

**Introductory Remarks**  
**by H.E. President Olusegun Obasanjo**  
**On the State of Peace and Security in Africa**

**Excellencies, African Heads of States and Government here present,**  
**Excellencies, African former Heads of States and Government,**  
**Representatives of the African Union,**  
**Representatives of the Regional Economic Communities Present**  
**Members of the Diplomatic Corps,**  
**Representatives of International Development Partners,**  
**Our friends from the Media and Civil Society Organisations**  
**Distinguished participants,**  
**Ladies and Gentlemen**

We are, once again, gathered here in Bahir Dar for the third time to celebrate the continuity of the Tana Forum, one of the ideas closest to the heart of the late Prime Minister of Ethiopia, H.E. Mr MelesZenawi. We are not only celebrating the achievement of this young forum, but also to realistically examine the peace and security challenges facing our continent.

**Excellencies,**

**Distinguished participants,**

Recent developments and security threats in Mali, Central African Republic, Nigeria, not forgetting South Sudan and what we commonly call the endless conflicts in Somalia and the Great Lakes, are alarming. The African Union at its 50th Anniversary Solemn Declaration pledged not to bequeath to future generations

of Africans a legacy of wars and conflicts by silencing the guns by 2020. But 2020 is around the corner. **What is the way out of this situation? I'm asking this question to prompt your response to a call for action.**

**Let me begin with a brief overview of the current state of peace and security in the continent.**

Our continent has no doubt witnessed some transformations in the last decade or two, ranging from advances in the use of communication technology, to rapid economic growth triggered by expanding market for Africa's commodities; and a burgeoning youth population able to innovate in this environment. At the same time, our potential to translate these transformations into stable peace and development for African people is hampered by the continuing threat of armed conflict, along with its transmutations. Armed conflicts have become a recurrent reality in Africa since independence. From 1960 till present, fifty percent of African states have been ravaged by one form of conflict or the other. The post-Cold War resurgence is particularly disturbing.

**Peace and Security Scholars have attempted to classify armed conflicts on the continent into various categories – some of which understandably only feature in our discourses in a historical sense. Let me provide you with some sense of this**

**categorisation if only as an indication of how far we have come as a continent:**

- First – Post-colonial conflicts arising from agitations for liberation from the control of colonial settlers in countries such as Namibia (1990), Zimbabwe (1980) and apartheid in South Africa (1994);
- Second – Boundary and territorial conflicts such as the Angolan Bush War in South Africa, from 1966 to 1989; and the Algeria-Morocco conflict over the Atlas Mountain area in 1963, the territorial tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea, (1998-2000), Kenya-Somali war (1963-1967), Somali-Ethiopian conflict (1964-1978), Egypt-Libya conflict (1977), and the Cameroon-Nigeria conflict over the disputed Bakassi Peninsula (1994) – the settlement of which I was part of.
- Third – Conflicts linked to secessionist ambitions such as the case of Sudan and South Sudan from 1983-2011, the age-long Cassamance rebellion in Senegal, the Cabinda agitations in Angola; and the Biafra civil war in Nigeria 1967-1970.
- Fourth – Resource-based conflicts such as the Sudan and South Sudan conflict over the Abyei region, Congo Brazzaville conflict in 2007, the Angolan conflict, and the Senegal/Mauritania conflict of 1989;
- Fifth – Identity-based conflicts such as inter-ethnic or inter-tribal conflicts. Examples of these are the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, the Burundi massacre, the Tuareg uprising in Mali, clan fighting in Somalia and Liberia, Algerian Berbers fighting

against the ruling Arab class in Algeria, and the ongoing South Sudan conflict;

- Sixth – Annexationist conflicts: such as the occupation of the Western Sahara by Morocco in 1975, and British Southern Cameroons in 1961.
- Seventh – Poverty, denial and perceived or real injustice induced conflicts like the militancy in the Niger Delta of Nigeria or the current Boko Haram insurgency.

Even though a substantial decline in the occurrence of inter-state conflicts including many of those I just mentioned was experienced in the 1990s, an alarming rise in the number of intra-state conflicts and what some scholars refer to as new wars in their various forms and shades is taking place. By nature, these conflicts tend to be more intense and intractable. They range from large-scale warfare to low intensity conflicts; and of late we have seen how public protests and people's movements can set off a chain of violent even if transformative events. Over the past years, countries such as Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia-Eritrea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, Mali, Central African Republic and Nigeria have witnessed one form of escalating conflict or the other with their attendant consequences. Some of these countries are still undergoing heart-wrenching episodes of violence, even as I speak.

The gory events of the last month of 2013 in South Sudan and the horror witnessed on the streets of Bangui in Central African Republic attest to this and in my view should challenge our resolve as Africans to silence the guns in these places forever.

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Further additions to these are growing and menacing terrorist activities and insurgencies taking place in Somalia, Mali, Kenya and North Eastern Nigeria till date. In some respects, these conflicts and forms of insecurity are not as new as some peace and security scholars might claim. For one, their root causes and triggers are not necessarily new. We have long spoken about the structural violence that underlines armed conflict. The Constitutive Act of the African Union pays particular attention to this.**

**We have also noted that the triggers of these conflicts are numerous and interwoven. I highlight three major categories here just as an illustration:**

- Politically, poor governance, state building processes such as struggle for control of power and unconstitutional change of government remain key conflict drivers.
- Economically, corruption, struggle for ownership, management and control of natural resources, as well as unequal

distribution of these resources constitutes major factors that trigger conflicts across the continent.

- Socially, inadequate capacity for diversity management, the real or perceived inequality and discrimination against minorities, marginalization along ethnic and religious lines as well as the alienation and consequent disillusionment of the youth are further additions.

