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# Preventing Conflicts in Africa: Early Warning and Response

AUGUST 2012



On April 27, 2012, the International Peace Institute (IPI) hosted a roundtable discussion entitled “Preventing Conflicts in Africa: The Role of Early Warning and Response Systems,” organized in partnership with the Permanent Missions of South Africa and Azerbaijan to the United Nations.

In light of crises in Mali and Guinea-Bissau in 2012 and popular uprisings in North Africa in 2011, the meeting addressed the role and effectiveness of regional and international early-warning and response mechanisms, with a view to strengthening conflict-prevention efforts on the continent. In particular, participants examined the African Union’s Continental Early Warning System, the UN’s “root-cause” approach, national early-warning structures in Ghana and Kenya, the role of civil society, and the challenges of adopting a timely response.

This meeting note was drafted by Mireille Affa’a-Mindzie, a research fellow at IPI. It reflects the *rappor-teur’s* interpretation of the seminar discussion and not necessarily the views of all other participants.

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## Introduction

The popular uprisings in North Africa in 2011 and more recent crises in Mali and Guinea-Bissau have raised questions about the capacity of the African Union (AU) and the international community to successfully prevent violent conflicts in Africa. In Mali, the military coup in March 2012, which ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré, occurred only two days after a ministerial meeting of the AU Peace and Security Council was held in the capital Bamako to consider the situation in the Sahel region and the Tuareg rebellion in the northern part of the country. Less than a month later, the equally unforeseen crisis in Guinea-Bissau erupted while an ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council ministerial meeting was taking place in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, in April 2012. Against this backdrop, the International Peace Institute (IPI) hosted a roundtable discussion on early warning in partnership with the Permanent Missions of South Africa and Azerbaijan to the United Nations, both members of the United Nations Security Council at the time. The seminar, “Preventing Conflicts in Africa: The Role of Early Warning and Response,” was held on April 27, 2012, at IPI’s Trygve Lie Center for Peace, Security, and Development in New York.

The roundtable was attended by more than forty participants, including representatives from the United Nations, UN member states, civil society, and think tanks. Experts from the AU Continental Early Warning System, the Institute for Security Studies in Addis Ababa, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) examined the role and effectiveness of regional and international early-warning and response mechanisms in monitoring, anticipating, and mitigating potential conflict situations in Africa in an efficient and timely manner. The discussion sought to unite the international community’s efforts to strengthen the conflict-prevention capacity of the AU and reaffirm support to African countries in promoting stability on the continent.

This report summarizes the key points that emerged from the meeting. The roundtable participants discussed the range of conflict-prevention and early-warning tools that are currently available at the national, regional, and international levels, and their ability to lead to effective response. They assessed the opportunities, challenges, and prospects of the AU Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) to collect, analyze, and report on conflict-relevant information, as well as its engagement with decision makers responsible for policy response. The participants also discussed the United Nations’ approach to conflict prevention and early warning. They looked at the national early-warning structures being developed in countries such as Ghana and Kenya and

the role that civil society actors and women play in early warning and conflict prevention. Finally, the roundtable examined the challenges posed by early response and considered the requirements for a timely and appropriate response to conflicts.

Acknowledging that successful prevention lies in an awareness of potential conflict situations, the ability to analyze relevant information, and the political will to take the right action when it is needed, the roundtable emphasized the importance of better synergies between regional, continental, and international early-warning structures. Early-warning and conflict-prevention efforts also benefit from civil society's and women's involvement. Beyond addressing the symptoms of conflict, it is essential to deal with a conflict's root causes to ensure sustainable peace. Finally, political will and adequate resources are prerequisites for a timely and appropriate response to conflict.

