Root Causes of Peacelessness and Approaches to Peace in Africa

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1. Summary of Findings

Africa is not at peace. More than 30 wars have been fought in Africa since 1970, and most of these have been internal rather than inter-state wars. In 1996 alone, 14 of the 53 countries of Africa were involved in armed conflicts, and they resulted in more than 8 million refugees and displaced persons. And this is before the recent eruption of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo which has now involved many of the states in the Great Lakes region and beyond. Most of these wars have been characterised by extreme brutality. In Rwanda alone, in a matter of 100 days, about a million people were massacred - a scale of killings that is almost unprecedented in world history. So even if there are "good" reasons for conflicts, there are no "good" reasons why these conflicts degenerate into violence and brutality that shame humanity.

The dominant discourse on the causes of conflict in Africa puts emphasis on lack of economic growth and poor governance. It accordingly advocates the opening up of Africa's economy to foreign capital as a means of improving growth and thus eliminating poverty as a cause of conflict, and a more democratic system of governance as a means of encouraging a more inclusive kind of politics.

The outcome of our Research is that material poverty and undemocratic governance are indeed the root causes of conflict and strife in Africa. But whilst removal of poverty and democratic governance are inherently desirable objectives, there are systemic, global, forces which make these objectives unattainable in Africa. The opening up of Africa to foreign capital, as advocated by mainstream thinkers, will bring neither growth nor peace in Africa. The real causes of Africa's underdevelopment, and hence peacelessness lies in the manner in which Africa is integrated into the global economy. By the terms of its integration, Africa is conditioned to never-ending impoverishment. Only self-motivated endogenous development undertaken by people at the grassroots, and a radical restructuring of the terms of integration into the global economic system, can lead to both material growth and peace in Africa.

However, this is not a task that can be left to the state in Africa. The African state is constrained by the terms of integration into the global economy, and by the specific interests of the elite who are in control of it. The African state tends to place the interests of foreign capitalists above those of the indigenous population, and to be accountable to the World Bank and the IMF rather than to its own people. The necessary political change in Africa can only come about as a result of action by grassroots communities to create alternative systems of organising production and political life. The nation state in Africa is under threat by the forces of globalisation, but it needs to be heaved back to serving the interests of the common people and be accountable to them.

But whilst such action from the grassroots is necessary, it is not sufficient. There still remains the question of violence. The challenge before us is not only how to stop conflicts in Africa breaking into violence, but also how to contain violence so that it does not break all moral boundaries of human behaviour. Lack of peace, even in
present conditions, does not excuse violence, inhumanity and ethnic cleansing which characterise conflicts in Africa. So growth or no growth, a culture of non-violence and respect for ethnic pluralism are values that need to be cultivated and nourished in their own right. The "peace agenda" for Africa must be based on the dual strategy of a partial de-linking from the global system, and developing tolerance towards inter-ethnic and political differences. This requires a new kind of moral and political culture, and new structures of political decision-making and accountability that are more locally accountable and more diversified.

2. **The Challenge Before Us**

Three issues must engage the attention of African peace activists: one, understanding the causes of conflicts not in general but of those in Africa; two, doing something about preventing conflicts from degenerating into violence and brutality; and three, dealing with the aftermath of violence - reconstruction and reconciliation, refugees, healing the wounds and making sure that violence does not erupt again.

3. **Methodology of Research**

There are two main ways of approaching the subject. There is first the historical approach which looks into the African history, year and year, and analyses the causes of actual conflicts and the reasons why they have led to war and violence. For example, anti-colonial wars of the 1950s and 1960s, gave way to border conflicts of 1960s and 1970s, but in the last two decades we are now witnessing more intra-state (civil wars) than inter-state violence and conflicts. This changing nature of conflict is itself an interesting subject of further study and analysis.

A second is the sociological approach that analyses the underlying social and institutional forces which lead to conflict and war, or which fail to prevent conflicts from degenerating into violence. In analysing internal civil strife, for example, it may be necessary to examine the nature of the post-independence African state, and indeed the character of the "nation" itself. Is the contemporary African "nation", enclosed as it is within artificially constructed geographic and multi-ethnic boundaries, a viable entity? Are there forces outside of Africa and beyond the control of Africans that challenge the integrity of the African nation-state and threaten its viability?

There is a third approach which involves a futurist projection. One way would be to imagine future possible scenarios of conflicts based on an extrapolation from the past and the present into the future and then work towards removing the causes of anticipated conflicts. Alternatively, future scenarios can be based on choosing a future date, such as the year 2020, working out a "desirable" future and then work backwards to the present to see what may be done starting today so as to lead to that desired future.

