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**D**iplomacy  
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**UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS:  
TRENDS AND LESSONS LEARNED**

Keynote Lecture

By

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## **Introduction**

It is indeed a great honour and delight to join you at this very important conference and I very much appreciate the opportunity to address the important and timely subject “United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Trends and the Lessons Learned”. It is also appropriate that this session is being hosted by the UN association of Finland. In this presentation, I would be drawing upon my experience in dealing with conflict resolution and peacekeeping in the global arena, first as Ambassador/Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the United Nations, for almost ten years, and secondly, as United Nations Under-Secretary-General for about thirteen years. Furthermore, there are three recent Reports which are of huge relevance to this subject and their main recommendations would be highlighted in this lecture. They are;

- The Report of High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) chaired by Mr Jose’ Ramos-Horta (Former President of Timor-Lest);
- The Report to the Secretary-General on the “Future of UN Peace Operations: Implementation of the Recommendations of the High-Level Independent panel on Peace Operations”,
- Report of the Independent Commission on Global Security, Justice and Governance, co-chaired by Madeleine Albright (Former US Secretary of State and Ambassador to the United Nations) and I.

2. Meanwhile, at the onset, it should be pointed out that the concept of Peacekeeping is nowhere mentioned in the UN Charter. Yet, peacekeeping has really become a principal tool of the UN in maintaining international

peace and security. At the same time, the concept and conduct of peacekeeping in the UN have evolved over-time. This evolution can be categorized in three different phases as follows;

(a.) Early and Traditional Peacekeeping; in the years after the establishment of the Organization.

(b.) Post-Cold War Multi-dimensional Peacekeeping; following the collapse of the Soviet Union, escalation of intra-state, sectarian conflicts and;

(c.) Complex Peacekeeping; Peace Enforcement and Post-9/11 UN Operations.

## **II. Trends in the Concept and Conduct of UN Peacekeeping Operations**

**3.** In 1948, the first Peacekeeping Mission and the first high-profile mediation efforts were deployed as creative response to inter-state conflicts by a young United Nations. These were few and small operations monitoring cease fires along recognizable borders. Now, almost 70 years later, more than 128,000 women and men serve under the blue flag in almost 40 missions across four continents working to prevent conflicts, help mediate peace processes, protect civilians and sustain fragile peace processes.

**4.** While the United Nations Peacekeeping operations have adapted to changing international political environment and indeed have contributed significantly to the successful resolution of conflicts such as in Namibia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Liberia, there have also been conspicuous failures such as the Mission in Bosnia and UNAMIR in Rwanda. Furthermore, both HIPPO and the Secretary-General have observed “a worrisome reversal of some of the positive trend and a widely shared concern that

changes in conflict may be outpacing the ability of UN peace operations to respond”. Moreover, they point out that, in the Post-Cold War period, a number of Peace Operations are deployed in an environment where there is little or no peace to keep. The spread of violent extremism and the scourge of terrorism, overlaid onto long-simmering local or regional conflicts and the growing aspirations of populations for change, is placing pressure on Governments and the international system to respond”.

**5.** Hence, the strain on the operational capabilities at peacekeeping and support systems is showing, and political support is often stretched thin. There is a clear sense of a widening gap between what is being asked of UN Peace Operations today and what they are able to deliver. The challenge is to narrow that gap such that “the Organization’s peace operations are able to respond effectively and appropriately to the challenges to come. With a current generation of conflicts proving difficult to resolve and with new ones emerging, it is essential that UN peace operations, along with regional and other partners, combine their respective comparative advantages and unite their strengths in the service of peace and security”.

**6.** Since many of the complex UN Peacekeeping Operations today is in Africa and conflicts in the continent now dominate the UN Security Council Agenda, it is necessary to discuss the African situation at the United Nations. In this regard, there is, in some quarters, the erroneous and unfortunate perception almost a stereotype – of Africans as passive recipients of UN assistance especially in the peace and security areas of the work of the Organization. I do not intend to dispute the view that Africa is at the centre of UN efforts in this key aspect of the UN Charter. Many lives have been saved, thanks to the UN actions. My contention is with the attempt to confine

the continent to a beneficiary status. On the contrary, the reality is that Africa's role in the work of the UN is not limited to receiving international assistance. Since joining the UN, African nations have made significant contributions to the work of the Organization, consistent with the UN Charter, on peace and security, and other areas.