## Conflict-Prevention Mechanisms in Africa

### STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The April 27<sup>th</sup> roundtable discussion provided an opportunity to take stock of the existing conflict-prevention tools available to African countries and the UN to anticipate conflicts in the region. Following the adoption of the *Solemn Declaration* of the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa by the Organization of African Unity in 2000,<sup>1</sup> and the publication of the first report of the UN Secretary-General on conflict prevention in 2001,<sup>2</sup> the AU and the UN placed a renewed emphasis on conflict prevention. Taking into consideration the high cost of peacekeeping, the AU adopted a protocol in 2002 that established the fifteen-member Peace and Security Council as “a collective security and early-warning arrangement to facilitate timely and efficient response to conflict and crisis situations in

Africa.”<sup>3</sup>

To advise the Peace and Security Council and the chairperson of the AU Commission in their efforts to prevent conflict, the 2002 protocol established the five-member Panel of the Wise. The panel is supposed to serve as an important conflict-prevention mechanism by providing the AU's first response to crisis situations. However, to successfully play this role, the participants at the roundtable highlighted the need to transform the Panel of the Wise into a more active, flexible, and expeditious body. In this vein, the roundtable discussed the AU's recent efforts to improve the effectiveness of the panel, which led to broadening its composition using “friends of the panel” and linking the body to similar institutions in Africa—namely, ECOWAS's Council of Elders and the Committee of Elders of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA).

Another useful tool to prevent conflict across the continent is the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), established under the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) adopted by African states in 2001. The APRM is a self-monitoring mechanism that aims to promote and reinforce high standards of governance by analyzing systemic or structural problems in countries under review, with a view to providing advice and recommendations before crises erupt.<sup>4</sup> As of January 2012, thirty-three countries were parties to the APRM, of which sixteen had gone through an initial review process.<sup>5</sup> However, despite the voluntary nature of APRM participation and mutual agreement on APRM goals, the implementation of recommendations formulated at the end of the review process remains a challenge.

Using Kenya and South Africa as examples, the meeting discussed the early-warning signs provided by APRM reports prior to the violence that erupted in both countries in 2008. In Kenya, the review conducted in 2005 pointed to the histor-

1 Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa, CSSDCA Solemn Declaration, AU Doc. AHG/Decl.4 (XXXVI), 2000, available at [www.africa-union.org/Special\\_Programs/CSSDCA/cssdca-solemndeclaration.pdf](http://www.africa-union.org/Special_Programs/CSSDCA/cssdca-solemndeclaration.pdf).

2 United Nations Secretary-General, *Prevention of Armed Conflict*, UN Doc. A/55/985-S/2001/574, June 7, 2001.

3 Article 2 of the *Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union*, adopted by the first ordinary session of the Assembly of the African Union, Durban, South Africa, July 9, 2002, available at [http://au.int/en/sites/default/files/Protocol\\_peace\\_and\\_security.pdf](http://au.int/en/sites/default/files/Protocol_peace_and_security.pdf).

4 NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency, “African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM),” available at [www.nepad.org/economicandcorporategovernance/african-peer-review-mechanism/about](http://www.nepad.org/economicandcorporategovernance/african-peer-review-mechanism/about).

5 “Communiqué Issued at the End of the Sixteenth Summit of the Committee of Heads of State and Government Participating in the African Peer Review Mechanism,” January 28, 2012, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, available at <http://aprm-au.org/sites/default/files/16TH%20APR%20FORUM%20-%20FINAL%20COMMUNIQUE.pdf>.

ical nature of the issues the country was facing—issues that then served as driving factors in the post-election violence. However, the review's outcome was not followed up at national, regional, continental, or international levels. The same observation was made about the APRM report on South Africa in 2007. Although the review identified a threat of xenophobia linked to systemic socioeconomic difficulties and a long history of migration, there was no adequate response to the report's findings, and South Africa went through a serious wave of xenophobic violence in May 2008, in which more than sixty people were killed.<sup>6</sup>

At the United Nations, the Security Council benefits from monthly “horizon-scanning” briefings by the Department of Political Affairs, which serve as an alert mechanism for potential conflict situations.<sup>7</sup> However, some participants observed that issues like elections, which can significantly increase the potential for violence and should therefore be addressed, are not necessarily on the agenda of the council. Moreover, the stigma attached to naming member states on the agenda of the Security Council highlights the need for conflict-prevention and horizon-scanning briefings to be seen as the responsibility of the UN system as a whole, and not only of the Security Council. Existing regional early-warning mechanisms should be more connected to the broader UN system, to facilitate more comprehensive approaches when responding to conflict.

