

Africa-Canada Forum - Colloquium 2010

Issues of Peace and Security in Africa: A Civil Society Agenda for Democratization

Report

Over 35 participants met over two days to deepen their knowledge of the complex challenges facing the continent in its search for sustainable peace. With colleagues from Africa, the Diaspora and academia, we discussed ways forward for the Africa-Canada Forum (ACF) advocacy work and members' partnership relations in support of peace and development in Africa, taking account of the context of growing challenges for Canadian civil society organizations to sustain their work with African counterparts. The agenda was built to first allow for an overview of the African challenges in the long journey to sustainable peace. Then we looked at the complexity of peace building, focusing on the cases of the Great Lakes region and Sudan. We explored the dynamics of conflict, looking in particular at the link between extractive resources, human rights and local development, and the role of women and girls in building peace. Finally, we discussed ways to better engage with our African counterparts in mutual solidarity based on the outcomes of the Open Forum for CSOs Development effectiveness process.

The ACF Briefing Note "Promoting Sustainable and Inclusive Peace in Africa" is available at http://www.ccic.ca/files/en/working_groups/acf_2010-04_africa_matters_note_6_e.pdf

African Challenges to Sustainable Peace

Hakima Abbas, Deputy Director of Fahamu, discussed the contemporary challenges for Africa's self-determination and the centrality of the continent's social movements in 'entrenching democratic principles'. 50 years since decolonization have not yet translated into independence and people are organizing throughout Africa to claim their aspirations for democracy.

New forms of colonization are taking place through an ever-increasing militarization of the continent, with the expansion of US 'counter-terrorism' programs and Africom, in collusion with repressive and short-sighted elites in many African states, and through land grabbing, as well as natural resources including biodiversity, as global resources shrink due to the effects of climate change and environmental degradation.

Violence still prevails in many ways: through war, sexual aggressions and pillage, corruption of 'security' services, ongoing economic oppression, exacerbation of 'popular' fundamentalisms, and the maintenance of patriarchal dominance. Repression by the state apparatus, our own fundamentalisms; and the interest of capital, multi-national corporations and foreign governments that seek to exploit the resources of Africa, are main obstacles to peace and democracy.

John Siebert, Executive Director of Ploughshares Project explained that Canada's overarching policy on security is based on its June 2008 "Canada's First Defence Strategy". According to this strategy, credible military power is the most important element accompanying diplomacy to address new security challenges: failing states, civil wars, and global terrorism. This means the Defence budget should expand "from approximately \$18 billion in 2008-09, to over \$30 billion by 2027-28". This is despite the fact that the world security situation is better today. Focus countries for Canada include, in order of priority, Afghanistan, Haiti, Israel/Palestine/Lebanon, and Sudan/Uganda/DRC.

The Complexity of Peace Building in the Great Lakes region

Marc Kapend, spokesperson of the Union of the Congolese Diaspora of Canada, addressed the roles and responsibilities of the international community in fostering a culture of peace and democratization in the Great Lakes countries. In that area, the DRC plays a key strategic role at the global level given its immense reserves of natural resources, including minerals -cobalt, copper, uranium, gold, oil, diamonds and coltan- forest and water. Despite this wealth, 75% of the population lives with less than \$1 a day, and less than 20% of the people have access to water and electricity.

This abundance of natural resources gives rise to a fierce competition between local actors and neighbouring countries armed groups. The international community also carries a responsibility through the maintenance of a global economic order that disadvantages Southern countries to the benefit of multinational companies and Northern economic interests. It does also play a key role in the maintenance of oppression and corruption in poor countries, weakening the State through its focus on good governance and political institutions while not addressing the factors that contribute to the corruption of governments and elites. Canadian mining companies are very present in the DRC, and they have played a key role in the formation of the transition government and the electoral process that led to the election of Kabila. They continue to support the strengthening of his autocratic power.

Sustainable peace and development lie in the renewal of democracy through a double collusion: between the State and civil society and between the State and universal institutions. It also supposes that we contribute to moralizing the multinationals. Bill C-300 is a good first step in this direction.

