Context

The last few years have witnessed a surge in violent conflict. Today’s conflicts are deadlier, costlier and more protracted, with civilians bearing the brunt of war. According to estimates, the economic impact of violence on the global economy in 2017 was $14.76 trillion; an increase of 16 percent since 2012\(^1\). And while primarily intrastate, most of today’s conflicts are regionalized and/or internationalized, and involve a wide array of non-state actors. Moreover, the tools at the disposal of the international community to address the outbreak or relapse to armed conflict (humanitarian and peace operations) are becoming overstretched and unsustainably costly.

This couldn’t be truer than in the case of Africa. The continent is home to half of the UN peacekeeping operations. In addition, all the country configurations on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission are African.

As a result, the logic for investing early and adequately to prevent the onset of armed conflict is simply unassailable. Conflict prevention saves lives, and averts social, economic and physical destruction, as well as developmental reversals. It also pre-empts the need for significantly larger investments in conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction.

The last few years have seen a renewed focus on “conflict prevention.” The 2015 report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) called for conflict prevention to be “brought back to the fore”, and called on the United Nations (UN) system to pull together in a more “integrated manner” in the service of conflict prevention, including by addressing the root causes of conflict. The 2015 Review of the Peacebuilding Architecture, and the subsequent Twin Resolutions of 2016 (UNSCR2282 and UNGA70/262), coined the term “sustaining peace”, as both a goal and a process, to “prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of violence.”

In 2018, Pathways for Peace, the first ever joint study between the United Nations and the World Bank Group, called for refocusing the international community’s attention on prevention. According to the study, a scaled-up system for preventive action could save between US$5 and $70 billion per year, which could be invested in reducing poverty and improving populations’ well-being. In addition to showing that prevention is cost-effective, the study highlighted key arenas where sustained, targeted and flexible intervention can have a significant impact.

In this regard, the primary responsibility for preventive action rests with states, through their national policies\(^2\). To prevent societies from descending into conflict, the prevention agenda must be integrated into national development policies and efforts, with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the core of this approach. State institutions must invest in inclusive and sustainable development that not only create growth and advance poverty alleviation, but also address inequalities, exclusion, and grievances (real or perceived). Moreover, acting preventively entails fostering systems that create incentives for peaceful and cooperative behaviour.

In the context of the African Union, prevention is understood to involve both a direct, operational focus of intervening during the escalation phase of a conflict, as well as a systematic, strategic focus of addressing the root, proximate, and structural causes of conflict. Both Agenda 2063 and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) Roadmap (2016-2020) recognized the link between development and

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2 As highlighted by "Pathways for Peace” and the "sustaining peace” twin resolutions.
conflict prevention. As a result, commendable efforts have gone into developing early warning systems on the continental (Continental Early Warning System) and regional levels (Early Warning Mechanisms of RECs/RMs). The Union also established elaborate structures and processes for conflict management (mediation; peace support operations; PCRD; etc.). However, progress in structural prevention continues to be limited, notwithstanding the development of an AU Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework (2015), encompassing Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessments (CSVRA) and Country Structural Vulnerability Mitigation Strategies (CSVMS).

The Expert Workshop

Upon assuming the Chairmanship of the African Union and the Championship of Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD), Egypt announced its intention to (1) launch the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development, as a high-level, multi-stakeholder platform to examine the interlinkages between the “sustaining peace” and “sustainable development” agendas; (2) to support the implementation of the African Union’s normative framework and policy for PRCD, including through hosting the AU Centre for Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development (AUC-PCRD).

Acting in its capacity as the Secretariat of the Aswan Forum, the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCRA), in partnership with the African Union Commission, the Egyptian Embassy in Addis Ababa and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), is organizing an Expert Workshop, titled:

“Conflict Prevention in Africa: From Policy to Practice”

The workshop, which will be held on 16-17 September 2019 at the African Union Commission, will bring a select group of officials from national governments, the African Union, RECs/RMs, the UN, the World Bank and other financial institutions, together with experts, professionals, and scholars in the fields of peace and security, development and humanitarian action, including from civil society, to:

- Exchange national and regional experiences, lessons learned and best practices of conflict prevention and sustaining peace in Africa;
- Discuss the challenges of building viable, inclusive and legitimate state institutions, especially in countries involved or emerging from conflict, and the nature of support to be provided by external actors;
- Present recommendations for advancing “structural prevention” in the AU and explore synergies between political, peace and security, and development actors to achieve effective prevention;
- Explore opportunities for advancing AU-UN partnership in conflict prevention;
- Discuss the challenges of predictable and sustained financing, as well as appropriate evaluation of “prevention”.

Outcome

A report summarizing the key findings and recommendations of the high-level workshop will be generated and submitted as an input for the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development.

Strategic Partnerships

The Aswan Forum is an Egyptian initiative, owned by Africa and supported by the international community. This event was made possible by the generous contribution of the governments of Canada, the United Kingdom and Japan, as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

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