### THE AU CONTINENTAL EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

The AU Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) was created under the 2002 protocol establishing the Peace and Security Council to provide “timely advice on potential conflicts and threats to peace and security to enable the development of appropriate response strategies to prevent or resolve conflicts in Africa.”<sup>8</sup> The CEWS comprises an observation and monitoring center (the situation room) located at AU headquarters in Addis Ababa and the observation and monitoring units of the Regional Economic Communities’

(RECs) early-warning mechanisms, which are to be directly linked to the situation room.

In 2006, a framework for operationalizing the CEWS was developed, which identified three primary requirements:

- collection and analysis of conflict data based on an indicators module;
- production of effective early-warning reports to facilitate engagement with decision makers;
- coordination and collaboration with relevant stakeholders including the RECs, the UN (specifically the Security Council and Secretariat), civil society organizations, and the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa—a body mandated to work as an early-warning entity for the AU by collecting and supplying security information.

The CEWS analytical framework also covers three key elements. The first is the collection and monitoring of information on potential conflicts through alerts that consider context, actors, and events to prepare profiles and baselines for assessing vulnerability. Following the development of gender-based indicators by the CEWS and the AU Women, Gender and Development Directorate, the collection of conflict information also reflects a gender perspective. The second element deals with early warnings that include analyses of conflict-relevant structures, actors, and dynamics and that identify trends and conditions conducive to conflict. The third element relates to the formulation of recommendations, through scenario building, development of response options, and their validation and verification. In general, the analytical framework is complemented by the response, which materializes in the action taken and implemented by the relevant decision makers.

In practice, the situation room in Addis Ababa currently comprises thirteen staff members and tries to operate on a twenty-four hour basis. Participants at the roundtable noted the evolution of the situation room since its establishment as part of the Conflict Management Division of the

6 South African Human Rights Commission, “Report on the SAHRC Investigation into Issues of Rule of Law, Justice and Impunity arising out of the 2008 Public Violence against Non-Nationals,” Johannesburg, March 2010.

7 Paul Romita, “The UN Security Council and Conflict Prevention: A Primer,” New York: International Peace Institute, October 2011.

8 African Union Commission, “Framework for the Operationalization of the Continental Early Warning System,” paper presented at the Meeting of Governmental Experts on Early Warning and Conflict Prevention, Kempton Park, South Africa, December 17–19, 2006, available at [www.africa-union.org/root/AU/AUC/Departments/PSC/PSC/CD/5\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.africa-union.org/root/AU/AUC/Departments/PSC/PSC/CD/5_Framework.pdf).

Organization of African Unity in the early 1990s. One participant also reported on the usefulness of daily text messages received from the situation room, which provide up-to-date information from across the continent.

While additional early-warning tools are being developed, the CEWS relies on analytical and news sources such as Oxford Analytica and BBC Monitoring, as well as online news sites such as the Africa Media Monitor (AMM). The AMM is a data-gathering tool that facilitates the collection of information from a large variety of sources in real time and in all four AU working languages. The software is able to read 40,000 articles simultaneously and is updated every ten minutes. Another tool tailored to the CEWS indicators and templates is the Africa Reporter, which facilitates monitoring and information gathering primarily from the AU field missions and liaison offices. In addition, the CEWS uses Live-Mon, a tool that performs an automatic geo-localization of news items so that events can be displayed on a map. Apart from information on events, incidents, and situations, data on actors and structural factors are collected and analyzed with a view to reinforcing conflict-prevention efforts by identifying trends.

The functioning of the CEWS was strengthened by a January 2008 Memorandum of Understanding, which increases the AU's cooperation with other regional early-warning and response mechanisms. Regular meetings bring together continental and regional early-warning experts for training and to share experiences and technical support. In addition, the AU and the RECs early-warning and response mechanisms use common tools and license agreements, and they have started publishing a joint newsletter.

