

**THE AFRICAN UNION:  
Forward March or About Face-Turn?**

Amadu Sesay

Claude Ake Memorial Papers No. 3

Department of Peace and Conflict Research  
Uppsala University  
&  
Nordic Africa Institute  
Uppsala

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ISSN 1654-7489

ISBN 978-91-506-1990-4

Printed in Sweden by Universitetstryckeriet, Uppsala 2008

Distributed by the Department of Peace and Conflict Research (DPCR), Uppsala University & the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), Uppsala

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# The Claude Ake Visiting Chair

A Claude Ake Visiting Chair was set up in 2003 at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research (DPCR), Uppsala University, in collaboration with the Nordic Africa Institute (NAI), also in Uppsala. Funding was provided from the Swedish Government, through the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The Chair was established to honour the memory of Professor Claude Ake, distinguished scholar, philosopher, teacher, activist and humanist, tragically killed in a plane crash near Lagos, Nigeria, in 1996.

The holders of the Claude Ake Visiting Chair give, at the end of their stay in Uppsala, a public lecture, entitled the 'Claude Ake Memorial Lecture.' While the title, thematic and content of the lecture is up to the holder, the assumption is that the topic of the lecture shall, in a general sense, relate the work of the holder to the work of Claude Ake, for example in terms of themes or issues covered, or in terms of theoretical or normative points of departure. The lecture is based on a paper prepared and made available to seminar participants and lecture audience in advance of the lecture.

In 2006 the DPCR and NAI decided to publish the papers that constitute the basis for the Memorial Lectures. An occasional paper series was created, entitled the Claude Ake Memorial Paper Series (CAMP). The papers are edited at the DPCR and published jointly by the DPCR and the NAI. In the future, the CAMP series may be opened up to contributions also from other scholars than the holders of the Visiting Chair.

The Claude Ake Visiting Chair is open to prominent social scientists—established and internationally recognized senior scholars with professorial competence—working at African universities on problems related to war, peace, conflict resolution, security, state building and development on the African continent. The Visiting Chair is particularly intended for scholars who, like Claude Ake, combine a profound commitment to scholarship with a strong advocacy for social justice.

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Finally, it should be noted that the texts published in the Claude Ake Memorial Papers series are the responsibility of the author alone—their publication does not reflect any positioning on the issues at hand on the part of either the Department of Peace and Conflict Research or the Nordic Africa Institute.

*Uppsala*  
*March 2008*

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## Editor's Foreword

This issue of the CAMP series contains the text version of the 2005 Claude Ake Memorial Lecture, delivered by Professor Amadu Sesay, who became the third holder of the Claude Ake Chair at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research in Uppsala. Having joined the Department of International Relations in Obafemi Awolowo University in 1978, Professor Sesay headed that department during the period 2000-2006. He has since been appointed the official ECOWAS Historian, and in that capacity he is currently commissioned to write a book on the ECOMOG military operations in West Africa.

In the paper, Professor Sesay raises the question of whether or not the African Union (AU) marks a departure from its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). And, if so, in what sense and with what prospects of success? Focus is on peace and security, including peacekeeping and the prevention, management and resolution of armed conflict. Scholars and practitioners involved with the theory or practice of regional or continental cooperation—in peace and security as well as in economic matters of trade, growth and development—tend to agree about some prerequisites, the existence of which will enhance the prospects for successful inter-state cooperation: *a)* shared principles and priorities; *b)* capabilities in the form of institutions and financial resources; *c)* norms and values guiding the interaction between and within concerned states, regimes and societies; *d)* a degree of domestic consolidation, e.g., relatively stable state units; and *e)* a combination of top-down and bottom-up dynamics. While a continental framework must be construed at the level of government leaders, there are no automatic 'trickle down' effects to market actors, identity-based or issue-oriented interest groups in civil society, or to citizens. Thus, the interests of intra- and inter-state coalitions of forces at the sub-national level have much leverage on the prospects for regional/continental cooperation.

In analyzing the African Union's prospects to improve the peace and security situation in Africa, Professor Sesay relates to these five prerequisites. On *principles and priorities*, he notes a degree of continuity from the OAU to the AU. Yet, he also identifies important departures from the past, such as the AU focus on human and people's rights, promotion of democracy, good governance and popular participation, an enhanced role for civil society forces, and new provisos for the principle of non-interference. On *resources*, he is less optimistic, noting that the set-up of the AU is, by and large, mimicking organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union, without a solid basis in Africa's historical and current experience, suggesting that form has taken precedence over substance, political correctness over economic feasibility. He points to the implications of insufficient economic

funds to mount viable operations in the area of peace and security. On *norms*, he finds more reason for optimism. While previously emphasizing the military dimension of national security, African leaders increasingly profess allegiance to the view that the security of a state is linked both to the security of individuals and communities within the state, and to the security of neighbours. On the rhetorical level, political leaders have revised their views on who should be made secure—and from what—in order to achieve overall security. Yet, norms and ambitions have been known to collapse, as leaders come to equate national security with regime security. Will new norms be able to find their way out of the realm of rhetoric and into the real world? Sesay argues that a measure of cautious optimism is warranted. One effect on Africa of the end of the Cold War is that it is now more important *how* a country is being run, than by *whom*. This emphasis on performance comes from both within and outside. Also, many leaders—not least in some of Africa’s more powerful ‘lead’ states—see that the continent’s many crises can only be challenged through a collective effort. There is additional hope in the fact that new leaders are emerging; leaders whose political perspectives and norms have been shaped more by post-independence experiences and recent events, than by colonialism and independence struggles.

Professor Sesay underlines that the unresolved national question challenges such a positive development. How can weak states generate the resources necessary to create domestic cohesion on matters of political power and economic distribution; and at the same time pursue regional or continental goals? A related problem is if leaders can adhere to norms that—when translated into policies—will mean drastic reforms of the state, its institutions and forms of interaction with society and citizens. Sesay implies that, while domestic consolidation is normally a prerequisite for inter-state undertakings, cooperative measures at the level of the continent in win-win areas may facilitate consolidation at home. With sober caveats, Professor Sesay concludes that with all its imperfections and shortcomings the AU represents an available and potentially useful option, so—given external support informed by longer-term interests—Africans could do well from trying to make it work.

*Uppsala*  
*March 2008*

*Thomas Ohlson*  
*CAMP Series Editor*

# THE AFRICAN UNION: Forward March or About Face-Turn?

Amadu Sesay

## 1. Introduction

“...an occasion for hope. Let us be careful not to mistake hope for achievement.”<sup>1</sup>

“African Union or African Utopia?”<sup>2</sup>

“...the organization is like a house under construction, with no roof yet: people are asking us for protection from the rain and we are not yet ready.”<sup>3</sup>

The African Union (AU) invokes different reactions from different individuals. It is significant, however, that most of the critical and even pessimistic comments about the new organization tend to come from Africans. This is perhaps not unconnected with the disappointment with the AU's predecessor, the Organization of African Union (OAU). Most Africans would like to see their continent take its place as a respected member of the comity of nations. At the risk of being called an Afro-pessimist, I would like to begin by asking the rhetorical question: What is in a name? Does a change in the name of an organization, place or even human being make a significant difference in the experience or life of that organization, place or human being? For example, what difference would it make if an individual were to simply change names while all other important attributes and fortune remain intact?

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<sup>1</sup> Kofi Annan, reacting to the Durban Summit that formally set up the African Union, cited in Nicole Itano, 'Africa Takes a Cue from the EU', *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 July 2002, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Kamara, in his piece titled: 'African Union or African Utopia', in reaction to the Sirte Summit in Libya, which paved way for the dissolution of the OAU and the creation of the AU. He added: “[e]ven if one is to take seriously this dreamy concept, there are a number of unanswered questions: what are the political, technical and structural guarantees that the ‘Union’ will work where the OAU failed?” *Perspective* (Liberia), March 9, 2001. Also available at <http://www.theperspective.org/utopia.html>, accessed on 12/4/2005.

