

3.2 Regional conflict resolution and peacekeeping: the OAU

The very size and 'distance' of the UN has caused many to argue in favour of an increased role for regional organizations in conflict resolution and peacekeeping. However, there are many problems in principle, and practice leaves even more to be desired.

In the Rwandan crisis, the OAU and African countries took very ambivalent stances. On one hand, they were extremely concerned about developments in Rwanda, and both the OAU and countries like Nigeria pushed hard for an expanded UNAMIR with a stronger mandate. At the same time African countries refrained from using, and at times within the UN and SC debate actively blocked, the use of strong explicit language criticising human rights violations. This was particularly true with regards the term genocide.

That type of ambivalence stems not from a lack of concern, but from a lack of political will to take the steps necessary to have any substantive impact on the internal abuse of human rights. It is indicative to look at paragraph 14 of the OAU's statement on the creation of its new mechanism for conflict resolution²⁵:

14. The *Mechanism* will be guided by the objectives and principles of the *OAU Charter*; in particular, the sovereign equality of Members States, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, the respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Member States, their inalienable right to independent existence, the peaceful settlement of disputes as well as the inviolability of borders inherited from colonialism. It will also function on the basis of the consent and the cooperation of the parties to a conflict. (emphasis added)

This unwillingness to intervene in the internal affairs of fellow African states will continue to hobble efforts of Africans to play constructive roles in African crises. Fortunately episodes such as the recent Lesotho intervention by South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Botswana shows the possibilities when the fundamentals of democracy and human rights are not overridden by those governments who are unsure of their own legitimacy or own ability to sustain regional or international scrutiny.

Another aspect of regional conflict resolution and peacekeeping involves the double sided factor of 'local knowledge'. On one side, Africans culturally and geographically are initially better placed to understand the issues and identify the solutions for Rwanda, and other African crises. The flip side is that such proximity often results in real or perceived partiality either because they favour a particular party to the dispute or because they have a national vested interest in the

²⁵ see the "Declaration of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the Establishment Within the OAU of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution", Cairo Declaration AHG/Dec.13(XXIX) of 30 June 1993.