“DEATH IN DARFUR AND GLOBAL SECURITY: CAN AFRICA HANDLE SECURITY CRISES ON ITS OWN?”

Address by

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1. Introduction and Background

In a powerful editorial on February 27, 2005 entitled “Thousands Died in Africa Yesterday”, the New York Times pointed to the apparent double standard in the developed world’s response to global disasters, both natural and man-made:

When a once-in-a century natural disaster swept away the lives of more than 100,000 poor Asians last December, the developed world opened its hearts and its checkbooks. Yet, when it comes to Africa, where hundreds of thousands of poor men, women and children die needlessly each year from preventable diseases, or unnatural disasters like civil wars, much of the developed world seems to have a heart of stone.

The multi-dimensional conflict in Darfur and the resulting deaths, (estimated between 100,000-200,000), destruction and horrific humanitarian needs of the affected population have sadly not received the global responses that are appropriate to the scale of the tragedy. Even after the United States Government has characterized the conflict as genocide, this has not resulted in prompt and adequate action to stop the tragic events and to fully address the humanitarian aspect of the affected population which, as of 1 January, 2005, reached a total of 2.4 million, including an estimated 1.84 million IDPs.

Yet, when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People’s Liberation movement was signed on 9 January, 2005, to bring to an end Africa’s largest running war, there were great hopes and expectations that durable and solid peace would spread throughout Sudan, including in Darfur. Sadly, this has not happened. Indeed, the conflict and war in Darfur, along with those in Cote d’Ivoire constituted real setbacks to the generally positive trend since 2001 in the peaceful resolution of conflicts in Africa (e.g. in Angola, Sierra Leone, DRC, Burundi and Liberia following the resignation of Charles Taylor as President and now in exile in Nigeria).
Despite the recognition that the killings and crimes committed in Darfur could only be stopped by the intervention of a strong third party force, only the African Union has stepped up to try to provide such a force. Some critics have questioned whether the mandate authorized force level of 3,000 and African Union observers or monitors are adequate. In any case, only about half of the authorized force level has in fact been deployed and these observers/monitors face enormous challenges of coping with the terrain, mobility, communications, equipment and other logistics supplies. And despite the Peace and Security Protocol having entered into force on 19 December 2003, with the establishment of the Peace and Security Council, as a standing decision-making body and mechanism for early action, and with advanced plans for the African Stand-by Force at the brigadier level, the AU has still not been able to play an effective role in peace and security matters and conflict resolution and management, especially in the Darfur region.

Hence the key questions: first, what is the relationship between conflicts such as in Darfur and its relation to global security, and secondly, can Africa handle security crises on its own?

2. The Nexus Between Peace and Development

In his address to the last African Union Summit in Abuja, Nigeria, (31 January to 1 February, 2005), Secretary-General Kofi Annan argued that, “in no continent would the implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Changes save more lives than in Africa”. He said further that the Report makes the point that “poverty and infectious diseases such as AIDS, which affects so many millions every year in Africa are among the gravest threats to international peace and security” and also that “any effort to build an effective collective security system must place prevention and the fight against poverty at its heart (hence) it calls for a more concerted action to achieve the Millennium Goals”.

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In general, the High-level Panel identified six clusters of threats which the international community must address now and in the future:

- War between States;
- Violence within States, including civil wars, large scale human rights abuses and genocide;
- Poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation;
- Nuclear, and radiological, chemical and biological weapons;
- Terrorism; and
- Transnational organized crime.

Several of these clusters of threats are relevant to the situation of wars and conflicts in Africa. In my view, the High-level Panel’s insistence that we must see the inter-connectedness of contemporary threats to security is particularly important. Issues such as terrorism, civil wars, and extreme poverty should not be treated in isolation from one another. According to the High-level Panel, “hard” and “soft” security issues should be addressed with equal seriousness. When the Panel considered the question of what constitutes a security threat, it was confronted with the political fact of diverse threat perceptions among leaders around the world. The government and/or people of the Central African Republic, for instance, are not as likely as those of the United States to consider weapons of mass destruction a palpable threat. But poverty and the associated limitations on health and life possibilities are certainly uppermost concerns for all governments and citizens alike. Poverty can, for example, lower life expectancy as dramatically as war.

Moreover, development is an “indispensable foundation” of collective security, and the eradication of poverty and disease is an essential part of the effort to achieve a safer world. Industrialized powers worried about terrorism, for instance, should also be concerned about narrowing the gap between rich and poor. Although poverty is not direct cause of terrorism in any simple, straightforward way, factors such as minimal economic
opportunity and a lack of strong governing institutions create conditions which can be more readily exploited by those seeking to recruit new members to terrorist causes.

The High-level Panel’s Report contains many proposals to prevent conflict and other global threats, with development as the first line of response. Development, it says, “serves multiple functions. It helps combat the poverty, disease and environmental degradation that kill millions and threaten human security. It is vital in helping states prevent or reverse the erosion of State capacity, a key to meeting almost every class of threat. And it is part of a long-term strategy for preventing civil war, and for addressing the environments in which both terrorism and organized crime flourish”. The Panel members criticized the “shockingly late and shamefully ill-resourced” global response to HIV/AIDS, and called on the international community to rebuild global public health capacity, disease monitoring and response, as a defense against both naturally occurring epidemics and against terrorists using biological weapons.

