

b) Democratic development, civil society and conflict prevention

The strengthening of democracy is a condition essential to peace. Most African countries are now involved in a process of democratization. Democratic development in Africa must naturally take into account the situation and specific constraints of African societies. It must also be seen as a transitional, demanding process not without its difficulties. However, the constraints and difficulties must in no way become pretexts for delaying the fulfilment of the process, which in the long term is essential to the consolidation of peace.

A secure framework is vital to democratic development. Each state must build a national army that can maintain political neutrality in all circumstances — a force subordinate to the political authority of the state. The army must become a factor contributing to social equilibrium. The combatants in war-ravaged areas must be disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated into society and the economy. A civilian police force must also be established to safeguard the rights of the people. Emergency assistance must be provided for rebuilding; where necessary, land mine clearance operations must be carried out. The control of arms (especially small arms) represents a tremendous challenge, particularly because arms trafficking is so extensive and profitable.

Democratic development further involves creating or consolidating the institutions necessary to ensure the rule of law. To begin with, there must be an efficient, legitimate, universally accessible judicial system. Development assistance should provide assistance for this purpose, both to train magistrates and to provide technical and material support.

Democratic development requires as well the expression of political pluralism through the political parties and the media. Development aid should support the training of journalists and provide physical and technical assistance. Journalism should be governed by a code of ethics or by appropriate legislation.

Another condition essential to the establishment of democracy and peace is civic education, especially training in human rights. A culture of peace must be established throughout. Failure to understand rights is a direct source of conflict. All stakeholders should undergo training in this regard, beginning with the army, police, judiciary and journalists. Women and youth must also take part in the training programs.

The difficulties encountered by the new African democracies often arise from the weakness of civil society, a legacy of authoritarian government. Civil society plays an essential role in regulating and controlling the state, in mobilizing people to take public action, and in developing democratic culture.

Thus democratic development requires strengthening of the institutions and organizations of civil society. Development assistance must address the various components of a civil society, including economic (such as associations of producers and business leaders), developmental (local or regional development associations), civic