

« The Growing Challenges of Peace and Security in Africa: A West African Perspective »

A speech delivered on the occasion of the 2015 Kofi Annan/Dag Hammarskjöld Annual Lecture

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Protocols,

We are here today to honour two former UN Secretaries-General whose fight for peace, justice and human rights in Africa cannot be overemphasized. Dag Hammarskjöld's commitment to world peace was so evident that when he died in mysterious circumstances in a plane crash in Zambia more than half a century ago, the world has never fully recovered from the shock. It is in this regard that Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon has taken the commendable steps to set up an investigation to know the exact circumstances of the death of Dag Hammarskjöld who lost his life in search for peace in Africa. Dag Hammarskjöld's untimely demise came at a time the UN and the international community were struggling to keep peace in Africa barely a few years after the first set of African countries gained independence. Today, Africa is still host to the largest number of peacekeeping missions in the world.

Kofi Annan's tenure as Secretary-General of the United Nations was characterised by more concerted efforts to ensure world peace, respect for human rights and promotion of women's rights. His leadership role in resolving political crises in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and more recently in Kenya is still fresh in our memories. Even today that he is retired, he seems not to be tired as he is using his wisdom to continue doing what he is best known for – peace making. That is why it is most *a propos* that this great institution is named in his honour.

Despite the efforts of these eminent peacemakers, and those of many others, Africa is yet to be at peace with itself. It is therefore appropriate that we continue to reflect on the challenges of peace and security and efforts that have been deployed in West Africa to deal with these challenges.

Excellences, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past decade, West Africa has gained considerable ground in consolidating peace and democratic governance after having been ravaged by deadly/long years of conflicts, widespread human rights violations, and political instability. These hard-won gains have generally brought stability to the region and enabled positive economic growth and development with a promise/potential to reverse the trend of widespread poverty, youth unemployment, and

to promote sustainable livelihoods, good governance and democratic practice.

As we all know, West Africa region is home to almost 340 million people representing a rich cultural diversity and human capital. It stretches from Mauritania to Nigeria and covers the disparate climatic zones from arid Sahel desert to its north to the fertile land and rain forests to its south. Despite the slowing down of the global economy, the West Africa region has in recent years been the fastest growing economy in Africa, with well above an average of 6% (2012) and 5.6% (2013) growth rate. However, there continues to be a growing disparity within the countries on human development, compounded by governance and security challenges including transnational crime such as arms, drug and human trafficking and terrorism. The challenges faced throughout the West African region are complex and diverse.

In the **Sahel** for instance, the fallout of the 2011 Libyan crisis and the subsequent spill-over of the conflict continue to have a devastating impact on neighboring countries. The case of Mali is fresh in our mind. Even after the massive support and engagement of the international community, which lead to the stabilization of the situation in Mali, the country today remains fragile in the face of numerous security challenges. In the northern part of Mali, extremist terrorist groups have not only continued their brutal attacks against

Malian forces and civilians as well as UN peacekeepers and international aid workers, but have also kept the political peace process hostage. Just this weekend, two civilian colleagues were killed near Gao.

The aftermath of the Libyan crisis as well as the insecurity caused by terrorist groups and organized criminal groups in the Sahel have also affected Niger; a resilience-fragile country also pressed on its southern border by the activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group.

Meanwhile, the structural problems faced by Sahelian countries in the area of economic development and democratic governance can also cause political disruptions, especially where an ever-growing youth population is frustrated by the lack of opportunities and outlook for the future. This problem was undoubtedly a contributing factor last year when Burkina Faso nearly plunged into a crisis following a popular uprising that saw the expulsion of the country's President of 27 years in just two days.

Indeed, the root causes of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria can also be traced in parts to the Sahel bred security threats and their consequences in the region. While the ongoing joint efforts are achieving concrete result, the long-term solution lies in substantially in comprehensively addressing the root causes of the

fragility in the Sahel region. I should mention, in this regard, the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel developed to help achieve this objective. The UN has a dedicated Office tasked with the primary responsibility to implement the strategy in close collaboration with all UN offices and agencies as well as the countries of the region. The Office is headed by a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General.

Excellences, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past year, three of the four countries of **the Mano River Union** have been ravaged by the outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease. This unprecedented public health disaster, which prompted the establishment of a first-ever UN emergency health mission – UNMEER – has isolated Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea in the region and left their economies badly affected. The crisis has also exposed fault lines and weaknesses at national and regional levels, particularly regarding health care structure and delivery system. Social fabric was affected and public trust on public institution was further eroded. Most worrisome was that the EVD outbreak slowed down the progress that was being made in the post conflict peacebuilding efforts in the affected countries. For instance, efforts in the implementation of the trans-border security strategy in the Mano River Union were almost completely stopped owing to the outbreak of the disease.