Gaëlle Breton Le Goff, associate professor at UQAM, spoke about the horrible reality of the violence against women in the DRC. Her analysis draws from the UN Report **DRC: Mapping human rights violations 1993-2003**. The war over women's body is a direct consequence of the struggle over the resources. With her "cri du coeur" she calls upon the international community governments to act now. It may be time for a "Kimberley type" process for the DRC and the Great Lakes area. The report can be accessed at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AfricaRegion/Pages/RDCProjetMapping.aspx>.

Dynamics of Conflicts:

Both the presentations from **Nadim Kara** with Partnership Africa-Canada on extractives resources, human rights and local development, and **Netsai Mushonga** with the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe on the role of women and girls in building peace further highlighted the need to address the link between extractives resources and conflict and the importance of women's and girls' role in building a culture of peace and democracy.

The Complexity of Peace Building in Sudan

Justin Laku, from the African Diaspora Association, presented a portrait of the complex situation in Sudan at the eve of a referendum that will determine the future of the country with the possible separation of South.

According to **John Lewis**, from Kairos, we need to start by reframing the arguments about the important role civil society plays in peace and democracy building. Canada's commitment has been financial through the UN system but has not provided a strong political support nor has it been very supportive of

civil society. Canada has given too little attention to the democratization process in Sudan. While the Department of Foreign Affairs has contributed \$800 million in emergency assistance and peace keeping, it has played no role in monitoring and accompanying the electoral process, and no role in governance and diplomacy. In general, the West has not been critical of the elections because of the absence of open violence. In Sudan there is a growing lack of trust of the international community.

With the up-coming referendum, insufficient attention is being paid to the impact a separation would have on the North: the uncertain and ambiguous status of the 2,5 millions Southerners living in camps around Khartoum and the backlash they could experience; the effect on women and women's organization of the radicalization of the Islamic State; and the way oil revenues will be separated.

Many issues remain with regard to the referendum, beginning with the date itself – it has to happen on January 9, 2011, and the question of the 60% of participation. A main question for us is how do we help the Sudanese Diaspora vote in Canada.

Engaging with Africa: Strengthening our Capacity to Effect Change

Paul Okumu, Coordinator of the Africa CSO Platform on Principled Partnership, and **Brian Tomlinson** from CCIC, shared the outcomes of the Open Forum on CSOs Development Effectiveness process. In particular, they spoke about the principles for CSO Development effectiveness agreed upon during the General Assembly held in Istanbul at the end of September. These principles will form the foundation for a final International Framework on CSO Development Effectiveness that will be adopted at a second Global Assembly in 2011. These eight principles will guide the work and practices of civil society organizations in both peaceful and conflict situations, in different areas of work from grassroots to policy advocacy, and in a continuum from humanitarian emergencies to long-term development. The principles include among others: respect and promote human rights and social justice; embody gender equality and equity while promoting women's and girls rights; and focus on people's empowerment, democratic ownership and participation. For the full list of principles and more information consult the Open Forum web site at <http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/?lang=en>.

The principles provide a framework to deepen discussions with CSO and governments, and a tool to improve our practice to be accountable as development actors. The challenge lies in their application in our reality as development actors, and in the enabling conditions provided by governments of host countries and donors for the principles to be effective. The context in which CSOs operate globally has changed as a consequence of aid reform launched by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA).

In Canada it is hard to understand if there is a CIDA strategy. Despite the many announcements of past years it remains to be seen how they will translate into real shifts within CIDA. For example, how will the decline of support for Africa take shape given the importance of the sector priorities for Africa? In any case, they have a profound effect on a day-to-day basis. Many of the changes at CIDA relate to the Open Forum agenda: with the new "Partnerships with Canadians", CIDA confirms it has shifted from institutional programmatic support to competitive mechanism and towards a project-orientated support – back to the eighties- because the search for direct results. There is no information available on the rules of this mechanism and the principles for assessing the winners and losers in competition are confusing. The notion of development effectiveness is a distortion from what appears in the Accra Agenda for Action.

