

EDITORIAL

Conflict prevention and the responsibility to protect in Africa

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This issue of *African Security Review* is dedicated to discussing the nexus between conflict prevention and the ‘responsibility to protect’ in Africa as a key contribution to the Direct Conflict Prevention (DCP) programme activities and is a collaborative effort between the DCP, based in Addis Ababa, and the Training for Peace (TfP) Programme, based in Pretoria. The objective of the Direct Conflict Prevention Programme of the Institute for Security Studies’ Addis Ababa Office is to improve the quality of direct conflict prevention strategies and approaches in Africa. The Training for Peace Programme promotes capacity building for personnel in peace operations.

The United Nations (UN) has a long-standing commitment to conflict prevention. Article 33 of the UN Charter (1945) encourages preventive action to offset disputes that are likely to endanger international peace and security. The UN’s *An agenda for peace*,

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published in 1992, argued for proactive peacemaking and humanitarian intervention. It highlighted four major areas of activity, namely preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and post-conflict peacebuilding. Preventive diplomacy, which is vital to implementing conflict prevention, comprises action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflict, and to limit the spread of conflict when it does occur. The notion of conflict prevention has gained greater currency in the discourse on peace and security since both the UN and the AU are attempting to mainstream this doctrine.

A key recommendation issued by the 2005 UN World Summit Outcome Document was a commitment to the 'responsibility to protect' people from threats to their livelihood. Article 4 of the AU Constitutive Act, 2000, endows the organisation with a right to intervene while simultaneously articulating a commitment to conflict prevention and the organisation's responsibility to protect potential victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

This issue of *African Security Review* explores themes that highlight the nexus between conflict prevention and the responsibility to protect (R2P) by means of specific case studies. The aim is to enhance our understanding of the complexity of conflict prevention strategies and the responsibility to protect.

In broad terms, the contributions in this issue focus on contextualising conflict prevention and the responsibility to protect in Africa, as well as on issues related to sovereignty, non-interference and non-indifference, and challenges and prospects for intervention to prevent and manage conflict.

It must be noted that despite the numerous conflicts in Africa and the continued vulnerability of civilians in conflicts, it is widely recognised that some progress has been made through new legal instruments and mechanisms created to address the problem. The major obstacle in making substantial progress is the lack of implementation owing to a lack of resources and at times a lack of political will. Through analysing various conflicts and assessing past and current interventions, the contributions in this issue propose possible options for improved implementation.

Africa continues to witness a scourge of violent conflict leading to the death of countless civilians, not only as a direct result of conflict itself but also from the consequences of conflict. Understanding and tackling the root causes of conflict is a long-term process that requires the commitment of leadership at the national and the regional levels, together with support from the international community.

The features by Sadiki Koko and Tim Murithi engage directly with the notion of the responsibility to protect and assess to what extent international organisations like the

AU have implemented this norm. Based on an analysis of peacekeeping in Africa, Timothy Othieno and Nhamo Samasuwo question whether African institutions possess the ability to protect. The essay by Steven Gruzd examines whether the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) can contribute to peace and security. Joshua Marks's essay explores the dilemmas faced in protecting civilians and contains an analysis of the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In his essay, which focuses on Sierra Leone, Theo Neethling assesses the prospects of sustaining peace through post-conflict reconstruction. Focusing on the West African region, Issaka Souaré discusses early warning mechanisms and explores the extent to which they prevent conflict. The commentary by Joseph Yav assess the prospects for reconciliation in the Great Lakes region, while Norbert Tóth surveys the relationship between the European Union (EU) and the AU with regard to issues of peace and security. Lauren Hutton reviews a book by scholar Greg Mills on his assessment of international assistance and intervention efforts.

It is our hope that this issue will provide a deeper insight and understanding into the challenges of addressing the root causes of conflict, existing mechanisms and new mechanisms for conflict prevention and the manner in which they relate to the responsibility to protect civilians.

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