<sup>3</sup> AU official that wanted anonymity, quoted by Nancy Soderberg, in 'African Union Moves a Quiet Revolution,' *Christian Science Monitor*, February 7, 2005, p. 9, also available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0207/p09so2-coop.html>, accessed 12 April, 2005.

Put more directly, does a change in the name of an organization—whose membership remains identical with that of its predecessor—significantly alter its orientation, mission mandate, philosophy, resource base and the will to make a difference? These questions point to the dominant perspectives on the new organization. On the one hand, are those who would like to argue that the African Union is simply the OAU without the O, and that it is simply ‘new wine in old bottles.’ Most of the citations above tend to support this position. On the other hand, some observers do believe that the AU marks a significant departure in several significant ways from the defunct OAU.

Finally, there are those who would argue that, in creating the AU, African leaders were merely reacting to the dramatic changes that had taken place in the international system since the end of communism in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and with that, the cessation of ideological hostilities between the two superpowers (Ake 1992, 1996). Consequently, the principles and institutions of the AU only reflect the changed global environment in which the new organization has to operate. From such a perspective, the important factor in assessing the Organization becomes not the AU itself, as important as that may be, but the ‘new’ global socio-economic and political environments in which it has had to operate since its creation in 2002. In other words, whatever the AU has done or is doing now that seems to set it apart from the OAU, is intricately tied up with the changing global priorities, goals and agendas which have compelled it and similar actors in the international system to amend their priorities, focus, and ways of operation. From such a perspective, it is right to argue that all three points of view expressed above contain some measure of truth.

There are those who would see these preliminary remarks as bordering on what critics describe as Afro-pessimism and they may not be entirely acceptable to many analysts, practitioners, policy makers or the casual observer, who are wont to argue that the AU is indeed, ‘new wine in new bottles.’ For example, according to Nancy Soderberg, in creating the African Union,

...Africans are beginning to take responsibility for the continent’s many conflicts. With the right international assistance, the effort can tip the balance from war to peace (Soderberg 2005: 9).

The Afro-optimist would also add that the African continent faces a plethora of challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and that it has risen up to those challenges in creating the AU. But if the challenges before the AU are different from those of the OAU, has the AU responded to them in effective ways? The questions raised in this paper are not entirely impertinent or out of place, for each of them has some measure of merit. They also provide an opportunity to have a balanced discussion on the African Union, an organization on whose shoul-

ders, arguably, also rests the future of the African continent and its people. It is therefore important to have a frank and open discourse on the AU for that is the only way that we can identify its shortcomings and proffer suggestions that would enhance its performance and relevance not only to Africa but also to the rest of the world. Be that as it may, it is clear from Soderberg's statement that Africa, even with the AU, cannot go it alone if it hopes to succeed in any important sphere of the developmental endeavours tasking the continent, including not least, conflict management and prevention.

Of course, the AU is to some extent 'work in progress', dynamic and unraveling. Thus, raising so many critical issues about the organization no matter how unpalatable they may be to some, is deliberately intended to take the discussion to a level that would enable all of us to critically assess the structure, mandates and performance of the continental organization and by implication, its members, in the light of the diverse and unprecedented changes that are taking place in Africa and in the international system. I am also convinced that finding apposite answers to these central questions would be informed by a close examination of some of the historical antecedents of the AU, its contemporary experiences, fortunes and misfortunes on the one hand, and those of its members and the African continent at large, on the other. The rest of this paper is divided into five sections. The next section looks briefly at the historical background to the AU, while section 3 is on the impact of the end of the Cold War on Africa and the continent's responses, including the formation of the African Union. The fourth section critically examines the objectives and principles of the AU in order to find out the extent to which they represent continuity or change between the AU and the OAU. Section five is on the AU's responses to the challenges of the 'new world order' environment. Finally, the conclusion examines the prospects of the AU in the light of the challenges of the global system.

## 2. Brief Historical Background to the African Union

It is incontrovertible that the African Union is a continuation of the major discourse that started in the penultimate days of colonialism in the continent of Africa, and which focused on both the nature and character of future relations between the newly independent African States in the context of the prevailing international system at the time. Put differently, the discourse centred on finding appropriate and effective responses to the myriad security and developmental dilemmas then confronting the newly independent states and their continent, which though solidly rooted within the broader Pan-African Movement, was moderated by developments in the dominant Cold War international system at the time, especially the East-West ideological

rivalry, in which the AU's predecessor, the OAU, was founded.<sup>4</sup> Two broad, conflicting and seemingly uncompromising schools of thought emerged within the Pan-African Movement and in the discourse of the late 1950s and early 1960s. On the one hand, what was loosely called the 'radical school', or the Casablanca group, whose defining feature was its advocacy of immediate political union among the newly independent African states, to form the United States of Africa. Its chief apostle was Kwame Nkrumah, then president of Ghana. On the other extreme was the 'moderate' or 'conservative' school, also known variously as the 'Monrovia', 'Brazzaville' or 'Lagos' group. This group of states was totally opposed both to the idea and the implications of immediate political union. They instead advocated, for want of a better word, a functionalist approach: close cooperation in non-controversial areas in the social, economic, cultural, health and educational spheres, among others. The chief advocates of this approach were the President of Liberia, William Tubman and Nigeria's Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (Sesay et al. 1984).

In spite of this obvious ideological divide, a number of crucial issues united all Pan-Africanists; the imperative of ending colonial rule on the continent, regulating the relations between and among the independent states, and putting in place an organization that could act as the main vehicle for the achievement of these broad goals. Finally, all the new states were convinced that having a pan-African organization would provide a veritable platform for the new African states' participation in the global system. Thus, on May 25 1963, they reached a compromise and formed the OAU and adopted its Charter in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital (OAU 1963). However, long before its creation, it was clear that events in the international system, dominated by the ideological rivalry between the USA and the Soviet Union, would have significant consequences for the pan-African body, given the ideological fissures within the pan-African movement itself at the time.

Not surprisingly, the institutions of the OAU, its mission and mandate, as well as its performance, were conditioned to a large extent by the nature and character of the prevailing regional and international systems in which it was founded and in which it had to operate. An understanding of this fundamental point is essential if we are to also understand the circumstances that led to its demise and subsequent replacement in 2002, by the African Union at the Durban summit of African Heads of State and Government in South Africa. The objectives of the OAU are located in Article II of its Charter, and total five in all. But for the purpose of this paper, only three are pertinent: first, *to*

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<sup>4</sup> There is a rich literature on Pan-Africanism and the OAU. See, for example, Amate (1986), Cervenka (1977), Geiss (1974), Legum (1965), Sesay et al., (1984), Thompson (1969) and Wolfers (1976).

*promote the unity and solidarity of the African continent*, and it was to keep the search for unity among the independent states alive in spite of the divisive intrusions of Cold War politics into their affairs individually or collectively at the time. It was also important as a confidence-building measure aimed at minimizing the attempts by the superpowers to manipulate African states and avoid debilitating inter-state conflicts as a result of the ideological differences of African states.

The second objective was *defense of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of members*. Given the fragility of the new states and the arbitrary manner in which African territories were carved out by the erstwhile colonial powers among themselves, and the division of ethnic groups between and among the new states, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one another was designed to prevent territorial and ethnic irredentism, subversion and neo-imperialist designs on the part of bigger and more powerful African states against their weaker neighbours. By placing so much premium on the sovereign equality of members, the African countries were not only echoing the prevailing mood in the leading East-West system, they also wanted to preempt the meddling tendencies of the great powers in African national or inter-state affairs. After all, that was one of the early and bitter lessons learned from the collapse of the Congo weeks after its independence in 1960.

The final objective was the determination of the new organization to *eradicate all forms of colonialism from Africa*. This clause is important because the independent states believed, rightly or wrongly at the time, that they would not be secure unless all colonial territories in the continent were liberated. Thus, the deliberate destabilization measures carried out by colonial Portugal, Rhodesia and apartheid South Africa only confirmed their fears that the newly independent states would not be safe until all minority white supremacist regimes were eliminated on the continent. Accordingly, concerted efforts led by the OAU, were made to terminate the obnoxious regimes either peacefully or through the use of force with the help of the international community.