Despite noticeable progress in operationalizing the CEWS, the limited capacity of the AU situation room in terms of staff expertise, material, and technical equipment continues to hinder the effectiveness of the system. The AU situation room employs five early-warning professionals among its thirteen staff, compared to eleven experts at the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) observation and monitoring

units, respectively. Such limited capacity negatively impacts the analysis of collected data. It also affects the drafting of concrete recommendations for action. To address these challenges and complete the operationalization of the CEWS, the participants at the roundtable recommended:

- a more efficient information and communication system that takes into account the development of new technologies;
- better communication between the AU situation room and the regional observation and monitoring units;
- additional training and capacity building for staff members; and
- stronger cooperation with other AU conflict-prevention bodies, the RECs, civil society, and think tanks.

Participants underscored the urgent need for relevant AU organs to strengthen the political will to act on early warnings, not least by improving the implementation of continental and regional normative frameworks.

#### ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES: THE UN APPROACH

Building on the momentum that currently exists for early warning, the United Nations has worked toward expanding its conceptual understanding of early warning and developing collaboration among its various agencies. For the UN, early-warning efforts aim to strengthen national capacity for conflict prevention by building the skills of national actors and developing closer collaboration between them, with a view to facilitating immediate responses to conflict.

In Africa, as the UN Secretary-General's first report on the prevention of conflict highlighted, member states and civil society actors are the primary conflict-prevention actors.<sup>9</sup> The UN's conflict-prevention and early-warning work also derives from the process relating to the Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA), which has been formalized since its adoption to consolidate the AU's work in the areas of peace, security, stability, development, and cooperation by creating

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Secretary-General, *Prevention of Armed Conflict*.



synergies between the various activities undertaken by the union. More collaborative work is also conducted at country level to de-stigmatize early-warning systems—for example, by highlighting the existence of such systems, including national intelligence systems, in most countries.

The UN's Department of Political Affairs and UNDP are two agencies working to build national capacity for conflict prevention. Support is provided to UN country teams to develop national responses that forestall the need for violent interventions at a later stage. For example, the UN works with governments and civil society to facilitate dialogue on emerging issues. Training is also organized to equip local actors, such as members of parliament, with negotiation skills. Ghana and Kenya are two examples of the UN's engagement in conflict prevention at country level.

#### NATIONAL EARLY-WARNING STRUCTURES: THE CASES OF GHANA AND KENYA

In Ghana, the extreme politicization of intractable chieftaincy disputes had the potential to destabilize the northern part of the country and pose serious threats to peaceful national elections in 2004. In response, local peace committees, or District Peace Advisory Councils, were established to deal with these conflicts through a process of community dialogue and mediation.<sup>10</sup> Training was provided to traditional leaders who were members of the District Peace Advisory Councils. The relevance of these alternative conflict-resolution mechanisms led the government to institutionalize the peace advisory councils, and a National Peace Council was set up with the support of UNDP.<sup>11</sup> This council actively collaborated with the Ghana Electoral Commission, facilitating dialogue among political parties to avert a violent outcome to the tense 2008 presidential election. As a result, the vote saw a peaceful transition of power even with a margin of victory of less than 1 percent.<sup>12</sup>

Similar conflict-prevention work was done in

Kenya ahead of the 2010 constitutional referendum by the Ushahidi and Uwiano platforms, at a time when there were genuine fears and evidence of renewed political violence. The Ushahidi platform (*ushahidi* means “testimony” in Swahili) was initially developed for humanitarian early warning following the post-election violence in 2008. The platform uses crowdsourcing—namely, reports submitted via the web and mobile phones—to map incidents of violence and peace efforts throughout the country. It has helped civil society organizations to connect and share information. More recently, the Uwiano (“cohesion”) platform was launched ahead of the 2010 referendum by several Kenyan and international institutions, including the National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (NSC), the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), PeaceNet Kenya, and UNDP. The Uwiano platform organized a system to collect up-to-date information on tensions, hate speech, incitement, threats, and violence throughout the country, and to relay that information to security institutions and local peace committees best positioned to undertake the appropriate actions, including mediation. Peace advocates were trained to facilitate an immediate response to conflict. This joint initiative was supported by the government, local communities, local civil society and religious groups, and international development partners.<sup>13</sup>

The roundtable acknowledged the need for greater government involvement in such efforts. Sharing experiences among local and national peace structures from different countries was seen as an important capacity-building strategy. In addition, it was noted that strengthening national peace structures could usefully reinforce regional mechanisms for conflict prevention. Moreover, closer collaboration between national peace structures and the AU and REC early-warning mechanisms could help continental and regional systems to give greater consideration to short- and long-term causes of violence.

