

FOREWORD

La Francophonie is neither a distinct geographic nor political entity but a mosaic of different cultures, political systems and economic structures. Furthermore, it has only a few years' experience as a formal institution. These two facts have hindered the emergence of an integrated approach in the field of conflict prevention and resolution. Nevertheless, la Francophonie can add the weight of its summits to the moral authority exercised by the UN and other international and regional organizations in conflict prevention.

Within the Francophone world, Africa is the site of a large number of current and potential conflicts. Africa still lacks the functioning institutions available to other parts of the world for managing disputes. The fact that these conflicts occur within single states distinguishes them from the interstate confrontations of the Cold War era. The analytical instruments once used to assess threats and the intervention mechanisms developed to defuse interstate crises are of limited use in such circumstances.

Aware of the need for greater involvement, the heads of state and government of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) decided in Cairo in June 1993 to create within their organization a mechanism for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa. Several Western countries, including Canada, have agreed to help the OAU design, structure and equip the Mechanism to make it operational as soon as possible. One of the objectives of the Ottawa Meeting was to contribute to this process.

In Africa, OAU preventive diplomacy missions have met with some success. Although as an institution la Francophonie has limited resources for prevention, it nonetheless represents significant political authority since it spans many regions of the globe and transcends the barriers between developed and developing countries. In addition, many of its members have considerable expertise in peacekeeping, conflict management and conflict resolution.

The International Francophone Meeting on Conflict Prevention had two main purposes: first, to facilitate a discussion of the new realities affecting security and stability on the African continent; and second, to encourage participants to draw the inescapable lessons from various experiences in preventive diplomacy. In practical terms, the deliberations and discussions should contribute to improvements in the capacities of la Francophonie and member countries in the field of preventive diplomacy, and should lead to closer co-operation with the UN and the OAU.

In order to stimulate and channel discussion, the Meeting was organized into three workshops. An eminent person from la Francophonie led each workshop, and each started with presentations by several experts. The first workshop examined the conditions required for stability. In the second, participants attempted to define more clearly the concepts of early warning and preventive diplomacy, and considered how