**7.** For example, African countries also continue to provide substantive support to UN peacekeeping across the globe as troop- and police-contributing countries and in provision of Civilian Staff. For example, National Personnel who are recruited in peacekeeping missions across Africa provide invaluable local knowledge without which most such operations would be ineffective.

**8.** Several African contingents and civilian staff serve in high-risk environments where they live, often in precarious conditions, and several have died. As Head of the largest peacekeeping operation in the world with a predominantly African character, the African Union/United Nations Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) until July 2012, I have witnessed and spoken about this reality often with pride but also great sadness that the conflict is still nowhere near resolution. It is also the Africans, through its Mission, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) that have boots on the ground in Somalia and most of the troops in the UN Mission in Mali are also Africans.

**9.** As former president Obasanjo said at the High-level Forum on Security in Africa in Ethiopia: "By adopting the Constitutive Act of the African Union at the turn of the Century which uniquely shifted from the norm of non-intervention under the defunct OAU to that of non-indifference, Africa

became very decisive and proactive in placing itself on the global peace and security agenda. Africa is definitely no longer a spectator in the international security discourse. If anything, the continent is shaping the global security landscape in rather innovative and profoundly different ways from what used to obtain. It is no wonder, then, that Africa is increasingly being recognised - by its own citizens as well as by the international community - as a key player in maintaining global peace and security.”

**10.** Furthermore, Africa has the most developed regional mechanism in the developing world for conflict resolution and peacekeeping. The African Union has a functioning Peace and Security Council, Peacekeeping Forces in Darfur and Somalia and a Panel of the Wise – all part of African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). It is in this context that both HIPPO and the Secretary-General have observed that “with most United Nations peace operations in Africa, significant African Union peace operations under way and common mediation efforts across the continent, the African Union is the key regional partner of the UN”. Nonetheless, the Secretary-General emphasizes that UN-Africa cooperation is underpinned by principles that apply to other regional partners, including consultative decision-making and appropriate common strategies for an integrated response to conflict, based on respective comparative advantage, transparency, accountability and respect for international norms and standards.

**11.** Meanwhile, the concretization of UN partnership with the African Union requires, in the words of the Secretary-General, “the optimization of the full range of potential support modalities, which may include a combination of voluntary, assessed and bilateral support” especially given the African Union’s own commitment to self-reliance, including to financing 25 percent

of future African Union's peace operations. However, there is still considerable debate on the AU's access to UN assessed contributions for peace operations undertaken by the regional organized but authorized by the UN Security Council. And there is also discussion in the UN Secretariat and Security Council about "need to develop by 2016, a shared vision for benchmarks to guide transitions from African Union to United Nations Operations, drawing on lessons from the Central African Republic, Mali and Somalia".

**12.** In addition to the UN experience of peacekeeping in Africa as illustrative of the potentialities and challenges of partnership with regional organizations, there are significant trends in global peacekeeping. These include; critical issues such as security sector reforms in conflict areas; emphasis on human rights and gender issues; dealing with sexual exploitation and abuse all of which are now standard aspects of mandates given to peacekeeping missions by the Security Council along with benchmarks and reporting time-lines for their implementation.

### **III. Lessons Learned**

**13.** Today, I wish to share with this distinguished audience, my thoughts on the broad lessons learned in UN peace operation. There are, in my view, nine major issues that are of critical importance in this regard. First, the United Nations now regards and also treats Peacekeeping in the broader context of the Organization's peace operation through which it responds to the Charter's responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security. Hence, UN intervention encompasses conflict prevention, conflict management and peacebuilding and consolidation.