The objectives of the OAU also invariably influenced its principles. The relevant ones for our purpose, are: *i)* non-interference in the internal affairs of members, *ii)* respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of members and finally *iii)* condemnation of all forms of subversion against members of the OAU. Together, the objectives and principles of the OAU had great influence on the nature, structure and powers of its major institutions: *a)* the Assembly of African Heads of States, *b)* the Council of Ministers, *c)* the Secretariat and *d)* the Commission of Mediation, Arbitration and Conciliation. It is now a moot point whether or not the OAU succeeded in achieving all its objectives. What is not debatable, though, is that African

leaders perceived the Organization as redundant after the end of the Cold War and they did not hesitate to replace it with another pan-African body, the African Union, as we shall point out presently. The next section is devoted to this phenomenon.

### 3. The End of the Cold War and the Emergence of the African Union

The end of the Cold War took Africa, like other regions, completely by surprise. African states and the OAU were ill prepared for the unprecedented consequences of the end of the rivalry between East and West. Nonetheless, there is a compelling urge to ask whether the AU was inevitable in 2002? Why did African leaders not simply reform the OAU to reflect the new concerns of Africa and the international system after the end of the Cold War? Several vital reasons have been suggested for the dissolution of the OAU in 2002. One of them, ironically, was the OAU's perceived immense success in certain key areas of Pan-African goals and diplomacy especially the end of colonialism in the continent. By 2002 when the AU was created, only Western Sahara had not formally gained independence, although it was a member of the OAU. Again by the early 1990s, even the most stubborn case in the third wave of decolonization apartheid in South Africa, had been resolved 'peacefully' with the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 (on the impact of the end of the Cold War on Africa, see Akinrinade & Sesay 1998, UNRISD 1995, Wallensteen & Axell 1993, Wallensteen 2002, WME 1993).

Second, and contrary to the dire predictions of local and international skeptics, African states had managed their relations relatively well, for nearly four decades. There were inter-state conflicts of course, but not on the scale that had been anticipated because the new states were able to fashion out a mutually acceptable code of conduct among them. Apart from the wide acceptance of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, the Cairo Deceleration of 1964 literally froze inherited boundaries, thereby drastically reducing the destabilizing effects of substantial redrawing of the inherited territorial demarcations.<sup>5</sup>

Third, at the United Nations, the African countries—under the aegis of the OAU, the Non-Aligned Movement, NAM, and other multilateral political groupings—also strongly supported the non-use of force in inter-state rela-

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<sup>5</sup> Exceptions include the Algeria/Morocco war soon after the formation of the OAU, the long-standing dispute between Morocco and POLISARIO in Western Sahara, the Mali-Burkina Faso border war of 1985, the Ethiopia-Eritrea war and the border war between Nigeria and Cameroon over the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula, among others. Interestingly, the latter problem was referred to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which ruled in favour of Cameroon. Nigeria accepted to withdraw from the territory.

tions. Finally, the OAU Charter unreservedly condemned all forms of subversion and assassination by member states. The injunction significantly reduced the urge by African leaders to promote policies of destabilization in perceived hostile neighbours. Thus, and from such an angle, it is arguably so that African countries started the 'war on terror' long before it became the buzzword in international politics after September 11, 2001.

The sudden collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union spawned a number of significant events that the OAU was ill equipped to handle effectively. First, the event dramatically reduced the continent's strategic importance. This is because the termination of the Cold War witnessed the end of the political protégé system whereby weak, corrupt, dictatorial and potentially unstable states were sustained by the great powers in return for uncritical political support. Expectedly, political dissidents who could not openly challenge sit-tight leaders and presidents for life for many decades, suddenly regained their vitality and started probing 'constituted' authority in their various domains, only to discover that they were weak and on their own without the protective shield once provided by Great Powers (Charters 1994). African leaders once described by some great powers as close, tried and tested friends of western countries suddenly became victims of the political turmoil that erupted in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the great powers' own back yard. Together with cuts in regular budget subsidies, many African leaders discovered that they no longer had resources either to co-opt opponents or prop their tottering regimes and states. The result was unprecedented political turmoil in many African states. Thus, contrary to expectations that the fall of the Berlin Wall in October 1989 would usher in a global peace dividend, for Africa, the euphoria was rather short lived as autocratic regimes literally had no place to hide as states came crashing under the weight of insurgencies that were equally determined to replace them by every means at their disposal: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Rwanda, etc. (Akinrinade & Sesay 1998).

Africa's post-Cold War conflicts, or what is also called 'post-modern' and 'network wars' are distinct from their Cold War precursors in several significant ways (UNRISD 1995). First, they were mainly within states, and started by men leading informal armies, so-called 'warlords'. Second, they were protracted and not easily amenable to resolution using the existing conflict management mechanisms of the OAU. Third, they involved the use of large numbers of children, the so-called 'child' or 'baby' soldiers, many of whom became notorious for heinous war crimes and atrocities such as rape, kidnapping, cannibalism, crude amputations, etc. Fourth, and quite unlike previous wars, most of the victims and casualties were civilians: children, women and the aged. Fifth, the armaments used were overwhelmingly small arms and light weapons, easy to carry and use, which also facilitated the

massive participation of children in the wars. Finally, 'network' conflicts led to what became known as complex humanitarian emergencies; massive displacement of peoples internally, unprecedented refugees, collapse of social infrastructure, hunger, diseases, etc., and eventually state collapse. Africa became a continent synonymous with refugees and brutal death.<sup>6</sup> For Africa, therefore, the demise of the Cold War was also synonymous with state collapse, and the fragmentation of social communities into smaller units and groups. Not unsurprisingly, the OAU proved incapable of tackling these complex challenges, lacking as it was in the requisite institutional mechanisms, capability, political will, and above all, the financial resources to make a positive impact on the situation. Salim Ahmed Salim, erstwhile OAU Secretary-General, succinctly captured the haplessness of the organization this way:

Many times, we have looked around for the OAU to intervene constructively in a conflict situation only to find that it is not there, and when present, to realize that it is not adequately equipped to be decisively helpful.<sup>7</sup>

Apart from wars and conflicts, the post-Soviet international system also foisted on the African continent new concerns, ideas and processes that were not directly related to those for which the OAU was created: unprecedented globalization, strong commitment to respect for human rights, insistence on democracy and good governance, free and fair elections, accountability and transparency, all 'new' concerns that particularly targeted the developing countries, and most especially, those in Africa, which had hitherto been among the major defaulters in many of these respects in the Cold War era. The situation was exacerbated by the emergence of the US as the sole superpower, bent on putting issues of democracy and good governance at the arrowhead of its international diplomacy. Added to these developments were the unprecedented integration of the global economy especially under the auspices of the World Trade Organization, the unrestrained triumph of market forces, and breath-taking innovations in information and communications technology, that tuned the world into a global village for which Africa was also embarrassingly ill-equipped.