10 Andries Odendaal and Retief Olivier, “Local Peace Committees: Some Reflections and Lessons Learned,” commissioned by The Academy for Educational Development (AED), Kathmandu, Nepal, available at [www.gppac.net/uploads/File/Programmes/EWER/I4P/9.%20LOCAL%20PEACE%20COUNCILS.pdf](http://www.gppac.net/uploads/File/Programmes/EWER/I4P/9.%20LOCAL%20PEACE%20COUNCILS.pdf).

11 United Nations Development Programme in Ghana, “National Peace Council: A Peace Architecture for Ghana,” available at [www.undp-gha.org/mainpages.php?page=national%20peace%20council](http://www.undp-gha.org/mainpages.php?page=national%20peace%20council).

12 Lucas Issacharoff, “Keeping the Peace in a Tense Election: Ghana, 2008,” *Innovations for Successful Societies*, Princeton University, 2010, available at [www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties](http://www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties).

13 United Nations Development Programme in Kenya, “Uwiano Peace Platform Project,” available at [www.ke.undp.org/index.php/projects/uwiano-peace-platform-project](http://www.ke.undp.org/index.php/projects/uwiano-peace-platform-project).

## Civil Society's Role in Early Warning and Conflict Prevention

The roundtable participants emphasized the link between early-warning systems and civil society at national, regional, and continental levels. This link is increasingly acknowledged—for example, by early-warning mechanisms in the Horn and West Africa. In the Horn of Africa, the Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has developed community-led peace initiatives, which serve as a tool for reducing violence and enhancing peaceful interaction and resource sharing among local communities.<sup>14</sup> In West Africa, the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN), which is comprised of an observation and monitoring center based in Abuja, Nigeria, and subregional zone offices, is supported by civil society organizations that collect information on the ground. In addition, the media are actively involved in ECOWARN's work given the role they play as open sources of information and potential conflict-prevention actors.<sup>15</sup> However, at the AU level, the participation of civil society in the CEWS remains limited. This was seen by roundtable participants as a possible area for improvement.

Civil society organizations, linked to local communities that provide them with comparative advantages in accessing open-source information on potential conflict, can usefully contribute to strengthening the early-warning and response mechanisms established at continental and regional levels. For instance, community-based actors such as churches and local radio stations are able to monitor and gather information on conflict using indicators that differ from more developed data-collection tools. Information gathered through

such informal networks can be transmitted by more established civil society organizations to the regional and continental early-warning and response mechanisms. In addition, civil society organizations' useful connections, greater political independence, and more extensive experience in advocacy can improve the preparation of implementable recommendations for responding to conflict. In Lesotho, for example, a deadlock ahead of the May 2012 parliamentary election was addressed by domestic, church-led mediation supported by UNDP. To prevent violent contestations of elections such as those in 1998 and 2007, and following more confrontations before the 2012 election, the churches facilitated the signature of a pledge by most of the political parties, in which they committed to conduct themselves lawfully and accept the results of the upcoming elections.<sup>16</sup>

The role women play as credible agents of peace was also highlighted at the roundtable meeting. Ahead of the 2012 presidential election in Senegal, women were mobilized and trained to serve as observers and mediators. Under the banner of the Senegalese Women's Platform for Peaceful Elections, a "situation room" was set up, which provided a space for conflict prevention and mediation, as well as the coordination of election monitoring using a gender perspective. The situation room brought together fifty women leaders from Senegal and neighboring countries involved in promoting women's rights, peacebuilding, and ending violence against women and girls. The women were equipped with mobile phones to speed up warning and response through text messaging. Building on Resolutions 1325 and 1820 of the UN Security Council, the women's platform facilitated the active participation of women and youth in the electoral process. The initiative was supported by several organizations, including UN Women and UNDP. It is to be replicated in upcoming elections in Sierra Leone.