**14.** Second, the recognition that the UN must embrace the challenge of maintaining contact and credibility with major parties of a conflict in order to have a good chance of resolving them. In this regard, I wish to recall the rather hot exchange with the then Ambassador/Permanent Representatives of the United States of America to the UN who castigated me on the floor of the United Nations Security Council (when I returned from a visit to Lebanon in my capacity as Undersecretary-General for Political Affairs) for daring to speak with Hezbollah which was considered by the USA as a terrorist organization. My response was that you cannot seek to change the behaviours of a party to a conflict if you do not talk to them – however distasteful you may find their positions or actions. Moreover, the spoilers or enemy of today may become the partner of tomorrow. In this regard, I recalled to Ambassador Bolton that one of his predecessors, Andrew Young, was dismissed by President Carter for daring to meet with the President of PLO, Yasser Arafat – and yet PLO became an important US ally for peace in the Middle East. The UN is uniquely placed to dialogue with difficult regimes or pariah States.

**15.** Third, there can be no military solution to most conflicts, especially in the Post-Cold War era, where there have been far more intra-State rather than inter-State conflicts, where wars are asymmetrical and where civilian casualties are high, and displacements of peoples are cases in point. For example, at the height of the conflict in Darfur, there were an estimated 300,000 people dead and almost two million refugees and IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) – in a region whose total population was seven million. Therefore, mediation must be intensified in order to help resolve the conflicts. Of course, it can be argued that in Angola, there was a military solution with



the victory of MPLA forces over those of UNITAR – even then, this occurred only following the death of avimbi and, in any case, this may be the exception that proves the rule that if there were military solutions to regional conflicts, such would have taken place sooner than later. The central role of politics in driving peace processes is fully recognized in the report of HIPPO.

**16.** Fourth, justice is an imperative on the pathway to making peace. As a major instrument for promoting justice, the International Criminal Court (ICC) was not there before and it has so far tended to concentrate on indicting sitting African leaders. Nonetheless, the Court – as a new invention – is a good one because it addresses the issue of impunity. You cannot have peace if there is no justice, and if people don't feel a sense of closure, a feeling that those who are guilty of or accused of egregious violations of human rights are brought to justice. So you have the ICC pursuing that track. At the same time, if you are going to resolve a conflict, and one of the parties to the conflict may be, as in the case of Darfur, an indictee of the ICC, how do you engage with an indictee of the ICC who is part of the solution to the conflict, and also part of the peace process? It is extremely difficult to strike the right balance.

**17.** My own experience and position is that you do not have to choose between peace and justice, rather you can sequence them. You can phase them. For example, you can say, 'At this point, what is the most important emphasis that will bring us closer to peace?' The UN, on its part, has given strict instructions to its Envoys on what is and is not acceptable in terms of the necessity of dealing with an indicted war criminal. I just mentioned the example of Darfur, but you could say the same of Liberia and the case of Charles Taylor. There was a time that nobody wanted to touch him. Right

now he is in The Hague being tried. But if he had not been taken out of Liberia by prior arrangement involving the African Union, ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States] and Nigeria, if that aspect of his past had not been sequenced to follow rather than to precede peace process, there may have been no peace, no election, and Liberia would not be where it is today.

**18.** Fifth, there is the challenge of addressing the root causes of conflict. Take Darfur again. It's fundamentally about water in a sense; you have environmental degradation, rapid urbanization and increasing population going on all at once. The most important resource in Darfur is water, and there is not enough of it and it is poorly distributed. This has bred tension between nomads and farmers, who tend to belong to different ethnic groups. Specifically, the nomadic peoples are primarily Arabs, and sedentary and farming peoples are non-Arabs, Africans. They are competing for the same scarce resources, and therefore prone to be in conflict over them. If you want to address the issue of peace, and if you want to bring peace closer, you have to address root causes such as these. That is why, at one point, when I was Head of the African-UN mission, the UNAMID [*African Union-UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur*], we organized a large International Conference on Water for Peace. We have seen land for peace famously proposed in the Middle-East, nowhere we see similar approaches taken with water.

**19.** Sixth, Peace Operations must be conducted in tandem with peacebuilding. One cannot wait till peace has broken out throughout a conflict area such as Darfur, before we pursue reconstruction and development issues. On the contrary, there is a real need to demonstrate to those communities and areas where fighting has stopped that there are

peace dividends, and this may have positive spill-over effects in other areas where conflict continues. There is now a growing recognition that the entire UN system has to be mobilised to promote peace in conflict affected areas and regime.