Finally, apart from crippling poverty, another unexpected development was the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and its debilitating impact on the continent. Expectedly, the vital socio-economic statistics on Africa are very glooming to put it mildly, although it has only ten per cent of global population, it accounts for 70 per cent of the world's AIDS cases. An estimated

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, (UNHCR), there were in 1970 only 2,5 mn refugees. In 1980 the number had risen to 11 mn and in 1993 they numbered more than 16 mn (Harbom 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Salim Ahmed Salim, speech at the OAU Summit in Dakar, Senegal, July 1993.

total of 30 million people were living with HIV in Africa by 2004, while approximately 3.1 million new infections were said to have occurred that year.<sup>8</sup> In the same vein, the HIV/AIDS pandemic was reported to have caused the deaths of 2.3 million people in Africa in 2004. More distressing is the fact that those most affected by the scourge are Africans between the ages of 15 to 49, the most active and productive people in any country. The number of children infected with HIV was estimated at 2 million and Africa has the world's largest population of HIV/AIDS orphans, an estimated 15 million in 2004.<sup>9</sup> The scourge has adversely impacted on every segment of life in the worst affected countries: education, agriculture and food production especially, health, enterprises, and life expectancy. According to the international AIDS charity AVERT:

In many countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS is eroding decades of progress made in extending life expectancy. Millions of adults are dying young or in early middle age. Average life expectancy in Sub-Saharan Africa is now 47 years, when it could have been 62 without AIDS.<sup>10</sup>

The sluggish progress of their economic development has been a recurring concern for all developing countries, but most especially for those in Africa, the continent with the largest number of least developed countries, a phenomenon that has led many observers to say that the early post-independence years are the golden years of Africa's development drive. The statistics again, are embarrassing: Africa is the continent with widest gap between rich and poor, with more than 40 per cent of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa living on less than one US\$ a day, and for many an average of only 65 cents. Africa accounts for only 2 per cent of total global trade, and a trivial 1 per cent of the global economic output. As if that were not bad enough, the 48 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have a combined total income that "is equal to Belgium's, with a median gross domestic product of just over \$2 billion, about the output of a town of 60,000 people in a rich country" in the developed North. Furthermore, "Africa's share of global manufactured goods is almost zero." Finally, according to Greg Mills, "the continent has experienced a deceleration in growth from 5 per cent per annum after 1973 to 1%."<sup>11</sup> Furthermore,

Africa has experienced the downsides of globalization, at least to a greater extent than other regions. It has lost an estimated US\$150 bn in capital flight,

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<sup>8</sup> For more details, see <http://globalchallenge.com/aidsafrica.htm>, accessed 22/4/2005.

<sup>9</sup> For more information, see AVERT on <http://www.avert.org/africa.htm>, updated 11/01/05, accessed 6/3/2005.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Greg Mills, Speech at the Royal African Society ([http://www.royalafricansociety.org/articles\\_africanvoices/mills\\_SAIIA](http://www.royalafricansociety.org/articles_africanvoices/mills_SAIIA)), accessed on 6/3/2005. See also *Africa Recovery*, vol. 17, no. 2, July 2003, p. 12, and [www.africarecovery.org](http://www.africarecovery.org), accessed on 6/3/2005.

with around 40% of private wealth held outside the continent, a higher percentage than any other region. It is estimated that 20,000 skilled professionals have left Africa annually since 1990. The gap created by the loss, between 1960-1987, of 30% of the continent's highly skilled workforce has had to be filled by expatriates. Around 100,000 expatriates work in Africa, a greater number than at independence, at an estimated cost of US\$ 4bn.<sup>12</sup>

In other words, the transformation of the OAU to the AU in 2002 was informed by the need for Africa to effectively face these challenges, deflect the mounting criticisms over its failure to address some of its concerns, and hopefully attain some modicum of relevance in the new world order. African leaders wanted to 'break clean' from the past and, hopefully, confidently embrace the future by evolving a state-of-the-art Pan-African organization to replace the ailing OAU, an organization better suited to tackle the myriad problems of the continent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With a 'new look' organization, it was hoped that African leaders would have a much more contemporary and dynamic institutional platform from which they would join the global stage with relative confidence, be relevant to their peoples and, indeed, to the rest of the world. The question that readily begs for an answer at this juncture is: to what extent has the AU responded to the new continental and global challenges? Are the institutions, organs, strategies and mechanisms devised by the AU qualitatively different from those of the OAU? It is to these important issues that I now turn my attention.

#### 4. New Wine in New Bottles? Objectives, Principles and Institutions of the AU

The thrust of the argument presented in the last section is that the AU was created to respond to new and specific challenges in the national, regional and international socio-economic and political environments. It is therefore essential to identify and discuss some of its objectives and goals as contained in the AU Constitutive Act (AU 2002a). That way, it is possible not only to assess their appropriateness, potency or otherwise, but more importantly, the relevance of the AU's mechanisms and strategies for responding to the challenges facing the continent and its peoples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In discussing the objectives, organs and structures of the AU, a good starting point is the Preamble where the motives and the driving force for setting it up the AU are located. According to the Preamble, the AU was a practical expression of the dreams of "generations of pan-Africanists in their determination to promote unity, solidarity and cooperation among the peoples of Africa and African states" and by the desire to tackle the "multi-faceted challenges that confront our continent and peoples in the light of the social, economic and political changes taking places in the world" and a consciousness that "...the

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<sup>12</sup> Mills, *ibid.*

scourge of conflicts in Africa constitute a major impediment to the socio-economic development of the continent and of the need to promote peace, security and stability as a prerequisite for the implementation of our development and integration agenda” (AU 2002a: Preamble).

Article 3 of the Constitutive Act contains the *Objectives* of the AU. They indicate a clear effort to make a clean break from the past, and to reflect the new concerns of the African leaders and their continent. Numbering 14 against the OAU’s four, the objectives include, among others, the need to:

- achieve greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and peoples of Africa;
- defend the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its Members;
- promote and defend African common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its peoples;
- promote peace, security, and stability on the continent;
- promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance;
- promote and protect human and peoples rights;
- establish the necessary conditions that would enable the continent to play its rightful role in the global economy and in international negotiations;
- promote sustainable develop at the economic, social and cultural levels as well as integration of African economies; and
- work with international partners in the eradication of preventable diseases and the promotion of good health on the continent (AU 2002a: Article 3).

Time and space would not permit detailed discussion of these objectives; however, the novel ones would be highlighted as they could potentially, have significant impact on the mission of the new organization. An important addition is the determination to promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good governance, while another is to promote and protect human and peoples’ rights. Both objectives, no doubt, reflect growing local and international concern about Africa’s democratic deficit. Besides that donor agencies and the great powers have listed progress towards democracy, good governance, free and fair elections as well as a good human rights record as conditions for providing aid and technical assistance. Finally, the AU made a deliberate attempt to involve the masses—civil society forces—in its activities. This was a decisive break from the OAU, which was perceived largely as a club of sit-tight leaders that were out of touch with their people. For instance, under the AU, civil society groups

can participate, under certain conditions, in conflict management and prevention.

The *Principles* of the AU are located in Article 4 of the Constitutive Act and they reflect a deliberate effort by African leaders to respond to the challenges facing 21<sup>st</sup> century Africa (AU 2002a: Article 4). The most relevant principles for our purpose here are listed below.

- Sovereign equality and interdependence among Member States of the Union.
- Respect for borders existing on achievement of independence.
- Participation of the African Peoples in the activities of the Union.
- Non-interference by any Member State in the internal affairs of another Member State.
- Prohibition of the use or threat to use force among Member States of the Union.
- The right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely, war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.
- The right of Member States to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security.
- Promotion of gender equality.
- Respect for democratic principles, human rights, the rule of law and good governance.
- Promotion of social justice to ensure balanced economic development.
- Condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of government.

A striking feature of the Principles is that they are rather comprehensive; sixteen in all, as if the founding fathers were eager to provide answers, checks and balances to the entire continent's problem, and avoid some of the stalemate that once characterized the activities of the OAU. However, much as they tried, African leaders could not make a clean break from the OAU. A close examination of the Principles reveals some degree of continuation. For instance, there is provision for *a)* respect for borders existing on achievement of independence; *b)* non-interference by any Member State in the internal affairs of another; and *c)* Prohibition of the use or threat to use force among Member States of the Union. At the same time, there are significant innovations. For sure, the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of another member state is upheld in the Act but with the groundbreaking proviso that the Union has the right "to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity."(AU 2002b: Article 4j). The

inclusion of this waiver is no doubt a reflection of past experience when the OAU was hamstrung in the face of atrocities in some member states because it did not want to formally breach the non-interference principle. However, it was clear in the early 1990's that the principle was an anachronism, since at the global level, it was no longer sufficient for a state to invoke the non-interference principle to prevent international action, especially during humanitarian emergencies. Again, even at the sub-regional level, the invasion of Uganda by Tanzania in 1979 to oust the regime of Idi Amin was already a pointer to future developments in the continent.

