

Book Review

Searching for Peace in Africa: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Management Activities

**Monique Mekenkamp, Paul van Tongeren and Hans van
de Veen (eds) 1999**

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Transformation. 528 pp.**

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If there ever was a book written about Africa that offers prospects for hope on such a grim subject, then it is this one. The book resulted from the work of numerous authors who have ably assisted the editors, and whose expert views on the conflict in Africa are fresh, provide food for thought, and urge Africa to awake from slumber and seize her moment. The book is set against a background in which ten major conflicts in Africa in the past 25 years have claimed the lives of between 3.8 and 6.8 million people. In 1998 alone, of the 200 violent conflicts occurring world-wide 72 were credited to Africa, thus making Africa 'the most warring region on the planet'. It is in this context that the authors proceed to analyse Africa in the light of conflict and the prospects for peace, since 'there is also another Africa, an Africa where people are

living in peace and harmony with each other and their neighbours'. Hence the fundamental question of 'Who will bring peace to Africa?' seems to be the pervading theme in the book. The West on its part has always dubbed Africa as the hopeless continent on the brink of extinction. This inaccurate analysis is the result of stereotyping and inadequate information. If these sentiments are propagated, then it will take a long time before Africa establishes herself in the world. The authors, while acknowledging this failure on the side of the West, reiterate that Africa on its part is not devoid of blame. They dispel the notion that everything associated with colonialism is bad. It is therefore not enough to point fingers of accusation, as this will only exacerbate the stalemate by opening up old wounds. Hence, to avoid the pitfalls of blame, the African Renaissance was initiated, providing an opportunity for Africa, as a whole, to mount a collective effort to quell the growing incidence of conflict propelled by hate. It is the hope of the authors that Africa will grasp the reconciliation, stability and economic independence necessary for social, economic and political development.

The book is divided into three comprehensive parts. Part I, entitled 'Reflections', analyses the conflicts in Africa and suggests ways of preventing and resolving the conflicts. In this part Chris Landsberg and Shaun Mackay ask fundamental questions and offer salient answers. The idea of an African Renaissance was coined by such figures as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere and Steven Biko, among others, but it is the current President of South Africa, Mr Thabo Mbeki, who is credited with igniting the flames yet again. In essence this is a call for Africa to realise the potential she holds, and for its people to steer her out of the deep abyss of hopelessness. By borrowing from South Africa and other countries, the two authors are of the opinion that Africa should adopt a policy of democracy and reconciliation if any peace is to be achieved.

A very useful summary is given of 16 lessons learned from a previous project (*People Building Peace: 35 Inspiring Stories from Around the World*). These include the creation of local capacities for peace, the creation of dialogue, the exchange of experiences, and the promotion of an integrative approach. Subsequently in the concluding chapter of Part I, Fitzroy Nation, shows how numerous peace-building initiatives have spread their web across Africa enveloping it in a cocoon of peace. This brief background into Africa's conflict serves both as an introduction to and as the foundation for the book in review.

The regions of conflict, North Africa, The Horn of Africa, Central Africa, West Africa and Southern Africa, are discussed in Part II, entitled

'Surveys of Conflict Prevention'. By dividing the continent into diverse sub-regions the authors explain the interrelatedness of the conflicts in Africa and also emphasise the need for sub-regional co-operation in quelling conflicts. This does not diminish the importance played by outside actors, however. In fact, according to Michael S. Lund, 'Outside actors have had as much success as inside actors'. Thus it is important that an effective and efficient co-operation exists between the sub-regions and other international organisations willing and able to assist in peace initiatives. According to the authors, this spirit of working together was totally lacking in the 1994 Rwandan genocide when the international community failed to act despite warnings by human rights groups of the impending genocide. The Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER), made up of international organisations and some United Nations agencies, and other participants in an international study during 1996 found that international bodies and many governments had ample warning of the impending genocide in 1994, but ignored this warning. In contrast, the efforts by the regional Economic Community of West African States Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) have been credited with bringing some peace to Sierra Leone. Although it is not ideal, it serves as a foundation on which future peace initiatives can be built. Notwithstanding the setbacks, the potential capacity for co-operation is well founded in Africa.

Part III gives a list of African and international organisations that seek to promote peace by building from the grassroots level to the top management. The activities of each organisation are briefly stated as well as their contact address and their budget. The book is not complete in its coverage, but the 120 mentioned organisations are adequately dealt with. This brief acts as a quick guide of who is who in conflict prevention and resolution in Africa.

Searching for Peace in Africa is detailed, but succinctly written. The report is well researched and provides ample background knowledge of the origin of conflicts and how they can be stopped. The book is a concerted effort of authors who are equipped not only to analyse but also to provide prospects for future reconciliation. The book is not a mere rhetoric, but shows the peace building capacities developed and in action in Africa. Africa should tackle her own problems as reliance on the West will graft into the subconscious the fallacious mentality of colonial superiority *vis-à-vis* Africa's inferiority. As it is well said in a song about Africa: 'Africa's shaped like a question mark; Africa's got the answer!'