**20.** Seventh, is the role of ‘spoilers’, which has become a lot more significant in many peace processes. There are different types of ‘spoilers’. You have those with limited objectives, some with broader national and international objectives, and those who really don’t want any peace at all. How do you deal with them? What are the sticks and carrots that you might use to reduce the potential influence of ‘spoilers’? I feel concerned that, in the case of Darfur again, which was my last experience in peace making and peacekeeping, there were many important actors who played the role of ‘spoilers’ who were not compelled to join the peace process in a meaningful way. It is a problem that the international community has not reached consensus on how to deal with ‘spoilers’ in peace processes. The international community has to be willing to identify them, and once identified, to really take the necessary steps, for the sake of the people who are suffering. At this point there are cases in which, because of their affiliation, key groups with the ability to undermine peace are not engaged with effectively. That’s not good enough. More should be done – for the sake of peace, and in the case of Darfur, for the sake of the people who have suffered for so long.

**21.** Eight, the role of NGOs and Civil Society groups in conflict resolution and peacemaking has been growing. For the most part, NGOs could be agents of change. Let me again use examples from Darfur. You have a situation where, at the height of the conflict in Darfur, there were over

300,000 people dead, but also 2 million were internally displaced – out of a total population of 7 million – in scores of IDP [internally displaced person] camps according to UN figures. The huge numbers of IDP's are critically important for the role of NGOs. Although the peacekeepers had the role of facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need, they did not have the needed humanitarian materials. The NGOs and the humanitarian community as a whole were the ones that provided for the basic needs of the people in the camps. NGOs and some Western countries behind the NGOs spearheaded the delivery of food, clothing, education and health assistance that was vitally important. Nevertheless, concerning the peace processes, the role of NGOs tend to be more complicated, because they often tend to become advocates for the armed movements. In effect, they take sides, so the UN or any Mediator can have very difficult relationships with the NGOs because the role of the mediation is to reconcile not take sides. However, it is impossible for the former not to have to deal with the latter. NGOs make hugely positive contributions in addressing the real needs of victims of violence and war. They are advocates for the weak and for those whose voice needs to be heard or heard more loudly.

**22. Nineth** and finally, I have observed that in peace negotiations and conflict resolution, the parties are able to stand their respective grounds more strongly while also developing a common ground. As President Martti Ahtisaari put it elegantly yesterday morning; the most successful mediation and conflict resolutions are that promises a “better future for everyone”. Examples (i) Myanmar, where both sides were cajoled and encouraged to pursue the path of democracy and human rights; Apartheid in South Africa (De Klerk, his National Party Mandela, Big private sector companies and

ANC developed common grounds for non-racial democratic dispensation). It is in this context that mediators can make their most valuable contribution by identifying, widening and consolidating the common ground. In so doing, they must build relationships of trust and confidence with the parties. Mediators must also be impartial, tough, humble but very patient. Nonetheless, the Chief Mediator and team should recognize his/her limitations and know when to give way for others to try if (a) the peace process comes to a dead end; (b) the trust and confidence of the parties and key interested outside actors have evaporated; and (c) the mediator becomes the issue rather than the focal point for moving forward the substance of the conflict.

#### **IV. Future of UN Peace Operations**

**23.** HIPPO made overarching and key recommendations which deserve our collective consideration and support. According to their Report, “four essential shifts must be embraced in the future design and delivery of United Nations peace operations if real progress is to be made and if United Nations peace operations are to realize their potential for better results in the field”. The shifts are that:

*(a) Politics must drive the design and implementation of peace operations*

*(b) The full spectrum of United Nations peace operations must be used more flexibly to respond to changing needs on the ground.*

*(c) A stronger, more inclusive peace and security partnership is needed for the future.*

*(d) The United Nations Secretariat must become more field-focused and United Nations peace operations must be more people-centered.*

I fully agree and would encourage this distinguished audience to go into further details provided in the Report.