The 'breakthrough' on the other hand, came after the collapse of the regime of Samuel Doe in Liberia under the weight of rebel incursions led by Charles Taylor in December 1989. Not only did West African countries, under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), intervene in Liberia militarily. President Museveni of Uganda, then Chairman of the OAU, stoutly defended the operation, which was led by Nigeria, when he noted that the principle of non-interference was only valid in the case of a functioning state, implying that since central authority had collapsed in Monrovia, Liberia ceased to be a functioning state (Sesay 1999, 2000), and was therefore not covered by the principle of non-interference. Significantly, the AU drove this point home further when it made provision for the right of Member States to "request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security" in a member state (AU 2002a: Article 4j). Although no state has invoked this right, the AU has not hesitated to intervene in a member state in circumstances that are perceived as serious threats to peace and security as well as gross violations of human and constitutional rights in some Member States. Darfur in the Sudan and Togo are cases in point.<sup>13</sup> Whether such interventions achieved the desired outcomes effectively is, however, a moot point.

As for the institutions and organs, the AU has a total of nine, compared with the OAU's four. More importantly, even where there is duplication, the AU avoided using the same institutional names, for example, Assembly of the Union, was formerly the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, Executive Council was formerly the Council of Ministers, The AU Commission is the successor to the OAU's Secretariat, etc. The interesting point, though, is that the functions of these institutions and organs are almost identical to those of the OAU. Like the Council of Ministers in the OAU, the "Executive

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<sup>13</sup> This waiver is not entirely novel in African multilateral diplomacy for as far back as 1981, the ECOWAS Protocol on Matters of Mutual Defence, in Article 16, empowered a state under attack to request intervention by the Community. Samuel Doe was alleged to have used this protocol to request for Nigeria's intervention in Liberia in 1990, see also Sesay (2000).

Council is responsible to the Assembly and shall consider all issues referred to it by the Assembly and monitor the implementation of policies formulated by the Assembly” (AU 2002a: Article 13:2). Perhaps the most innovative institutions of the AU are the Pan-African Parliament, the Court of Justice, the Commission, the Permanent Representatives Committee and the Peace and Security Committee, popularly known as the AU’s Security Council. In addition, there are three financial institutions; the African Central Bank, the African Monetary Fund and the African Investment Bank. To what extent have the new principles and related innovations been able to tackle the challenges confronting the continent and its peoples? The next section tries to answer this vital question by focusing on three key areas: institutions and organs; conflict management, prevention and peace building; and finally, economic development and good governance. The next sections assesses the AU’s response to Post Cold War challenges, and tries to establish if they are qualitatively different from those of the OAU.

## 5. AU’s Response to Africa’s Post Cold War Challenges: Forward March or About Face Turn?

Like its predecessor, the success or failure of the AU would be measured in part, in terms of how effectively it is able to respond to the myriad of challenges facing the continent and its peoples. Three areas are selected for the purposes here: *a)* Institutions and institution building, *b)* conflict management, prevention and peace building, and *c)* economic development, democracy and good governance. These are perhaps the most important challenges facing the continent and its peoples. Focusing on the institutions is important because they are the instruments used to respond to challenges through policy; while managing the continent’s conflicts successfully is intricately linked with the AU’s institutions, economic development and good governance. Without peace and stability, there would be no economic development and without economic development, it would be difficult to sustain democratic institutions or maintain peace and stability in member states or the continent at large. It is indeed, a vicious circle.

### A. *Institutions and Institution Building*

Institution building refers here essentially to the power or capability of an organization to create new institutions or enhance the power of existing ones so as to enhance its capacity to meet its obligations to its members. As already noted, the AU created new institutions to engender a clean break from its predecessor in order to facilitate the achievement of its set goals. However, there are those who would argue that it is yet too early to pass judgement on the Organization and its institutions. As true as that may be, it is also possible for the analyst to critically assess the potential of these institu-

tions and organs to fulfill their mandates against the background of the expectations of members, the keen observer, and indeed, the experiences of similar organs, etc. While institutions or organs are indispensable vehicles for achieving the collective aspirations and goals of international organizations such as the AU, by themselves, they would achieve very little unless their operators are determined to make them work. For the AU's new institutions to succeed, therefore, African states and their leaders must provide them with the necessary back up facilities: political will, enabling environment and financial resources, among others, that are indispensable if they are to effectively discharge their responsibilities.

My view is that while the AU has put in place an impressive array of new institutions and organs, such as the Peace and Security Council, African Parliament, the Court of Justice, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council, and the Financial Institutions, many of them do not seem to follow a logic that is informed by the political and economic reality of the continent and member states, as well as past experience. Thus, the new institutions and organs represent at one level, impersonations of organisations in other parts of the world that bear no direct relevance to the African continent's historical, socio-economic, political and cultural development. Put differently, the AU seems to have committed what can be described as 'political and institutional mimicry' by replicating in Africa institutions that are set up in other parts of the world, especially from the European Union, because those institutions are perceived to have worked rather well in Europe. This, it seems to me, is because in Africa there is still what I can call a 'primacy of symbolism' and 'form', the most dramatic representation of which is the AU itself, together with its numerous sub-institutions and organs. The situation, understandably, does reflect, in a way, the dilemma of a continent in a hurry to catch up with the rest of the world in several critical areas in socio-economic development in which it is embarrassingly deficient.

All the same, to the critical mind, the new institutions invoke several pertinent questions. First, how relevant are some of them at this juncture in the continent's political development? Second, given the continent's overwhelming deficit in both financial and political resources, is the AU in a position to meet the diverse needs of these institutions to enable them to discharge their responsibilities under the Constitutive Act effectively? Third, have African states achieved the requisite level of political development, for example, to successfully operate an African Parliament that is obviously patterned after the European Parliament? Fourth, do African states possess the necessary political will *now* to move these institutions in the right direction? Fifth, are the financial fortunes of Member States of the AU now substantially better than they were in the days of the OAU to warrant such proliferation of bureaucratic establishments? A brief discussion on the African

Parliament and financial institutions would suffice to provide glimpses to these very pertinent questions.

It is hard to understand why the AU would start with an African Parliament when the national parliaments are yet to function well in the respective Member States. Many African countries are not yet truly democratic and even those that profess to be so, present us with a split image as they are ruled by governments whose democratic credentials are dubious, to put it mildly. How representative of the majority of African peoples are members of the African Parliament if the elections that took them into their national parliaments are flawed? If flawed national elections do not represent the popular will of the people, is it possible for representatives to the African Parliament drawn from such a group to represent the will of the majority in their countries? The point being made here is that the African Parliament would not mean much to a people who, by and large, still do not have much say in the choice of those who govern them. The violence that broke out in Togo a tiny country in West Africa, early in 2005 simply reinforces this point. Few elections in Africa are conducted under free and fair conditions that provide a level field for gladiatorial political contests. Much appeal is still either based on parochial ethnic appeal or on how much money a prospective candidate has to spend on an electorate eager to be ‘compensated’ for casting their ballots in a particular candidate’s favour.<sup>14</sup> But even if members of the African Parliament were to be elected directly by the people, would that guarantee that those who would eventually win such elections are chosen through free, fair and transparent electoral processes? I doubt it. Besides, it is not clear how the African parliament is to be effectively funded, but it worthy of note that African organizations, including the defunct OAU and now the AU, are particularly notorious for their poor funding.<sup>15</sup> What then, is the purpose of the African parliament if all the indicators point to the fact that it would not achieve much and would not benefit the ordinary man in the street for many years to come? The answer can partly be found in the thesis on the predominance of form over substance in pan-African politics provided earlier.

A casual look at the financial institutions that have been provided for in the Constitutive Act—the African Central Bank, the African Monetary Fund and the African Investment Bank—reveals that they are broadly patterned after the Bretton Woods institutions and the European Union. Thus, while the intentions of the founding fathers of the AU may be good, it is hard to see

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<sup>14</sup> In Nigeria, for instance, it is mainly ‘money bags’, people whose sources of wealth are oftentimes dubious, that stand for ‘elective’ political office because only they can afford the huge expenses.

