

107th Great Lakes Policy Forum
Meeting Report
June 3, 2004

Introduction

Conflict and instability in one country in the Great Lakes region has a tendency of starting as an internal conflict and then influencing the dynamics of neighboring countries. Cultural, social and linguistic elements are important factors to be considered in understanding the internal and external spread of conflict in the Great Lakes region. The themes of peace and security, governance, and social development in a regional context were the focus of the June Great Lakes Policy Forum: *Preparing the International Conference on the Great Lakes Regions*. Speakers were Ibrahima Fall, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for the Great Lakes Region; John Prendergast, Special Advisor to the President-International Crisis Group; and Peter Uvin, Henry Leir Associate Professor of International Humanitarian Studies-The Fletcher School, Tufts University. Ozong Agborsangaya, Director of Sub-Saharan African Program-Search for Common Ground, facilitated the forum.

Importance of the Great Lakes Conference

The UN-sponsored International Conference on the Great Lakes Region scheduled for November 2004 in Dar es Salaam is not a new idea. The proposal for an international conference evolved initially from security issues between Rwanda and DRC following the Rwandan genocide; and then later from the civil wars in Burundi and DRC. It was seen as imperative to deal with many of the ongoing destabilizing issues from a regional perspective. The international conference therefore is not a substitute for the Lusaka or Arusha peace processes and agreements, but rather it should be regarded as an addition to these accords. Realistically, this conference cannot address all issues surrounding the Great Lakes region but will focus on four priorities: peace and security, democracy and good governance, economic development, and humanitarian and social issues. The aim



Ambassador Ibrahima Fall discusses preparations for the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region at the June GLPF.

of the conference is to address these regional concerns and not for individual countries to utilize the conference for negotiation purposes. The current countries involved are Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, and Zambia. Others such as Angola and the Republic of Congo want to be involved as participants rather than have a more passive position of observers. Also, “development partners” such as South Africa, Nigeria, Gabon, and 26 non-African countries (all OECD-Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development-countries), sub-regional groups like the

African Union, NGOs, the World Bank, and the IMF will all be included so as to ensure outcomes reflect needs and aspirations of multiple groups including civil society. Further, other actors such as civil society organizations (including youth and women’s groups), trade unions, and faith-based organizations will also be included in the conference.

Participation of state and non-state actors is seen as imperative for a successful conference.

To help ensure a successful outcome, the conference preparation includes local and regional ownership through national preparatory committees and national coordinators for the conference for each regional country involved. The preparatory committees will be responsible for preparing much of the conference. This pillar of African ownership is supported by the international organizations and countries involved. These countries and organizations will participate and contribute to implementing the outcomes of the conference by providing technical, diplomatic, and financial support. The expected outcomes of this conference are to ensure that the proposed action programs or plans and concrete follow-up mechanisms involving short-term, mid-term and long-term objectives be adopted.

Regional Peace and Security

The need for mechanisms dealing with security and promoting peace is a vital component of the Great Lakes conference. However, if the conference is held in November 2004, it will be difficult to manage because of a variety of factors. The current transitional governments in Burundi and DRC may not feel as great a responsibility to willingly implement conference outcomes, whereas a fully elected government by the people would feel a stronger need to facilitate changes. Another obstacle to a successful conference is ongoing conflict in Burundi and DRC that is putting both peace processes to the test. The current situation in Bukavu is a prime example.

The issue of regional security between Burundi, DRC, Uganda, and Rwanda needs to be addressed. Some argue that security problems need immediate attention and must be addressed before a meaningful conference can be held, while others argue that the conference will address such issues. Regionally, the civil wars that spill over into neighboring countries are results of leaders' actions as well as states having porous borders. Further, the degree of internal and external spoilers with access to natural resources poses a problem. It is important that the international community pressure the structures that aid and abet resource exploitation to halt their operations. Finally, the existence of predatory proxy armies is at the root cause of the issue and embedded in neo-patrimonial regimes and hence, makes resolution complicated. It is important to note that lasting progress on security issues without progress in governance is impossible, and that lasting change must come from within. Facilitating the process of change can be achieved by a stable security environment and strong societal pressure. To maintain stability, diplomatic efforts need to be broadened and there also needs to be greater investment in civil society organizations for their voices to be heard. Security Sector Reform (SSR) is also an important facet of improving security. SSR emphasizes the need for integration of the armies in DRC and Burundi as well as creating a more professional and effective security sector. Further progress on the DDR process is also needed, especially regarding Rwandan Interahamwe militias in DRC. Finally, it is argued that before the Great Lakes conference can proceed successfully, along with the aforementioned security improvements, there needs to be developed mechanisms in place

for resolving security problems that could include bilateral or tripartite mechanisms that are supported by the international community.

Conclusion

It is important to emphasize the role of peacebuilding to ensure peace and security at the upcoming conference. The issue of truth and justice as a requirement in the peacebuilding process is a question that will be addressed. Regarding the topic of truth and justice, and in terms of peace and security, impunity has to be dealt with. This is an important aspect of all four themes of the conference.

Even though it seems to many that the UN has a credibility gap in the Great Lakes region, this conference comes as a request from the region. By taking a comprehensive approach, concerns such as economics, arms trafficking, widespread poverty, and problems of the populous will be addressed. One of the positives of the conference is that it is trying to widen the pool of stakeholders and to involve as many stakeholders as possible, including civil society, to participate in discussion and making decisions. The conference is a process for stability in the region, not a one-time event. However, there stand in the way numerous difficulties that could be obstacles to meaningful change resulting from the conference if it is held as planned in November 2004.