The Gulf of Guinea is another area of instability in West Africa, which also straddles countries in the Central African region. Many West African countries have joined the club of petroleum oil producing countries, including Ghana. While this is welcome as an economic blessing, experience from other countries, especially our ‘big brother’ – Nigeria - has shown that if not well managed, mineral resources like oil (as was the case with diamonds in Sierra Leone) could be a source of potential tension, or what others have termed a curse. The petro dollars from oil have also attracted the attention of pirates and other interest groups who have embarked on the phenomenon of oil bunkering at high sea, causing a great toll on security of oil and commercial vessels. Therefore, the issue of maritime insecurity has become a serious threat in the Gulf of Guinea, attracting attention from ECOWAS, ECCAS and the AU to meet in Yaoundé in June 2013 to seek a collective solution to the menace. Affected countries from both regions have shown commitment and made progress in the adoption and the operationalization of maritime security mechanism. UN support and encouragement to this endeavor was provided and will continue to be provided by UNOWA and UNOCA.

2015 and 2016 are the years of another **cycle of elections** in West Africa. As the year 2014 was coming to an end, the Burkinabe experience came to underline the volatility of electoral processes and contests in our region. The move to amend the Constitution and the

ensuing popular insurgency and its consequences sent echoes throughout the continent and was received as a warning signal in countries where long-time political leaders were suspected of nursing plans and/or ambition to amend the constitution and extend their rule.

Nearer home in West Africa, inclusive dialogue on political participation and transparent electoral processes is gaining currency in Togo, Guinea, and Benin Republic. The main issues revolve around electoral time table, polling/voting system; biometric voters' card; the establishment of constitutional bodies and general the work of the electoral commissions. I must hasten to mention that in almost all the countries affected, political actors both sides of the divide (presidential majority and the opposition) have demonstrated commitment and responsibility to peaceful settlement in a consensual way. While the results of such efforts vary from country to country, little efforts would be needed from the international community to help stakeholders to bridge their differences and to conduct credible and violence free elections.

In this regard, Nigeria has set a positive pace. The region's natural leader silenced all sceptics after it successfully conducted two rounds of elections that displayed an unprecedented level of credibility and fairness. The peaceful execution of the general elections in this country of 175 million people underlines how political leadership and commitment to non-violence and non-

instigation by party leaders can serve as a key factor in avoiding electoral violence. Nigerians acknowledged as critical the role played by the international community in ensuring transparency and non-violence before, during and after the elections.

I am just back from Nigeria where our preventive and behind the screens diplomacy and the great resolve of Nigerians and relevant institutions, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) have just successfully concluded the 2015 general elections in which a former military leader, H.E. General Muhammadu Buhari defeated the incumbent President Jonathan. The historic congratulatory phone call from President Jonathan to General Buhari at a moment the collation was still ongoing completely doused tension in the country. Throughout the campaign, the presidential candidates denounced violence as a means to retaining or ascending to power at all cost, through what has now come to be known as the Abuja Peace Accords (I &II).

Here, I must pay tribute to Kofi Annan for his role in the signing of the Abuja I Accord on January 14, 2015. Working with the Office of the Inter-Party Affairs, civil society organizations such as the Situation Room (a platform of Nigerian organizations working in areas of elections, peace and security), the Kukah Centre, and the Savannah Centre, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Kofi Annan played a significant

role in dousing tension and ensuring the peaceful elections in Nigeria. I recall President Jonathan harping that his political ambition is not worth the blood of a single Nigerian. His exemplary and statesmanlike manner in conceding defeat is a great message sent to all African countries embarking on elections this year and subsequently. I will therefore wish to relay this message to the rest of West Africa to say that Nigeria has shown the way. The specific message for Ghana as it prepares for the 2016 elections is that having a Head of Electoral Commission who is a person of high integrity, professionally competent, independent-minded and mindful of their personal dignity and legacy is important in consolidating Ghana's rich experiences in the conduct of elections.

I am happy to say that West Africa now counts very successful elections that make us to hope for a better democratic future. Ghana, Sierra Leone, Benin, Cape Verde, Senegal have all been cited as success stories in free, fair and transparent democratic elections, with power alternating from one party to another. I salute the maturity of the electorate in these countries, and the men and women who have handled the electoral institutions, including the electoral commissions. Permit me to pay tribute to these courageous and professional officers who have continued to write the name of Africa in golden prints. The ECOWAS Electoral Unit and the team of observers, civil society and other partners and stakeholders have contributed, in no less manner, in successful elections in West Africa.

Meanwhile, in the northeastern part of the country, the brutal conflict with Boko Haram has been on for five years and has had a devastating impact on the lives of civilians, thousands of which have been murdered or displaced inside and outside the country. The crisis quickly spread to neighboring with devastating consequences in some of them.

While discussions over a multinational military force are still ongoing, Nigeria has been joining forces with its neighbors since the beginning of February and mobilized a long-needed military offensive to stop the insurgency from committing atrocities against local populations.