<sup>15</sup> The Parliament has been temporarily housed at the International Conference Centre, Abuja, Nigeria.

how such institutions would in practice succeed where national banks have failed woefully. Apart from that, why would the AU set up new financial institutions when the members continue to starve the African Development Bank of funds? Would African states be able to adequately fund these institutions to make them truly African? The experience of the African Development Bank has shown that sufficient, autonomous African funding cannot be guaranteed. If that were so, would the doors of the new monetary institutions be opened to non-African countries, especially the great powers, as the African Development Bank was compelled to do in order to remain afloat? If the answer to this question were yes, then, what degree of control would African states have over 'their own' financial institutions? Would African states and their financial institutions not be subjected to political and financial blackmail by the external investors at critical junctures in the future? Would African countries surrender control of their national currencies, as weak as they may be in the international money markets, and fiscal policies to an African Central Bank? Time would tell, but the inability of ECOWAS to adopt a common currency and launch a central bank does not encourage one to believe that the process would be much easier at the continental level.

There are obviously those who would argue that institution-building is itself a learning process, that Rome was, after all, 'not built in a day'; that Africa must start somewhere; and that with time, the operators of those institutions would master them for the good of the African peoples and the world; etc. While they may be correct, I dare say that it would require more effort, commitment and resources, human, financial, etc, to make an organization that is based on 'borrowed' ideas and structures work successfully in an alien cultural environment. More worrisome, perhaps, is the fact that a project built on such a foundation could also easily become a 'white elephant' that would impose a lot of stress on scarce resources, and could also simply lead to frustration and disenchantment among its members and the people of Africa, as a result of dashed hopes and unfulfilled expectations.

*B. Conflict Management, Prevention and Peace Building*

Managing the continent's violent conflicts successfully, as noted, was one of the reasons for setting up the AU. Expectedly, the AU has put in place the most elaborate, complex and detailed peace and security architecture that the continent has ever had. At the centre of the architecture is the new Peace and Security Council (PSC), which is patterned more or less along the UN Security Council model. For example, it is to "anticipate and prevent conflicts," and it "shall have the responsibility to undertake peace-making and peace-building functions for the resolution of these conflicts" (AU 2002b: Article 3b). The African Security Council is also to "promote and implement peace-building and post conflict reconstruction activities to consolidate peace and prevent the resurgence of violence" (AU 2002b: Article 3c) and finally, it

shall “promote and encourage democratic practices, good governance and the rule of law, protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for the sanctity of human life and international humanitarian law, as part of efforts for preventing conflicts” in Africa (AU 2002b: Article 3f).

Article 4 of the Protocol establishing the PSC contains its guiding principles, the most pertinent of which are the following:

- Peaceful settlement of disputes and conflicts.
- Early responses to contain crisis situations so as to prevent them from developing into full blown conflicts.
- The right of the Union to intervene in member States...in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.
- The right of Member States to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security, in accordance with Article 4j of the AU Constitutive Act.

The new peace and security architecture has many other important components among which are:

- the Peace Fund,
- a 5-man Panel of Wise Men,
- an African Standing Army,
- a common African defence policy,
- a Military Staff Committee,
- a Peace and Security Directorate,
- the Peace and Security Components of NEPAD, especially its emphasis on good governance and the Peer Review Mechanism,
- a Continental Early Warning System, and
- the Conference on Stability, Security, and Development in Africa, CSSDA.<sup>16</sup>

A closer examination of these organs and institutions reveals that the AU has leaned heavily on United Nations institutions and experience, and to some extent, on Europe, the exceptions being the Panel of Wise Men, NEPAD and its peace and security component, including the PRM. I would like to expand briefly on the Permanent Peace and Security Council, because it is to be the hub of the AU’s conflict management, prevention, and peace building mechanisms. The PSC, like its UN counterpart, is composed of fifteen mem-

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<sup>16</sup> These institutions and organs are contained in several protocols and other relevant documents of the AU. See its website <http://www.africa-union.org> for specific details on these documents.

bers that are elected on the basis of equal rights: ten members for a term of two years, and five members elected for a term of three years' to ensure continuity in the Council. Members are elected to the Council on the principle of equitable regional representation and rotation, using the criteria below.

- Commitment to uphold the principles of the Union.
- Contribution to the promotion and maintenance of peace and security in Africa, such as experience in peace support operations either locally or under the banner of the United Nations.
- Capacity and commitment to shoulder the responsibilities entailed in membership.
- Willingness and ability to take up responsibility for regional and continental conflict resolution initiatives.
- Respect for constitutional governance.

Two important issues come to the fore from these guidelines. The first concerns how many members of the AU meet these election criteria and, second, their capacity to effectively carry out these tasks in an autonomous way after their election, since they must possess capacity to make effective contribution to the diverse aspects of conflict management, prevention, and peace building in Africa under the auspices of the PSC. However, the record of even lead nations in Sub-Saharan Africa, perhaps with the exception of South Africa, is mixed. The AU's current frustration and inability to make decisive impact acting alone in Darfur in Sudan is a clear testimony to this conclusion.<sup>17</sup> While many African states have certainly participated in numerous peacekeeping operations especially under UN auspices—and more recently, under sub-regional arrangements—it is also true that most of them were only able to provide the human component of the operations, the troops. Other necessities such as boots, uniforms, transport, allowances, and even insignias, etc, were often provided by a third party external to the continent under special arrangements, in order to consummate their participation in the operations. That has been the experience at sub-regional levels too, with the exception, again, of South Africa. For instance, part of the reason for the delay in deploying ECOWAS troops in Liberia is the lack of transport capability by the lead nation, Nigeria, which had to rely on support from the USA. What is clear so far, then, both from past and current experiences—Chad 1981, Burundi in the 1990s and, more recently, in Darfur since 2005—is that it is not yet possible for the Africa to engage in independent preventive diplomacy even at the continental level without external support. Insufficient funding and absence of critical logistics capability are perhaps the most debilitating constraints to Africa's peacekeeping operations. Unfortu-

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<sup>17</sup> It is pertinent here to mention the rather inglorious public act of re-hating AU troops in Darfur in January 2008 that was beamed across the world.

nately, there is no sign that the continent would overcome these major obstacles soon, not even under the AU.

From such a conclusion, several critical questions beg for answers. How can the AU make a difference in conflict prevention, management and peace building if it does not have local capacity? A related question is this: if Africa does not at the moment have reliable independent capacity for effective multilateral conflict management, then what must be done to achieve such a capacity? Is it possible to attain such homegrown competence at the moment? What types of capacities do African states have presently, and how can they consolidate them with or without external support for effective conflict management, prevention and peace building in Africa? What are the potential sources of domestic and external support? What areas should be given priority for external assistance: peacekeeping, institutional capacity building, training, logistics, information and database or intelligence gathering? How can the AU guarantee the credibility and neutrality of its conflict management, prevention and peace building operations with or without external support? Suffice it to say that Africa is caught in a delicate 'Catch 22'-situation: it cannot mount effective operations alone, while external assistance cannot always be assured, and when it is provided at all, its timing is outside the control of the AU, and that could make a lot of difference in a grave humanitarian emergency such as the one in Sudan's Darfur region, with colossal loss of lives and unimaginable human misery. The implication of this is that the support of the international community, especially the UN and the great powers, will continue to play a decisive role in determining the nature, extent, effectiveness or otherwise, of the AU's conflict management efforts. But can support, even from the UN, always be guaranteed? And even if it were to be guaranteed, would it be on an 'as-and-when-needed' basis? Experience in Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Somalia, Darfur etc, indicates that this is not always so.

C. *Bringing the Good Life to the African People: Economic Development and Good Governance*

Meeting the basic human needs of citizens is supposed to be a state's primary responsibility. However, few African countries can boast of meeting this basic responsibility at the moment. Indeed, the fact that the African continent is still the least developed in the world and has a majority of countries with the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) implies that many states have not been able to successfully provide the basic needs of their citizens. Under the OAU, specialized agencies were set up to promote the economic and technological transformation of the continent. Several continental initiatives were also embarked upon by the OAU to accelerate the pace of economic development and integration in the continent: the Lagos Plan of Action 1981, Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery

1985, the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community 1991 and now the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), among others. One of the OAU's major failures was its inability to promote economic development, democracy, good governance and rule of law in Member States. Thus, Africa has remained the most economically deprived continent in the world.