The issue of democratic space is fundamental; therefore the need to address the legal environment in which CSOs can operate. In Africa, Ethiopia as led the way for the tightening of democratic space for CSOs. Now 33 countries have followed the example. Engaging with social movements in Africa, mutual

solidarity and collective action are ways to strengthen our capacities to effect change. To find more about the increasing shrinking space for development and democracy work across Africa, visit the ACPPPP web site at <http://www.africacsoplatform.org/index.html>.

Challenges and Opportunities for CSOs policy work on peace and security issues

There is a need to better understand **Canada's security policy** vis-a-vis Africa in order to define how we can be effective in our interventions. We need to assess how NGOs relate to the frameworks that dominate current government's definition of security. It includes defining our own framework to replace the "war on terror", and "failed and fragile States" discourses. We need to address the false dichotomy of security: it "us" or "out" (presented as mutually exclusive); and the distortion of the notion of "security" to come back to a notion of human security.

Gender-based violence, violence against women, violence and conflicts: all the same issue: the war is waged on women's bodies. We need to work to institute the rule of law, and increase the power of women (leadership) at all levels, including the community. We also need to put in contrast policy priorities and real issues: i.e. Maternal and Child Health, Youth and Children versus the massacres of women and the violence against women in Congo (and elsewhere), and child soldiers in a number of countries, etc. Including Canadian development agencies as actors would enrich the debate and bring in the experience, especially as 2012 is the deadline for the **small arms treaty** finalization.

The just released **Canadian action plan on a group of UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security** (1325, 1820, 1888, and 1889) may be a good starting point to anchor the forum's work on women, peace and security.

We also need to take a critical **look at our practices**. In many ways, Western leadership is taking over in key issues with the result of actually disempowering Africans, and marginalizing them from the management of their own issues and solutions. The example was given of well-funded programs working with victims of violence against women in the Congo, being managed and organized by expatriates with strategies for exit, transfer of knowledge, training or funding. This means once the programs terminate, they will not have led to long-term solutions and Congolese women will be facing the same problems as before.

Social movements in Africa are not one "block": they come from a concerted effort of many types of organizations that have very diverse agenda and ideological assumptions, they are inclusive, and have different tactics and strategies. We should be aware of these differences. Their strengths are in their capacity to link and develop networks.

Many tools are available: **Regional instruments** such as the AU protocol on Women, and **African initiatives** like the "Gender is on my agenda" campaign in Zimbabwe, and the Kenya People's Parliament are potentially powerful tools that should be supported, and encouraged. But we still need to be aware that these might be two-edge sword; African instruments are also often used as to gather financial inputs rather than as tools for serious implementation. The AU has now a Committee on extractives, also managed by the representative who is the Special Rapporteur on Women Affairs in Africa, an ally for CSOs in Canada.

The **use of technology** can be a powerful instrument for mobilization and education purposes, for example to spread the word about massacres happening daily to women around the world; and on the consequences/impacts of legal framework instruments.

Ways Forward

ACF members agreed to find ways to better share our own experience, challenges and situation here with our partners, and ask for their support to our own reflection. In light of the challenges to democracy facing civil society globally, and most particularly in Canada and in Africa, we need to define our togetherness to take and voice public positions.

With regard to issues of peace and security in Africa, and the role of civil society organizations, it was suggested to better use the media and public engagement activities. This could take the form of a series of Op eds on peace and security in Africa using new language and frameworks to clarify our message.

Participants agreed it is important to choose carefully our wording to describe the reality:

“impoverishment” versus “poverty”, to illustrate the growing contrast between the immense wealth accumulated by a few and the extreme deprivation that remains, in many African countries. Talking about ‘impoverishment’ and how it happens would help reveal the power dynamics at play and the agency of people working to change the system. We also need to ensure that men are not marginalized and excluded from our conversations and strategy development on making change to address violence against women, gender based and sexual violence.

The Africa-Canada Forum should work towards strengthening its links with universities in Canada, with African networks and connections and engage selectively with African research organizations, universities, etc.

Note: Some of the presentations are available at http://www.ccic.ca/working_groups/acf_e.php