



UNITED NATIONS

## **Talking Points**

**By**

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**Strengthening Africa's Voice at the UN – a UN perspective**

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### Background

The relationship between Africa and United Nations has evolved over the years. At the establishment of the UN, there were only 4 African member states<sup>1</sup>. As African countries gained their independence, so their membership grew. Today the 54 African member nations vary, in size, economy and interests, and are the largest regional block in the UN. This however has not necessarily resulted in Africa 'speaking with one voice'. Nor has it brought about leverage, commensurate to the size of the African block, at the United Nations.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Globally, although evidence points to a better world; a world in which we are less conflict, more healthy, and in which poverty is on the decline, the number of people living in extreme poverty has

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<sup>1</sup> [www.un.org/depts/dhl/unms/founders](http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/unms/founders)

declined by more than half<sup>2</sup>. This dissonance in perception versus reality could be due to the growing inequality globally and here in Namibia.

Various MDG progress reports, further state that development gains have been noteworthy. For example the literacy rate among youth aged 15 to 24 has increased globally from 83 per cent to 91 per cent between 1990 and 2015. Also more than 71 per cent of births were assisted by skilled health personnel globally in 2014, an increase from 59 per cent in 1990<sup>2</sup>.

While the African continent continues to be part of this progress, significant challenges remain both globally and on the continent.

Conflict and more recently violent extremism pose such a threat. One has only to view the band of violence that stretches from Iraq and Syria, across Yemen and Somalia, and bridges into West Africa in northern Nigeria, and that continues as far as Mali, to understand the impact.

As we speak there are more than ten ongoing conflicts on the continent, (i.e. the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan). Some of these include significant threats and or occurrences of violent extremism (e.g. Somalia, Mali and N. Nigeria).<sup>3</sup>

Humanitarian crises have left 58.9 million people displaced globally, and from that 15.1million are spread across 19 countries on the African continent.<sup>4</sup> The current El Niño crises have brought with it the worst drought in decades in the Horn and Southern AFRICAN region, with approximately 14 million and 28 million people affected respectively<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> MDG Report 2015

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.globalissues.org/issue/83/conflicts-in-africa>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/4a02d7fd6.html>

<sup>5</sup> WFP Southern Africa Regional El Nino External Situation Report #2, 23 March 2016 (1157) KB

Another common challenge is how to ensure sustainable economic growth that improves livelihoods and reduces poverty. Almost half of the approximately 1 billion people who live on the African continent are still considered poor<sup>6</sup>.

We need to ensure that through the implementation of the newly agreed development goals (the SDGs) we do not deplete country resources and can therefore safeguard the planet for our children.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Transnational organised crime is on the rise, in 2012 alone more than 100,000 people were smuggled out of the East Africa, generating over of \$15 million for organized criminal networks operating on the maritime crossing from the Horn of Africa<sup>7</sup>. Many migrants are driven in part by high levels of conflict and poverty, and as they try to escape their situation they are vulnerable to abuse and extortion.

So, to answer the question, is there a need for strengthened collaboration between the AU and the UN? Given the goal of both institutions to further international peace and security, the answer is yes.

We have heard calls for strengthened collaboration beginning with the former SG of the UN Boutros Boutros Ghali's agenda for peace recommending a focus of the organization on preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping<sup>8</sup> and more recently the current SGs high level panel on peace ops and the focus on the financial sustainability of AU & UN operations

Chapter 8, article 52 of the UN Charter provides an opportunity for the UN to work together with regional bodies such as the AU in the pursuit of international peace and security. Chapter eight further

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<sup>6</sup> MDG Report 2015

<sup>7</sup> Transnational Organised Crime in Eastern Africa: A threat Assessment by UNODC

<sup>8</sup> An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping: Report by Boutros Boutros Ghali

encourages peaceful settlement of local disputes through such regional arrangements or agencies.

Given the current complexity of global crises, it is easy to argue that no one nation or institution can handle challenges alone. Solutions must be found jointly. Working together could result in a shared UN and AU analysis to ensure a common understanding of a particular situation that takes into account all perspectives.

And once there is agreement on the problem definition, elaborating a coordinated response strategy becomes possible.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Cooperation between the United Nations and the African Union in the maintenance of peace and security has greatly intensified in recent years, as demonstrated by numerous collaborative efforts in conflict prevention, mediation and peacekeeping, under the umbrella of a ten-year framework agreement<sup>9</sup>.

For example efforts were coordinated by the AU, UN in Somalia (The AU PKO is supported logistically by UNSOA a UN operation), Sudan (The United Nations–African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) which focuses on protecting civilians, facilitating humanitarian aid and helping political process in Darfur<sup>10</sup>).

The above examples demonstrates that the two organizations can work together despite challenges and addressing the peace keeping burden is a job for more than one actor.

The AU/UN have different advantages; for example the AU's willingness to deploy troops and use force even when there is no peace to keep e.g. AMISOM in Somalia, the AU ability to deploy troops more quickly and more cheaply, and the regional legitimacy

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.un.org/undpa/africa/un-au-cooperation>(framework agreement (A/61/630))

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unamid/>

the Organisation has, while with over 60 years of PK experience, the UN has a stronger bureaucracy, logistics and financing capabilities.

AU and UN partnerships on peace and security if managed properly strengthen and ensure a more effective response.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

With regard to global development, Africa has the most to gain. Sustainable economic growth that promotes livelihoods, and addresses poverty and inequality is the current challenge.

Globally 85 people own as much wealth as the bottom 50% of the world's population. The two richest South Africans (Johann Rupert and Nicky Oppenheimer, own as much wealth as the poorest 50 percent of the population (i.e. 26.5-million people)<sup>11</sup>.The recent Panama papers scandal underscores the challenges generated, with rules skewed in the favour of the wealthy.

The two coherent and complementary agendas: The AUs Agenda 2063 and the Global SDGs provide an opening to address some of our most pressing questions: how do we better distribute wealth? How do we create jobs and increase income, how do we strengthen our governance systems and continental trade.

In paragraph 42 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development UN Member States specified and reaffirmed the importance of supporting the African Union's Agenda 2063<sup>12</sup>.

For the most part, the AU and UN development agendas converge.

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<sup>11</sup> Oxfam global inequality report

<sup>12</sup> Paragraph 42 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

## CONCLUSION

Given the complexity of the African situation perhaps it is not hard to justify working together.

Although there are no clear answers and these efforts will remain a work a progress, opportunities exist. Therefore among the questions to consider are:

- 1.) What could some of the incentives be for us to work together?
- 2.) The permanent seat on the Security Council?
- 3.) How do we harmonise the decision making process of the two organisations and improve communication?
- 4.) How do we take advantage of the SDGs and the resources their implementation brings to the table?

It may not be simple, but a strengthened AU voice through the prioritization of the SDGs, could move us one giant step forward to ensuring African solutions to African problems.