CONCEPT NOTE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES IN AFRICA
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Presented By:
Hekima Institute of Peace Studies & International Relations (HIPSIR)
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Africa continues to experience intermittent conflicts. Currently, the continent is experiencing renewed and emerging conflicts, with violent extremism/terrorism increasingly taking centre stage. This is all within the background of post-conflict countries struggling to consolidate peace while at the same time attempting to nurture cultures of democracy. Among the critical concerns and dilemmas presented by the post-conflict reconstruction phase is the question of how to address past crimes against humanity and at the same time create an environment where national healing and reconciliation can take place. The process of addressing past crimes otherwise known as transitional justice, involves confronting the past through open discussions, investigating in a fair manner and in a systematic way the mistakes and atrocities committed in the past, holding perpetrators accountable, and recognizing victims and restoring their dignity.

In Africa, transitional Justice has become a major issue of concern, since at least 15 African countries are undergoing transitional justice processes of one form or another. A call to accountability through truth and reconciliation commissions, special international courts, the International Criminal Court (ICC) and traditional courts has been witnessed in countries like Rwanda, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR), Sierra Leone, Sudan, Libya, among others. In spite of these attempts, the intended overall outcome of a justice that aids communities to heal and move forward seems to be inaccessible. The African Union (AU) on several occasions has threatened a mass pull-out of the African countries from the ICC, leading to debates on how political accountability can be attained without putting in place instruments of justice. At the same time, questions of how to promote authentic national healing and reconciliation in the midst of these debates and impasse continue to linger and to become more complex as new issues with a tendency for conflict emerge.

1.1 Rationale

The need for this conference arises from the fact that national healing and reconciliation needs to take place for democracy to take root and peace to be sustainable. In the absence, however, of dealing with past atrocities and human rights violations, post conflict societies cannot embark on a journey of total healing. Initiatives towards uncovering truth that should lead to justice and reconciliation have often begun and stalled with no satisfying conclusion. Africa, therefore, despite great social, political and economic progress still faces the challenge of dealing with the past conclusively.
1.2 OBJECTIVES

1.2.1 General Objective

The general objective of this conference is to stimulate strategic responses to the challenges of national healing and reconciliation in African countries, such as Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Rwanda, among others, while looking at diverse policy formulation and implementation opportunities in addressing the needs around transitional justice. In a number of post conflict societies in Africa, there has been a general impasse on the way forward in addressing issues of justice, compensation, accountability, healing and reconciliation. It is therefore fundamental that as civil society, government, academic and religious institutions we explore ways in which action can be taken in order to find long lasting solutions to our fragmented societies.

Expected Output and Outcomes

The expected output and outcomes of the conference will be:

1. Provide an international platform to discuss how different countries in Africa have responded to the challenge of transitional justice and post conflict peace-building
2. Highlight and build on existing transitional justice activities currently taking place initiated by the Kenya Transitional Justice Network members in Kenya. These initiatives address issues on reparations, litigations for victims of torture, healing and reconciliation at national and county levels, etc. It is good to note that the conference is also providing a platform to share follow-up experiences and challenges based on a number of meetings that have taken place in this area. One such meeting is the consensus-building forum on the TJRC report held on September 2013 at Serena Hotel, coordinated by ACORD and attended by majority members of the conference steering committee and others.
3. Revisit and generate new ideas and policy recommendations for different key stakeholders in order to realize justice for victims as well as healing and reconciliation for communities and nations as a whole.
4. Carry out advocacy for policy and legal framework on reparations.
5. The papers presented at the conference will be peer-reviewed and published in the Institute’s upcoming journal Africa Peace Studies Journal and regular policy briefs.

HIPSIR in collaboration with different stakeholders in the country while taking into account the complex nature of the transitional justice processes, is keen to develop a post-conference strategy towards strengthening on-going initiatives and policy formulation and implementation. This hopefully will set the stage for enhanced and continued multilateral engagement with all the concerned local, regional and international actors (governments, civil society, African Union, IGAD, etc.) in the search for just peace and development in Africa that is sustainable.
1.3 CONTENT

To realize the above objectives, the following topics will guide the discussions:

1. Transitional Justice and Truth Commissions in Africa
2. Transitional Justice and State/Institution Building/Reparations
3. International and Domestic Politics of Transitional Justice
4. The Role of Religious Institutions in Post-Conflict Reconstruction
5. Peace-building at all levels of societies in Post-Conflict reconstruction
6. Transitional Justice and Gender
7. The ICC, Political Accountability and Transitions in Africa

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The conference program is designed to include keynote addresses in plenary followed by discussions; parallel sessions covering the various themes with paper presentations from resource persons/experts; sharing of experiences; thematic entertainment and exhibitions. Prior to the conference potential paper presenters will submit abstracts on topics of the conference themes for consideration before making final selections.

1.5 RESOURCE PERSONS

The resource persons will be drawn from civil society practitioners (local and international), current and former government officials, faith-based organizations/institutions and academicians with in depth knowledge and a wealth of experience on issues of transitional justice, governance, human rights, gender, peace building, conflict resolution and international relations.

1.6 TARGET GROUP

The conference seeks to bring together approximately 120 participants (local, regional, continental and international). They will comprise of government officials, policy makers, civil society, media, private sector, university students, donors, local and international non-governmental organizations and academicians.

1.7 PROPOSED VENUE AND DATES

The conference will take place at the Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations (HIPSIR), located on Riara road, Nairobi-Kenya. The dates are October 8th & 9th 2014.
1.8 CONFERENCE CO-CONVENOR/HOST

Hekima Institute for Peace Studies and International Relations (HIPSIR), a constituent college of The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), Nairobi, Kenya is the host and coordinator of the conference. Since its founding in 2004, HIPSIR has received and graduated one hundred and four (104) students from diverse religious and political affiliations coming from different parts of Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Our students have come from Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Cameroun, North and South Sudan, Zambia, Eritrea, Burkina Faso, Central Africa Republic, Ghana, Poland, Ireland, India, Costa Rica, Korea, Indonesia and Venezuela. HIPSIR has registered a completion rate of more than 90% of the students who enroll.

HIPSIR also offers short-term accredited courses covering a wide range of topics such as Human Rights and Governance, Transitional Justice and Reconciliation, Preventative Diplomacy, National healing and Reconciliation, and Leadership and management. These courses target leaders and practitioners in various sectors. HIPSIR is also engaged in governance and peacebuilding activities in a number of counties.

The alumni of the HIPSIR program are working in different sectors undertaking diverse activities, such as: consultancy in peacebuilding and conflict resolution interventions; government and academic institutions; research and social action institutions; NGOs and civil society, etc.

HIPSIR has a large continental and international network through Jesuit and non-Jesuit educational and social justice institutions - this enriches the experiences of different participants to the program. In Africa for example, HIPSIR is part of Jesuit network of social justice centres in Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Uganda etc.

COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS/INSTITUTIONS

HIPSIR is glad to collaborate with a number of organizations/institutions that currently form the organizing/steering committee for the conference. These are Peace and Development Network (PeaceNet), Saferworld, Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (ACORD), Peace Tree Network (PTN), Constitution and Reform Education Consortium (CRECO), Coalition for Peace, Truth and Reconciliation (COPTRE), Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), and the Transitional Justice Network in Kenya (TJNK). In addition, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, South Africa, and the Institute for Security
Studies are partners in this endeavour. Invitations and discussion to include additional government agencies and academic institutions are also underway.