For now, Boko Haram has been pushed out of their strongholds but attacks still occur and a regional humanitarian crisis with over a million displaced people is still left largely unaddressed with no current perspectives for a return. As we strive to address the security deficiencies that have given rise to Boko Haram and similar terrorist groups and alleviate their humanitarian consequences, we must remain mindful that they do not exist in a vacuum but nourished by weak state institutions, ungoverned spaces, political neglect and the rampant poverty that drives people into desperation.

I have just completed a tour of the Boko Haram affected countries plus Benin with my colleague SRSR for Central Africa, which took us to Yaounde, N'Djamena, Cotonou, Abuja and Niamey. Countries assessed that defeating Boko Haram is within their reach. Boko Haram attacks have reduced significantly following the vigorous action taken by Nigeria and its neighbours during the past few weeks but we are not yet out of the woods. Challenges remain to be addressed properly and urgently with regard to coordination of their fight and the funding required. Nigeria is expected to live up to its responsibility and put in more efforts under the new government. But other governments need to understand the huge stakes involved in the fight against Boko Haram by standing together to face this menace and especially allowing hot pursuit across common borders. The marginalisation, underdevelopment and humanitarian crisis brought about need to be tackled. Already, reflection on what needs to be done for the post-Boko Haram era is underway.

In this connection, I would like to underscore the somehow related phenomenon of migration and say that it has always been disheartening watching television images of Africans drowning in boats in the Mediterranean waters or jumping barbwires to reach Europe at all cost. Only this week we have been reminded of the dangers faced by thousands of youth risking their lives to cross the Sahara and the Mediterranean to enter Europe.

Excellences, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

West Africa faces a multitude of peace and security challenges. It will require full attention and combined efforts to prevent violence and political instability in this region. Let me also state here that peace and security are attained by collective effort, even if we all have the understanding that the responsibility for global Peace and Security lies with the United Nations, while at the level of Member States, it is the government's role to protect its citizens. In this regard, it is worth noting that Africa took a major step with the adoption of the AU Constitutive Act in 2000, which provides a normative framework for an intervention of the continental body in case of grave violation of human rights for instance, thus bridging the gap between “non-interference” and “non-indifference”. The subsequent African Architecture for Peace and Security, which stretches from prevention of conflict to post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding as well as the Charter on democracy, elections and governance, are equally noticeable.

At regional level, ECOWAS has had a vanguard role as indeed it put in place a normative set up, starting with the Declaration of political principles as early as in 1991. This was followed, less than a decade later, by the Protocol relating to the mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping and security of

1999. The two instruments were further enhanced by the Protocol on democracy and good governance of 2001.

Learning from past experience of interventions to bring peace and security to countries in West Africa, ECOWAS realized the need for a paradigm shift towards conflict prevention. Based on existing protocols, particularly the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security of 1999 (also known as the Mechanism) and the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance of 2001, ECOWAS and its partners have deployed efforts aimed at operationalising the Early Warning System in accordance with Chapter IV of the Mechanism. Emphasis on early warning and early response was intended to underscore the importance of prevention of violent conflicts both at the structural and operational levels, and the adoption of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework in January 2008 is proof of the determination of West African leaders to work proactively to avert or prevent violent conflicts. Efforts at establishing the ECOWAS Standby Force that draws from the famous ECOMOG experience is an indicator of a strong resolve and collective political will.

Nevertheless, the UN should continue to help build their capacity and consolidate the close political integration in West Africa.

We must also do more to engage with the living voices in these societies and help build and improve civil society-driven conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms throughout the region.

To prevent a backslide into conflict and disorder in countries that are still in fragile recovery, we as a region must not lose sight of providing the necessary support to diplomatic and political mediation, ensuring free and fair elections, and implementing security sector reform and efforts to combat terrorism and transnational crime.

We cannot allow ourselves to forget that prevention of conflict remains a pressing priority in West Africa.

Excellences, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cannot conclude without paying tribute once again to the distinguished peace makers on whose legacies this annual lecture is instituted: Dag and Kofi have become legendary figures whose works and speeches continue to inspire us all. Let me end with two quotations, one of Dag Hammarskjöld's last speech to UN staff on 8 Sept 1961:

But, although the dangers may be great and although our role may be modest, we can feel that the work of the Organization is the means through which we all, jointly, can work so as to reduce the

dangers. It would be too dramatic to talk about our task as one of waging a war for peace, but it is quite realistic to look at it as an essential and - within its limits - effective work for building dams against the floods of disintegration and violence.

and of Kofi Annan in a report to the Security Council in 2001,

“For the United Nations, there is no larger goal, no deeper commitment and no greater ambition than preventing armed conflict. The prevention of conflict begins and ends with the protection of human life and the promotion of human development. Ensuring human security is, in the broadest sense, the United Nations’ cardinal mission...”

There is no better way to remember them than by their own words.

I thank you very much for your kind attention.