None of these approaches is superior to the others, nor indeed mutually exclusive. For the Peace Activist, he/she needs to integrate the various approaches to get the necessary historical and sociological perspectives on the matter as a guide to action. Theory for the Peace Activist is only a tool for action. More importantly, what he/she needs to be aware of is the conflicting theories about the causes of war and conflict in Africa, because these inform his/her actions.
It is this last consideration that guided the research methodology on this particular occasion. Issues relating to peace and conflict are some of the most researched areas of human existence. Every age has its own theory or theories about the causes of conflicts and their possible solutions. So does ours. A study of only a fraction of the vast literature that already exists on the subject indicated that there are two major (and several less influential) views on the causes of conflicts in Africa, and the ways to deal with them. One is what we call the "mainstream" or dominant view of the matter, and the other is an alternative, minority, view. Instead of starting from scratch, the method we chose was to look at the dominant view of the matter, evaluate its merits in so far as it explains the reality of conflicts in Africa and the means of resolving them, and to suggest alternative explanations for conflicts and wars in Africa, and the corresponding strategy for dealing with them.

Before we get into these two views on the subject, it is necessary to look into why we have conflicting theories on matters of war and peace.

4. Conflicting conceptions of the Causes of Conflict in Africa

Knowledge, it must be understood, is a productive activity just like any other field of production. There are a cluster of ideas and assumptions which go into the production of knowledge. These ideas and assumptions are themselves products of the values, objectives, and circumstances of the thinkers. There is no thinker who can step completely outside of history and his/her circumstances. This is what explains differences in our ideas. The difficulty arises when one set of ideas claim superiority or "objectivity" for itself, seeking to discredit competing or alternative ideas. That is when it becomes an "ideology". An ideology may contain many truths which give it certain amount of credibility, but it also obscures a certain part of reality and thus ceases to be objective.

Every civilization, ours not excluding, has a set of institutions responsible for producing a certain kind of order - moral as well as physical - and a set of ideas that define, elaborate and justify that order and how changes can "legitimately" take place within that order. These set of ideas we call the "mainstream" or dominant ideas. In our times, these ideas are the products of the institutional thinking of the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO, the OECD "think tanks", and the universities and research institutions which reflect on these matters and produce a certain kind of knowledge about them. Mainstream ideas on any matter of consequence in contemporary times - whether it is economics, human rights, governance, trade and investment, development, or causes of conflict and approaches to peace - are the products of these institutions. In our situation, for example, competing ideas about contemporary "order" and its moral basis coming out of the intellectuals from Cuba and Libya are fundamentally different from those of the "mainstream" thinking. That is why countries like Cuba and Libya which entertain "rebellious" conceptions of order or morality are regarded as "pariahs" and often subjected to sanctions by the dominant power(s). China, too, has a different conception of "order" and morality, and it challenges the mainstream conceptions on issues such as human rights and governance, but because of its size and power it cannot be subjected to the same kind of treatment as Cuba or Libya.
We shall analyse the mainstream thinking on Africa's conflicts and ways to resolve them in a moment, but before we do that it is important to emphasise that there is nothing conspiratorial or malicious about mainstream thinking on this, as on other, matters. This is the way things are. The producers of mainstream knowledge on peace, war, development, human rights, governance, and so on are people doing the best they can given their knowledge, authority, mandates and circumstances.

Another important aspect of mainstream thinking, as indeed of any alternative thinking too, is that the ideas on different elements of the existing order - peace, development, governance, human rights, etc. - are interconnected. Indeed they affect one another. Peace, development, human rights, governance - these are simply different aspects of the same complex reality. There are, of course, distinguishing features of each of these elements, but when they become parts of an explanation for that complex reality, they also broadly share a common "terrain" or "landscape" of a body of ideas with common assumptions. Thus, for example, the ideas on the issue of peace relate specifically to conflict and conflict avoidance and resolution, but these ideas cannot be separated from those related to development, human rights, governance, etc. The question "why there is no peace in a particular country?" may be answered in any number of ways, but they cannot avoid referring to matters related to development, governance or human rights. These are all inter-connected. Similarly, the question "what kinds of institutions can bring about lasting peace?" cannot avoid an examination of the institutions of decision-making, accountability and economic development.

The Peace Activists' approach, we concluded, must be distinguished from the mainstream thinking on causes of Africa's conflicts and approaches to peace. Why? Because mainstream thinking, we observed, contains an ideological aspect that obscures or obfuscates a part of reality. It is the task of the peace activist to reveal the whole truth as he/she sees it and not be "taken in" by half-truths of the dominant set of ideas.

With these general observations in mind let us now consider the main elements of the mainstream thinking on peace and conflict in Africa. Contrary to what the reader might be led to expect by what we have said above, there are indeed many ideas in the dominant theory which are readily acceptable. Their problem is their partiality.

5. Mainstream Thinking on Peace and Conflict in Africa

It would be too easy to start with ideas on causes of conflicts in Africa, and the way to move forward, presented by the ideologists of the World Bank and the IMF (for indeed they have written a lot on the matter ), and subject these to a critical evaluation. The World Bank/IMF ideologists have already lost a lot of credibility these days, and it is not even interesting any more, although still very necessary, to critique their dominant discourse.

