

A New World: Challenges and Opportunity

As a new world order has emerged from the end of the Cold War, it is clear that the nature of conflict has changed greatly. The predictability and simplicity of the bipolar, Cold War era has vanished. Instead, we now live in an era of transition, which is defined by contradictory challenges of globalization and fragmentation, peace and conflict, prosperity and poverty. In addition to the continued threat of interstate conflict, the international community has faced the disturbing nature of intrastate conflict. Such conflicts are often based on ethnic or religious tensions; which often breed civilian victims, regional escalation and floods of refugees. In such cases, conflict is said to have been "civilianized," as individuals - not states - are the principal victims, targets and instruments of war. The complexity of these conflicts has produced new demands on the international community for intervention.

Francis Kofi Abiew and Tom Keating have recently written that "at the close of one of the more infamous centuries in recorded history, we must also acknowledge one of its most violent decades, marked by two apparent contradictory trends in international politics."² According to Abiew and Keating, the first trend is a substantial increase in violent conflict, much of which took the form of civil wars with many of the victims being civilians. For instance, in 1996 all of the major conflicts in the world were civilian or intrastate in nature. This is in stark contrast to the expectations many had for the 1990s. The end of the cold war was to provide a peace dividend in which human rights, democracy and development would be emphasized. Thus, Abiew and Keating note that increased conflict has been contrasted by a second prominent feature of international politics in the 1990s - an emphasis on individual human rights and human security. In addition to an expansion in declarations and charters by international organizations, there was a significant increase in the number, variety, scope and prominence of interventions based on humanitarianism. Abiew and Keating observe:

Motivated, it seems, by a concern for human rights and a sense of urgency in the face of the scope of humanitarian and political disasters in all regions of the world, a variety of individuals groups, governments, and organizations intervened in the affairs of other countries in the hope of contributing to a more stable, peaceful, and just world. Within this context the theory and practice of peacebuilding emerged as a central part of what the rest of the world has to offer to divided societies.³

As a result, while it appeared for a short time that international politics in the 1990s would be defined by peace, stability and cooperation, this new form of conflict presented a great challenge to the international community. But with every challenge comes opportunity and the

² Francis Kofi Abiew and Tom Keating, "Outside Agents and the Politics of Peacebuilding and Reconciliation," *International Journal* (Winter 1999-2000), p. 80.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.