**24.** The Role of Women in Peace Operations in Conflict Areas cannot be over-emphasized. In this regard, by adopting in 2000, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 recognized, for the first time, the vital contribution of women to conflict prevention and resolution. As a symbolic act and practical call to action, the Resolution acknowledged what I experienced throughout my careers in diplomacy, business, academia, and development: the involvement of women in peace processes significantly improves the prospects for a more durable peace. Each year since 2000, the crucial role of women in peacekeeping and peacebuilding has figured more prominently in the commemoration of International Women’s Day, March 8. This is rightly so. Yet, sixteen years on from Resolution 1325, formidable political, socio-cultural, and economic obstacles remain to the full participation of women in peace efforts, whether as peacemakers or as citizens—something the Resolution was supposed to help overcome. This is one of the key conclusions of the ground-breaking Report of the [Commission on Global Justice, Security & Governance](#).

**25.** In that Report, [Confronting the Crisis of Global Governance](#), we concluded inter alia, that a key challenge for global governance is gender inequality, especially in fragile states and conflict-affected environments, where, compared to men, women suffer harm differently and disproportionately. Despite the call in 1325 for greater participation and

involvement of women in peace processes, women remain acutely under-represented in UN-brokered talks. [Research carried out by UNIFEM/UN Women](#) reveals that, in fourteen cases since 2000 (where such information was available), women's participation in peace negotiation delegations averaged less than eight percent, and less than three percent of signatories in these peace processes were women. Today, only two of twenty-two UN Under-Secretaries-General are women, and in UN Missions, women make up less than one-third of the international civilian staff, 21 percent of senior professional levels, and only 18 percent of national staff. Moreover, the recent [Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325](#) found that only 54 countries have formulated National Action Plans for Resolution 1325. Entire regions, notably the Americas and Middle East, are lagging behind. Meanwhile, the plight of millions of women, men, and children in the Greater Middle East seeking refuge in near-by Europe and beyond reminds us daily of the need for urgent action to prevent and end ongoing wars. From sitting at the negotiating table to building the blocks for long-term reconciliation and peaceful co-existence, women are poised to contribute, when given the opportunity, to fair and durable solutions so essential to reduce human sufferings.

**26.** In further contributing to the debate on the future of UN peace operations, the Independent Committee on Global Justice and Governance, which I was honoured to have co-chaired made the following recommendations: The International Community should create next-generation UN conflict mediation and peace operations capacity; build responsive capacity to provide experienced mediators, including a greater proportion of women, for crisis and conflict prevention and peacebuilding;

build capacity to deploy civilian, police and military personnel to meet urgent peacekeeping requirements; build a new cadre of experienced personnel to serve as Heads of Mission and members of mission senior management teams; beyond transitional justice, invest in transformational justice, and coordinate activities closely with and materially support regional actors and local civil society, with particular attention to inclusion of women in peace processes”. Furthermore, the Commission recommended that the International Community should strengthen the Responsibility to Prevent, Protect and Rebuild: invest in early warning capabilities and responsibility to Protect (R2P) action plans for an approach to atrocities prevention that involves all UN agencies and programmes; embed UN mission monitors in all forces participating in R2P implementation; and set concrete, achievable goals for all international actors seeking to prevent, react to and rebuild after mass atrocities”.

## **V. Conclusions**

**27.** Jose’ Ramos-Horta, Chairman of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), prefaced his Report with the sad observation that “we (the international community) have failed the people of South Sudan. Despite the courageous efforts of some, we have, as an international community fallen short, and continue to fall short in Burundi, Iraq, Libya, Palestine, Syria and Ukraine among others”. Nonetheless, it is my view, that the full and timely implementation by the stakeholders of the recommendations of Ramos-Horta (HIPPO) Report, those of the Secretary-General in response to them and of the Independent Commission of Global Justice, Security and Governance (Albright and Gambari), UN peace-



operations would contribute significantly to enhancing international peace and security.

**28.** Finally, the Preamble of the Charter of the United Nations started with the words: “We the peoples”. It is a recognition that the “raison d’être” of the world body, i.e. the prevention and resolution of wars and conflict, which are now more intra-state than the inter-state ones when the UN was founded in 1945, is far too important to be left to countries and their government alone. Indeed, as the link between peace and justice has grown in importance; as addressing the root causes of conflicts become imperative and as peace building, recovery and reconstruction become part and parcel of consolidating peace, individuals and professionals, NGOs, sub-regional, regional and continental bodies must redouble efforts towards building and enhancing the mechanisms for peaceful resolution of wars and violent conflicts.

**29.** I thank you all for listening.