Internationally, colonial legacies, and foreign interference in political transition and governance have equally triggered conflicts.

**But what is indeed new is the pattern of mutation of old conflicts. As a result, we sometimes see their manifestation in more extreme forms of militancy.** To be certain, this extreme expression of violence is not the preserve of Africa. However, while it is tempting to conclude that what we are experiencing is copycat stealing of “narratives” from all over the world, we must reflect on how deeply militant groups believe in those narratives. Initial evidence suggests that despite a copycat method of expression, these are reactions to local rather than global conditions. We now know that we cannot ignore the “power of Africa’s streets” both in its violent and non-violent manifestations. The phenomenon in which largely young populations, take to the streets to voice their feelings of exclusion through mass non-violent protests; and another phenomenon in which a form of socialisation causes young people

to throw bombs on themselves and are ready to kill deserves closer attention.

**As a result, we see the threat landscape changing. We therefore must ask ourselves whether this threat landscape is changing fundamentally and whether we are still looking at the right framework for addressing the breadth of security challenges confronting the continent.**

**Excellencies, Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**The consequences of conflicts in their various manifestations on state, human and collective security are enormous and I therefore call on you to muster the necessary resolve and determination to ensure that these deadly conflicts and their negative consequences on our citizens becomes a thing of the past.**

Politically, Africa's ability to establish secure, democratic, and economically prosperous states is being hampered. State institutions and infrastructures are eroded thereby undermining the integrity of the state. Formal economies have collapsed giving room for the rise of shadow states where warlordism, impunity, and criminality thrive.

Socially, the humanitarian dilemma across the African continent is huge. The incalculable loss of human lives, the damage to material infrastructure and environmental resources and the massive flows of refugees and internally displaced persons is a scar on our conscience.

Economically, the loss of income and assets, damage to infrastructure, diversion of resources from socio-economic development to peacekeeping, collapse of trading systems, cuts in social spending and capital flight, are some of the negative consequences of these armed conflicts.

**Our actions as decision makers, private stakeholders and civil society should complement the relentless efforts of National governments, the African Union, Regional Economic Communities and the international community on the prevention, management and resolution of these conflicts.**

National governments have adopted several measures, policies and initiatives to enhance peace and security in affected countries.

At the regional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have, in accordance with the Constitutive Act of AU, consistently condemned unconstitutional changes of governments in the region, imposed sanctions against defaulting member states and facilitated mediation processes in these



conflicts. They have equally deployed peacekeepers and human rights observers to conflict affected countries.

The Inter-governmental Authority on Development's (IGAD) also intervened in resolving conflicts in Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia.

At the continental level, The African Union since its transformation from the OAU to the AU in 2001, embarked on a paradigm shift from its principle of non-interference to a principle of non-indifference and the right to intervene. Guided by the principle of "African Solutions to African problems" the AU has taken significant actions to enhance peace and security in the continent. The adoption of the Protocol Relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council in December 2003 and its framework for conflict prevention, management and resolution in Africa: the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) are commendable.

The AU has undertaken several peacekeeping missions in Burundi, Comoros, Somalia, Darfur and Central African Republic with significant results. I will not forget to mention the evolving AU Agenda 2063 which places balancing state and human security as one of its core priorities, The African Common Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda which explores the interconnectedness between peace, security and sustainable development and the African Governance Architecture (AGA) which aims at promoting good governance for sustainable peace and security.

At the global level, the United Nations have supported the restoration of peace and security in Africa through the adoption of various resolutions, which established various peacekeeping missions across the continent. These efforts have been supported by financial and technical support of various development partners and non-state actors across the globe.

**Would these efforts be enough to eradicate conflict by 2020? Certainly not, we need to do more. Much also depends on our ability to engage in hard collective thinking and “horizon scanning” in ways that enable us to inject flexibility when required, into our existing response frameworks. The Tana Forum offers an important contribution to a process of collective thinking.**

**Excellencies, Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**If we must achieve sustainable peace in Africa, the following non-negotiable priorities to fast-track the implementation of already existing mechanisms are of utmost importance:**

First – Democracy and good governance must form the basis of management of affairs of every country in Africa. Peace, security and good governance are fellow passengers.

Second - African leaders and decision-makers must re-affirm their commitment in terms of resources and demonstrate the political will

required to ensure the operationalization of an African-owned APSA. African Solutions will ring hollow if we fail to fund our initiatives and programmes.

Third - The implementation of the African Governance Architecture must be accorded the needed priority as APSA and AGA are two sides of one coin. While AGA focuses on broader questions of governance, APSA places emphasis on the mechanisms for conflict management, resolution and peacebuilding. These two must work together to bring about peace and security in the continent.

Fourth - All components of APSA should be equally implemented for a more coherent and comprehensive approach to managing peace and security in Africa.

Fifth - African stakeholders; government, private sector, civil society must make concerted efforts to support existing mechanisms and initiatives, building strong infrastructure of government and viable institutions.

**Excellencies, Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Your presence here today emphasizes once more Africa's collaborative commitment to this course. This gives me confidence that we will succeed. A pivotal moment is now upon us, the long-running debate on achieving sustainable peace and security in

Africa is like running a marathon. Implementing existing frameworks and initiatives will require resilience, dedication, resources, and patience, perhaps more patience than we would like. The Africa that the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Dr Dlamini Zuma spoke of so optimistically in her email of the future presented at this year's African Union Summit is achievable. And we must all set our minds and put our hands together to achieve this imperative order for Africa.

I conclude with these words from the late President Nelson Mandela: 'It always seems impossible until it's done.' Let us press on in this conviction therefore— strongly and consistently, towards our goal of achieving sustainable peace and human security in our dear continent, Africa.

I thank you.