

INTRODUCTION

With the end of the Cold War and the decline in armed conflict between sovereign states, attention has shifted to the plethora of internal conflicts (those taking place primarily within the borders of a single state) which continue to cause tremendous destruction and instability in various regions around the world. Africa has been confronted with a number of these intra-state wars, which have led to increasingly severe humanitarian and refugee crises, and continue to dominate the evolving security agenda of the region. The war and genocide in Rwanda, in particular, recently focused the attention of the international community on the pressing need for better coordination and timing in the policy responses to such complex emergencies.

This roundtable of policy-makers, academics, and NGO representatives discussed the need for analytical perspectives and policy alternatives in three specific areas related to the prevention of internal conflict in Africa: the role of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) in conflict prevention; the role of la Francophonie in conflict prevention; and internal responses to the causes of conflict. By examining the roles of both internal (state institutions and civil society) and external (regional multilateral organisations) actors, the participants were able to outline policy options in a holistic manner.

SESSION I: THE OAU AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

One of the main difficulties with the concept of *conflict prevention* is that its success depends upon the assessment of factors which it is supposed to control or eliminate. In other words, conflict prevention is successful when the factors which cause conflict are removed and conflict does not occur. Therefore, analysing its success or failure requires making inferences about whether a conflict would have occurred. This difficulty has meant that at the policy level, decision-makers have been reluctant to take preventive action since its success cannot be clearly demonstrated. In the past, the OAU has concerned itself primarily with *conflict management*, working to contain existing conflicts rather than to prevent their outbreak in the first place, and it has had some measure of success in this regard.

The OAU was founded in 1963 to prevent conflict among African states.