14 CEWARN, "CEWARN Convenes Peace Gathering for Neighbouring Communities of Ethiopia and Kenya," available at [www.cewarn.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=92:cewarn-convenes-a-peace-gathering-for-neighbouring-communities-of-ethiopia-and-kenya&catid=110:2010-archive&Itemid=133](http://www.cewarn.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=92:cewarn-convenes-a-peace-gathering-for-neighbouring-communities-of-ethiopia-and-kenya&catid=110:2010-archive&Itemid=133).

15 OECD, "The ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network: Interview with Mr. Augustin Sagna," May 2009, available at [www.oecd.org/document/59/0,3746,en\\_38233741\\_38242551\\_42930299\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00&&en-USS\\_01DBC.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/59/0,3746,en_38233741_38242551_42930299_1_1_1_1,00&&en-USS_01DBC.html).

16 Bongiwé Zihlangu, "Parties to Sign Election Roadmap," *Lesotho Times*, January 11, 2012, available at [www.lesotimes.com/?p=8074](http://www.lesotimes.com/?p=8074).

## The Challenges of Early Response

Participants at the roundtable concurred that early warning should be timely in order to be effective and that achieving timeliness is often a challenge. In theory, early-warning systems should look to the future in a predictive fashion. In practice, however, participants noted that signs that should serve as “early warnings” of violence are frequently identified retrospectively, after conflict has broken out. And like many preventive actions, the success of early-warning systems can only be measured in hindsight, once it can be determined whether or not conflict has been averted. Early-warning actors and systems face additional challenges in the course of implementation associated with their accuracy in anticipating a conflict, the credibility attached to the prediction formulated, the decision by relevant players to act on the information provided, and the impact the action taken has on the conflict.

The participants agreed that bridging the gap between early warning and early response remains a major challenge. Moving from early warning to a response that concretely prevents conflict—that is, making a situation on the ground inspire action—is particularly difficult in the context of limited financial, human, and material resources. Overcoming this challenge requires, at the very least, the identification of the authors of the response. Some participants found it useful to draw a line between early-warning and early-response actors. Unlike at the local level, where both early warning and response can be initiated by national and community-based peace initiatives, for example, it is the political organs of the RECs, the AU, or the UN that have the responsibility to respond to conflicts at the regional and international levels. It is also important to identify the mechanism that is most adequate for addressing a particular conflict. The response can come from the UN Security Council at the global level or from the AU Peace and Security Council at the regional level. Not every conflict will require a response by the Security Council or the Peace and Security Council. At national or local levels, the response to a conflict

can be initiated by national and community-based peace mechanisms.

Another concern raised by the roundtable was the appropriateness of the response. The participants found it critical to ensure that the right type of response is provided to a specific conflict. Referring to the military coups that recently took place in West Africa, one participant observed that the coups’ authors on the ground may not necessarily be informed of the response initiatives undertaken by the Security Council in New York or the Peace and Security Council in Addis Ababa, such as the publication of a presidential statement by the Security Council. Another participant highlighted the importance of preserving institutional memory from previous conflict-prevention efforts, to facilitate learning from past experiences and to inform future responses by member states. This is prescient in the case of Guinea-Bissau, participants noted, where 700 peacekeepers from the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) were deployed in 1998 following a conflict that broke out between the army and the government. As Guinea-Bissau continues to face challenges in 2012, ECOWAS has decided to send 600 troops again, this time to monitor a year-long political transition and pursue the implementation of a defense and security-sector reform program previously initiated by an Angolan Technical Assistance Mission.<sup>17</sup>

The meeting participants also discussed the need to respond to conflict in a timely manner using concrete examples. Considering the recent crises in Mali and Guinea-Bissau, it was emphasized that it is always difficult to predict a coup d’état. Nevertheless, early signs of potential conflict were visible in Mali with the growing Tuareg rebellion, while the army was not well equipped to face the insurgency. Also, in Guinea-Bissau, the lack of response to long-term drug trafficking and the chronic tension between the military and political leaders were clear signs of brewing instability. At both the UN and the AU, it takes time for the Security Council or the Peace and Security Council to appoint an envoy. At the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, the identification of the relevant diplomat to send when a crisis erupts is often the first question to be raised. This bears risks of

