

Such intervention is highly controversial, but does appear to be a strengthening trend as human security and humanitarian issues play an increasingly important role in the UN Security Council's agenda. ECOWAS has its own experience in this regard. Thus is it ready to codify and implement a normative framework, agreed to by all its members, which justifies intervention? Certainly, it is much better for the countries of the region to set their own standards for example, as is now planned through the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Mechanism - rather than to wait to have them applied from the outside once armed conflict has broken out.

Naming names. Invisibility breeds impunity. So what about naming names? A very powerful idea. Let's look at a very recent example. Earlier this month, the UN Security Council investigative panel on Angola, examining violations of the international embargo against UNITA, made its findings known. Chaired by Canada, the report named names -diamond merchants in Belgium, arms brokers in South Africa, weapons suppliers in Bulgaria, African leaders who, in exchange for diamonds, allow their countries to be transshipment points or UNITA refuges. The accusations led to a storm of outrage, but also to immediate actions. Belgium and the diamond industry sought to absolve themselves of blame. Countries sought to defend their records, but also immediately acted to curtail illegal shipment activities. Corporations sought to defend their investment decisions - they become nervous when bad publicity threatens investments. And we find that increasingly, around the world, human rights are finding their way onto corporate agendas.

In this part of the world, similar reports exist on Liberia and Sierra Leone, on the links between the conflicts, the diamond trade, natural resource exploitation and arms flows, on the corporations and countries - both near and distant neighbours - which have benefitted from or contributed to these extended conflicts.

Of course, there is no "internal conflict" which is exclusively internal - parties always have external economic and political supporters, and external sources of arms. External governments and private companies help to support and underwrite conflicts. Should they be rewarded with silence? Surely we will all say no.

An ECOWAS Neighbourhood Initiative. A number of actions could comprise an ECOWAS Neighbourhood Initiative to encourage positive collaborative measures, including the small arms moratorium, measures to end cross-border recruitment of children as combatants, the child protection unit within the ECOWAS secretariat. Would Canada, Ghana and other ECOWAS partners be prepared to lead in also developing some additional measures? For example, the isolation of proven abusers and users of children in war - travel restrictions, denial of participation in regional organisations, their deliberations and summits? And further afield, the freezing of their external assets? If both encouragement to abide by ethical norms, and the threat of punitive action, can be made credible, the climate of impunity is going to change.