The Panel’s Report also addresses issues that arise during and after violent conflict, including the capacities needed for peace enforcement, peacekeeping, peace-building and the protection of civilians. It finds the global supply of available peacekeepers dangerously low, and calls on countries to be readier to provide and support military deployments. Developed States especially, it says, should do more to have suitable contingents ready for peace operations, and provide the financial and logistical resources to mobilize them when and where they are needed.

The Panel’s Recommendation that a new UN body be created, Peace Building Commission is therefore appropriate and timely. The Commission would identify countries at risk of violent conflict, organize preventive efforts and “Marshall and sustain the efforts of the international community in Post-conflict peace building”. If implemented, this recommendation would involve the Security Council, ECOSOC, developed countries and national authorities in filling a crucial gap by giving the necessary attention to countries about to descend into conflict and those emerging from one.
Another potentially positive and clearly relevant recommendation by the Panel concerns collaboration between the UN and regional organizations such as the African Union. The Panel proposed a series of principles that would govern partnership between the two in a more structured manner. For example, the recommendation that assessed contributions be used to support those peace operations undertaken under the authority of the Security Council and on its behalf would be particularly helpful to the AU in enhancing its peacekeeping operations.


The Security Council has encouraged and also gave political support for the African Union to take the lead in addressing the situation in Darfur. On its part, the African Union has pursued a two-track approach: the promotion of a political settlement within the framework of the Inter-Sudanese Peace Talks in Abuja (Nigeria) and the deployment of the African Mission in Sudan (AMIS). In this regard, the African Union Summit in Abuja, Nigeria, adopted a resolution demanding the resumption of the Inter-Sudanese Peace Talks and requests the Movements to be represented thereto by their highest leaders.

The African Union leaders also condemned the gross and repeated violations of the Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement of 8 April, 2004 and the Abuja Protocols of 9 November, 2004. They further condemned the continued attacks against innocent civilians, as well as against humanitarian workers. In fact, the Sudanese Government was not spared by the African leaders in the call to stop the bombings of civilian populations. The AU Summit also established a High-level Committee to work with President Obasanjo (Nigeria), Chairman of the African Union, to help push the peace process in Darfur. The Committee consists of Gabon, Egypt, Libya, Chad and Nigeria.
Finally, the African leaders endorsed the decision made earlier by the Peace and Security Council demanding that the parties fully implement the decisions of the 6 Meeting of the Joint Commission held in N’djamena, Chad, on 3-4 January, 2005. And in this regard, the Government of the Sudan was urged immediately to withdraw its forces to the positions they held before the military offensive launched on 8 December 2004 in order to create conditions conducive to the resumption of the political negotiations, disarm the Janjaweed/Armed militias and inform AMIS of the concrete steps taken in this regard. In this respect, the Peace and Security Council welcome the pledge by the Government of Sudan to withdraw its forces to their pre-8 December position. In addition, the movements should immediately communicate to the Chairman of the Ceasefire Commission the locations of their forces and put an end to attacks against commercial activities and government infrastructures, including police stations.

In concrete terms, the African Union has deployed almost fifteen hundred Monitors/observers to Darfur. And the reports coming in testify to the professionalism of the African Monitors/observers. Indeed, in the places where they have been stationed, there have been fewer reports of human rights abuses. The logic of this situation is that the rest of the force authorized by the AU should rapidly be deployed and that the number of such Monitors should be substantially increased. Unfortunately, the African Union lacks the capacity for rapid airlifting and meeting the other logistic needs of observers and the financial resources to maintain them in Darfur, over a long period. Meanwhile, the deaths and sufferings continue.

Hence pressure is mounting on the United Nations Security Council to assume its responsibilities. On this, Article 24 of the UN charter is very clear: the Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security). It did not exempt Africa or any other region from the responsibility of the Security Council in the area of international peace and security. In reality, of course, the Security Council has shown in greater readdress to assume its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, when the Africans have put boots on the ground in places like Burundi, Cote d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Darfur, trying to keep the
peace, saving lives and enhancing their peoples desires for peace. A further, and more sobering, reality is that these efforts on the part of the Africans to end wars and conflicts are not sufficient to keep the pace as was demonstrated sadly in these conflicts and now very glaringly in Darfur. In response to growing pressure on the Security Council to act, consideration is being given to a draft resolution which should lead to more concrete measures to address the crises in Darfur, including possible deployment of a more robust peace operation with UN and AU collaboration in one form or another.

4. Conclusion

While the humanitarian operations have improved despite the several obstacles and limitation (due largely to lack of or poor security), the death and destruction in Darfur have continued. The Africans are doing their best to promote a political solution to the conflict and to provide protection and security to the affected population, but these efforts falls far short of the need. The question then in my view is not whether Africa can handle security crises on its own but whether Africa should be left on its own to try to do so.

In this regard, the International Convention Against Genocide places the responsibility to act on the shoulders of the major powers. In 1994, when the Security Council failed to act to stop the genocide in Rwanda, the world said “Never Again”. This refrain sound hollow in the face of what the United States has characterized as genocide in Western Darfur. Moreover, in an increasingly globalised and post 9/11 world, a threat to one has to be regarded as a threat to all and we must recognize that peace and Security have become indivisible.

I thank you for listening.