<sup>17</sup> Comfort Ero, “ECOMOG: A Model for Africa?,” in *Building Stability in Africa: Challenges for the New Millennium*, edited by Jakkie Cilliers and Annika Hilding-Norberg, ISS Monograph 46, February 2000.

recycling the same envoys and, in some cases, sending in officials who may not necessarily be fit for a particular conflict. The meeting observed that while mobilizing and sending heads of state to address a particular crisis—such as the election-related crisis in Côte d’Ivoire in early 2011—can be difficult, the AU is also learning from experience, from one conflict to another.

Despite speed and flexibility constraints, the appointment of high-level envoys also presents benefits, as these figures bring political clout and add weight to the outcome of their intervention. However, beyond a “fire-fighting” approach to crises, there is also a need to consider more predictable policy approaches to conflict prevention and to address the structural causes of conflict and not only its symptoms. The AU has taken this concern into account, and the organization is constituting a roster of experts available to intervene in the areas of conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and postconflict reconstruction and development.

Finally, better responses to conflict are conditioned by the availability of adequate resources. Participants found it important to consider the gaps between organizations at regional, continental, and global levels, and they stressed the need for coordination and mutual support among conflict-prevention actors. Specifically, the AU’s capacity constraints were underlined, and meeting participants questioned the international community’s readiness to step in when the need arises. Another resource gap was highlighted in the space between conflict prevention and peacekeeping. The participants agreed that the rhetorical battle for conflict prevention had been won. For appropriate, timely, and sustainable responses to conflict in practice, it is now necessary to convince governments and multilateral actors to allocate the necessary resources to a more robust

prevention of conflict.

## Conclusion

Progress is being made in detecting and monitoring early signs of conflict, and this is enhanced by local initiatives that facilitate ownership. Conflict-prevention mechanisms have been established at global, regional, and local levels, which provide useful insights into potential crises. However, these mechanisms should be strengthened to produce timely and tangible outcomes.

At the AU, the Continental Early Warning System is being operationalized, and collaboration with the regional early-warning mechanisms is being developed. This system’s contribution to the AU’s efforts to prevent conflict can be improved through better communication with other regional mechanisms and with the AU organs mandated to act on early warning, as well as stronger cooperation with civil society organizations. Moreover, the CEWS could benefit from strategies developed by the UN in its national conflict-prevention work—specifically with regard to building local actors’ capacity in this area and addressing the root causes of conflict and not only its symptoms. As such, the creation of national peace structures and the involvement of civil society and women have proven critical to preventing and rapidly addressing potential crises.

Finally, roundtable participants agreed that many challenges remain for the international community to strengthen conflict prevention. They include coordinating between early-warning actors and decision makers who can act on proposed policy options, identifying the relevant actors or institutions to respond to a particular conflict, and mobilizing the necessary capacity and resources to provide a timely response.



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# Agenda

## Preventing Conflicts in Africa: The Role of Early Warning and Response Systems

April 27, 2012

08:45 – 09:00 Buffet breakfast

09:00 – 09:30 Welcoming Remarks

Ambassador John Hirsch, *Senior Adviser, IPI*

Ambassador Baso Sangqu, *Permanent Representative of the Republic of South Africa to the United Nations*

Ambassador Agshin Mehdiyev, *Permanent Representative of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations*

09:30 – 11:30 **Speakers**

Mr. Charles Mwaura, *Senior Expert on Early Warning, Continental Early Warning System, African Union, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*

Dr. Mehari Taddele Maru, *Programme Manager, African Conflict Prevention and Risk Analysis, Institute for Security Studies, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*

Ms. Gay Rosenblum-Kumar, *Executive Secretary, UN Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action, United Nations*

Moderator: Ambassador John Hirsch, *Senior Adviser, IPI*

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