self-reliance, fair trade terms, and a pursuit of greater south-south cooperation. Finally, an active agenda must be pursued in dealing with international financial institutions, especially the World Trade Organization (WTO).

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