Not surprisingly, the AU mandate devotes a lot of space and energy to issues of economic development. Article 3j of the Constitutive Act specifically identified promotion of "sustainable development at the economic, social and cultural levels as well as the integration of African economies" as one of its objectives. The most significant move in that regard is contained in NEPAD, which now forms the main backbone of the AU's agenda in both the economic and political spheres (NEPAD 2001). In NEPAD, African leaders seemed to have recognized the synergy between economic development, democracy and conflict prevention. NEPAD reflects a candid admission of previous mistakes, and a realization that it is not possible to achieve economic development in the absence of good governance, and that both—economic development and good governance—would attenuate conflict, enhance political stability in Member States and ultimately deliver the 'good life' to the Africans. NEPAD is therefore important because it attempts, in one fell swoop, to tackle the daunting socio-economic and political dilemmas of the continent. Thus, a brief discussion on it is necessary.

In very broad terms, NEPAD aims at turning the continent's fortunes around through radical economic and political reforms, increasing Africa's share of global trade through access to developed markets, debt relief, attracting direct foreign investment and, perhaps most importantly, by promoting and protecting norms of good governance by African countries and their leaders through an innovative Peer Review Mechanism (PRM). It is envisaged that embarking upon sustained reforms would provide the enabling environment for the continent's political and economic transformation that has eluded the continent since the flush of independence nearly five decades ago. To complement NEPAD's vision is the Peer Review Mechanism, a quasi-voluntary arrangement under which African countries submit themselves to review by other African leaders on a periodic basis, to establish whether or not they comply with the minimum acceptable standards of democratic rules, good governance and best practices, such as respect for human rights, accountability and transparency in politics, business deals, and political succession through the ballot box in free and fair elections, among other things.

It is impossible to dismiss outright the logic of NEPAD, for if the much needed economic and political turn around for the continent is to be achieved, drastic measures must be taken in the political and economic

spheres to break away from those habits, which had hitherto held the continent and its people down, and which placed them at the bottom of the economic development and prosperity ladder in the world. It is significant that in NEPAD, African leaders recognized right from start, that they could not go it alone, and that they would have to go into partnership with other countries, especially the G-8 countries. Ironically, this is also one of the major weaknesses and criticisms of NEPAD. Thus, it has been variously described as a 'KNEEPAD' and as a vehicle for conversation among African leaders and between them and the rest of the world (SAJIA 2004). This is because if NEPAD's objectives are to be realized, its critics believe that African leaders would really have to compromise a lot in discussions with G-8 countries to support its programmes and vision. Even so, there is no firm guarantee that those countries would release sufficient financial resources to achieve the Millennium development targets, for a number of important reasons.

One reason is that much of the anticipated goals of NEPAD would depend on external participation and good will, both of which are outside the control of African leaders; for example, debt waivers, increased trade and foreign investment in the continent. For one, it is becoming increasingly clear that there would be no blanket debt forgiveness for Africa. Besides, it is not clear if the much-desired direct investment in Africa would also benefit most members of the AU. This is because investment decisions are essentially based on enlightened self-interest on the part of investors, who look at factors such as political stability, market size and availability of dependable infrastructure, for example roads, electricity, telecommunication, water, etc. All of the foregoing is in rather short supply in most African countries. For instance, while South Africa has efficient road and rail networks and could supply uninterrupted electricity to businesses, the reverse is the case in Nigeria, which, on paper, has a much more attractive market because of its population, which is almost three times that of South Africa. However, investors would prefer to invest in the latter simply because of its more advanced infrastructure and relatively stable political environment.

The implication of this conclusion is that foreign investment would go mainly to countries that are perceived as democratic, stable and possess the facilities that would make it worthwhile for investors to input money. That would however only create 'oases' of development and prosperity on the continent, making a few states very prosperous, while the majority would remain poorer and their citizens even more deprived. As for the size of African markets, the truth is that many of the individual markets in Africa are too small to attract external investors. Unfortunately, however, the much advertised African Economic Community (AEC)—with a lot of influence from the former European Economic Community—for now remains so only on paper, while sub-regional integration schemes like ECOWAS, SADC, EAC,

etc—the backbone of the projected AEC—have not done much by way of market integration to increase market size and attract foreign investors. It is instructive that the oldest sub-regional economic integration project, ECOWAS, has only managed to promote 5 per cent intra-union trade in thirty years (Sesay & Akinrinade 1996). Not surprisingly, some AU members are skeptical of the feasibility and success of an African Economic Community. For instance, when asked why his government had not ratified the African Economic Community Treaty, the Botswana Foreign Minister is reported to have retorted: “why would we be in a hurry to integrate our economy with Africa that accounts for only 2 per cent of global economy instead of the 98 per cent?”<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to fault the logic of his argument, even if they ridicule the Africa Common Market project.

A second implicit assumption of the NEPAD blue print is that the continent would remain stable, and devoid of major flash points. This has been achieved in large measure in many states but perhaps only superficially, as several other factors continue to scare investors away: for instance, especially the rampaging HIV/AIDS pandemic, with all its implications for economic growth, development and political stability on the continent. A third factor is that the success of NEPAD projects; both economic and political, would very much depend on the extent to which they are supported by the G-8 states. Such support cannot however, be always guaranteed in spite of concern in some G-8 members like Britain and France. Fourth, at the political level, the sanctions that are to be imposed against defaulters under the Peer Review Mechanism would need a good measure of external backing to be effective. This is especially so if ‘lead states’ and regional powers like Nigeria, South Africa, Senegal, Ghana, etc. are the targets. It is instructive that Togo was easily compelled to reverse its palace coup by the combined disapproval and condemnation of ECOWAS and the AU in February 2005. The Togolese ‘success story’ hinged on several important factors.

First, Togo is a small country that depends a lot on its neighbours for many of its daily needs. Thus, it could easily be cowed into submission under pressure from such powerful neighbours as Nigeria and Ghana. Second, there was consensus among ECOWAS countries and sub-regional giants like Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal, that the 2001 ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, ironically signed in the Togolese capital Lomé, — providing for zero tolerance for unconstitutional changes of regimes—had been breached and must be respected by Togo. Added to this sub-regional

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<sup>18</sup> These comments by the Botswana Foreign Minister were made during an interview with a journalist, and credited to him by a participant at the May 2005 *Top Level Seminar on Peace and Security* at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala university; private communication.

pressure was that from the AU, demanding that the palace coup should be reversed. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, was the decision by Togo's former colonial master France not to get drawn into the conflict. In an interview on national television, the French Foreign Minister was reported to have said that 'the time of France acting as policeman in Africa was over' and that 'France is calling for a peaceful return to constitutional order and free elections'.<sup>19</sup> And once Paris had given the signal that it was ready to turn the other way, it was impossible for the new Togolese leader, Faure Eyadema, to survive the combined pressure from ECOWAS and the AU, so he had to step down pending general elections after sixty days according to the constitution. But what if the shoe was on the other foot, and the defaulters were Nigeria, Ghana or Senegal? Would ECOWAS or the AU have been bold enough to challenge them and impose sanctions against them? Would such internal pressure from peers in Africa have sufficed to bring about the desired changes in any of those sub-regional influentials? The Zimbabwean example, where President Mugabe has survived several types of sanctions that do not have the support of the sub-regional lead state, South Africa, does not encourage us to be hopeful.

To complicate the picture, it is always not absolutely certain if external powers would support regionally imposed sanctions against a lead state. Surely, small regional states would hesitate, for understandable reasons, to enforce sanctions against a powerful neighbour on whom they also depend for economic and political support. As for the great powers, it is possible that some of them would hesitate to play the role of 'spoilers' in a sanctions situation either directly by simply ignoring them, or indirectly by turning a blind eye to sanctions busting by their citizens and allies: Iraq, Liberia, Libya, etc, are cases in point. These scenarios clearly highlight the limitations of 'blue prints' for they remain just that until they are put to the test. However, a cursory look at experience under the OAU and the UN would reveal that the expected outcome is not always guaranteed—witness the cases of apartheid South Africa, Rhodesia, and more recently, Iraq.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

Is Africa irredeemably doomed then? Perhaps not, after all, there are some cheery news and success stories that are seldom celebrated in the midst of the continent's monumental failures; for instance, Botswana's longstanding shining example in good governance. Another example is South Africa's growing importance in sub-regional and regional politics and as a leader in many critical areas of need in Africa. Again there are encouraging signs in Nigeria, especially in areas such as democratic transformation and public

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted at [www.perspicacityonline.com/articles/2005/02/Togo050212.htm](http://www.perspicacityonline.com/articles/2005/02/Togo050212.htm).

sector reform, including a high profile and controversial anti-corruption crusade, even though both may appear to be wobbly presently. More importantly, with proper leadership, political will and motivation, South Africa and Nigeria could change the current and rather humiliating perception of Sub-Saharan Africa as a continent devoid of credible regional leader(s) or 'change makers', although much would also depend on whether or not they are ready to play the role of 'defenders' and 'enforcers' and make the necessary human and financial sacrifices. No doubt, a convincing partnership between a stable and democratic Nigeria, South Africa and other sub-regional influentials like Ghana, Senegal and Zimbabwe under democratic rule, could provide the badly needed catalyst for enduring political and economic reforms and stability, which could have positive impact on the fortunes of the AU. Happily, there are encouraging signs that such a partnership is slowly evolving. The warm rapport between the leaders of Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa is therefore a development in the right direction.

By way of a conclusion, then, long term African development would require paying serious attention to other important issues such as empowering women, and tackling the HIV/AIDS pandemic and human trafficking. While the AU is trying to mainstream gender and development, HIV/AIDS continues to pose the biggest overall threat to sustainable development in Africa. While there are encouraging national efforts in fighting the pandemic, the continent is yet to come out with a practical, holistic and collective response to the deadly disease. It is imperative for the AU to pay serious attention to the pandemic to complement efforts in other vital areas, such as conflict prevention and management. Another imperative is reform of legal systems in African states to better tackle corruption, money laundering and other deterrents to foreign investment. Foreign investors must be convinced that their investments are secure and that investment procedures are simple and transparent and do not involve extra costs. Taking concrete steps on these vital issues would go a long way in changing the generally negative perceptions investors have of the continent. Rightly or wrongly, negative news coverage of certain African countries very often gives the impression abroad that all of Africa is afflicted since investors habitually view an entire region, and even the African continent as a whole, through a single lens.

My worry, though, is that many of Africa's present policy responses, especially those under the auspices of the AU, smack of impersonation devoid of a solid base in the continent's historical and contemporary experiences. Unless such orientation is reversed, the present efforts would not take Africa out of the woods. As for the future of the African Union itself, this is intricately tied up with the fortunes of members individually and collectively. Essentially, two broad scenarios can be discerned, the *pessimistic* and the *optimistic*. The pessimistic scenario assumes, essentially, that Africa would

continue to do business as usual with minimum change in its fortunes and standing in the international system. That would certainly have negative impact on the AU and serious consequences for the continent and its people, on the one hand, and for the rest of the world, on the other. The optimistic scenario assumes that the reform processes in the political, economic and social spheres embarked upon by African countries at the national and continental levels would continue. From such a perspective, we can assume that the future of the AU, and that of the continent for that matter, would be bright. There is no reason to believe that the gains made so far in the governance sphere since the end of the Cold War would be reversed, with the replacement of civilian regimes by military dictators yet again. Because the dominant powers in the international system are not relenting in their campaign to change the world in their own image, and because of mounting pressure from civil society forces in many African states, there seems to be no safe hiding place for political backsliders in Africa any more. From such a standpoint the AU provides an important forum for collective action by Member Countries and their leaders, in moving the continent in the right direction. It is becoming clear, already, that the African Union provides a veritable platform for multilateral diplomacy, both for its members and outsiders. The AU is also increasingly playing important roles as 'bridge builder', 'motivator', 'legitimiser', 'defender' and 'enforcer' in national politics and continental diplomacy. Such roles would become increasingly crucial in future, as the organization's resolve is tried in diverse ways. How effective it would be in getting members to toe its line, and in commanding respect from the comity of nations, would very much depend on which of the two scenarios identified above eventually materializes. For now, however, there seems to be no better substitute for the African Union, in spite of its obvious shortcomings, and they are many.

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## About the Author

Professor Amadu Sesay became, in 2005, the third holder of the Claude Ake Visiting Chair at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research in Uppsala, Sweden. He is currently the official ECOWAS Historian, commissioned to write the *ECOMOG Book* on the ECOMOG military operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau. He joined the Department of International Relations in what was then the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, in 1978 as a junior lecturer and became a Professor in October 1991. He headed the Department of International Relations during the period 2000-2006. Professor Sesay also directed the CODESRIA *Child and Youth Institute* on the theme: 'The African Child and Youth in an Era of HIV/AIDS,' He is a grantee of the CODESRIA Comparative Research Network titled: 'Post-War Regimes and State Reconstruction in Liberia and Sierra Leone,' published by CODESRIA in 2008. He is a recipient of several academic awards and fellowships, among which are: Visiting Professor, Institut D'Études Politique de Bordeaux, France, 2006; Distinguished Lecturer, Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Ibadan, 2003; Visiting Fellow, Institute of Developing Economies, Tokyo, 2000; Visiting Fellow Institute of Strategic Studies, University of Pretoria, 1999; Korean Foundation Scholar, 1996; DAAD Scholar, 1995; and Ford Foundation Fellow, Centre for International Studies, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1995. Professor Sesay has authored, co-authored and edited 12 books, 8 monographs, as well as numerous book chapters and articles in academic journals across the world. His latest book, with Antonia Simbine (eds.), is *Small Arms Proliferation and Collection in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, 2006*. Professor Sesay met Claude Ake for the first time as a young scholar, at an international conference at the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex, England in 1979; a meeting that has had great influence on his academic life and writings.

## Holders of The Claude Ake Visiting Chair

*2003:* Professor L. Adele Jinadu (Nigeria); a former President of the African Association of Political Science (AAPS), Jinadu is Executive Director of the Centre for Advanced Social Science (CASS), in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

*2004:* Dr. Cyril I. Obi (Nigeria); Associate Research Professor at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs and Senior Research Fellow/Programme Coordinator at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala.

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*2006:* Professor Kwame Boafo-Arthur (Ghana); Head of the Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, Legon.

*2007:* Professor Charles Villa-Vicencio (South Africa); Professor Emeritus at the University of Cape Town and Executive Director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR), Cape Town.

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## Abstract (for back cover page)

The African Union (AU) invokes different reactions from different individuals, not unconnected to disappointment with its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity (OAU). The paper discusses the AU, focusing on two important rhetorical questions: i) what is in a name?, ii) does a change in the name of an organization whose membership remains identical with that of its predecessor significantly alter its orientation, vision, resource base and the will to make a difference? The questions reflect two broad perspectives; *a)* that the AU is simply the OAU without the 'O', *b)* those who believe that it is a significant departure from the OAU. The origins, principles, organs and institutions of the AU are intricately tied to the changing global priorities and agenda since the end of the Cold War; and provide a platform for multilateral diplomacy in the search for effective responses to the continent's challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Sadly, many of the AU's organs and institutions smack of impersonation, devoid of a solid base in the continent's historical and contemporary experiences. Coupled with patent absence of capacity in many critical areas, like its predecessor, it has so far not credibly tackled Africa's post-modern challenges, not least in the areas of conflict prevention, conflict management and peacekeeping, most recently confirmed by the failures to stop the blood-bath in Darfur or in Kenya following the disputed December 2007 elections. Yet, in spite of its present shortcomings, the AU has no credible substitute at the moment and the organization can still play critical roles as 'bridge builder', 'unifier', and 'legitimizer' in national, regional and continental politics and diplomacy.