Hence, to give the mainstream ideas a fair chance, we rather take up for examination a document put out by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, on this issue. As an African, and as one who was actually involved in conflict resolution in Africa - Somalia and Angola, for example - he is singularly qualified to address this
issue. He speaks from practical experience as well as from sharing a cultural and historical past of Africa.

However, it must be stated at the outset that no institutional thinker can place himself or herself outside of his or her institutional setting and circumstances. What makes the UN Secretary-General's thinking on the matter significant (and also differently nuanced from the thinking of a World Bank official) is that he has to "balance" the ideas of the dominant Bretton Woods institutions on the one hand, and on the other hand those of the "developing" countries which constitute the numerical majority of UN's membership. Of course, this does not make his institutional ideas any the less mainstream compared to those that come out of the World Bank; there may be shades of differences between them, but the Secretary-General cannot afford to stray too far from the dominant set of ideas, or he would not be there in the first place.

Also, this balancing of ideas between World Bank/IMF type of "hard core" thinking and the thinking of the numerical majority but weak "third world" states, is not done mechanically or even consciously. These processes do not work like that. The processes are embedded within the history and political or diplomatic culture of the United Nations itself and they imprint themselves on current and future thinking. The Secretary-General then becomes the "carrier" of these ideas; he institutionalises them. It is because of this that we need to distinguish between his "institutional" ideas and his "personal" ones. In practical terms, what this means is that in a concrete situation like in Somalia or Angola, the Secretary-General may have his own views on the matter, but he works in a political context where he has to be guided by what is possible and practical under certain set of circumstances. He may have wanted a greater role for the UN, for example, in Angola, similar to the kind of role that NATO is currently playing in Yugoslavia (Kosovo), but he is hardly in a position to determine such a role for the UN. He is both limited in his options and conditioned by the power realities of global politics.

It is important to understand this context not only because this helps us to understand why the Secretary-General is saying what he is on the issue of peace and conflict in Africa (to which we shall come in a moment), but also because it helps us to avoid raising unnecessary questions, such as why the United Nations did not play as aggressive a role in Angola - such as imposing military sanctions on Savimbi - as the NATO is doing in Kosovo. And, incidentally, one explanation is that the UN did not play such an "activist" role in Angola, because it just could not, given the configuration of political forces. In Eastern Europe, NATO is carrying out post cold war "mopping up" operations, and undertaking military occupation wherever an opportunity arises (as in Kosovo), whilst in Angola it is still not sure about the Government of Dos Santos, and it has lingering ideas on a continuing possible role that Savimbi can play to protect their economic and strategic interests in the entire region that includes the mining heartland of Angola and the DRC.

The institutional ideas of the Secretary-General on the issue of peace and conflict resolution in Africa (we are not concerned here with his personal ideas) are conditioned by such realities of global power politics. They are thus part of the mainstream or dominant ideas on matters of peace and war in Africa. It is in this light that "his" ideas on the causes of conflict in Africa can be summarised as follows.
In examining what he calls the "sources of conflicts", the Secretary-General looks into the following five areas: historical legacies, internal factors, external factors, economic motives, and particular situations.

One of the main problems independent Africa faced was how to make sense out of inherited colonial boundaries and how to achieve national unity. "The challenge was compounded by the fact that the framework of colonial laws and institutions which some new States inherited had been designed to exploit local divisions, not overcome them." (p.3 of Report) But the situation was made worse by the manner in which African states handled this delicate matter. "Too often, however, the necessary building of national unity was pursued through the heavy centralization of political and economic power and the suppression of political pluralism. Predictably, political monopolies often led to corruption, nepotism, complacency and the abuse of power."

Another legacy of colonialism was the character of the commercial relations created by it. "In addition to frequently imposing unfavourable terms of trade, economic activities that were strongly skewed towards extractive industries and primary commodities for export stimulated little demand for steady and widespread improvements in the skills and educational levels of the workforce. The consequences of this pattern of production and exchange spilled over into the post-independence State. As political competition was not rooted in viable national economic systems, in many instances the prevailing structure of incentives favoured capturing the institutional remnants of the colonial economy for factional advantage." (p.3)

The cold war was a major source of conflict in Africa. It "… fuelled some of Africa's longest and most deadly conflicts."

On "internal factors" as sources of conflict, Annan singles out the character of the African State and politics as "… a key source of conflict across the continent." Power in Africa gets personalised in the "winner-takes-all" kind of politics. "Where there is insufficient accountability of leaders, lack of transparency in regimes, inadequate checks and balances, non-adherence to the rule of law, absence of peaceful means to change or replace leadership, or lack of respect for human rights, political control becomes excessively important, and the stakes become dangerously high." (p.4)

When it comes to examining the "external factors", the Secretary-General is, curiously, very parsimonious. He says that "With the end of the cold war, external intervention has diminished but has not disappeared." And external interference includes that by neighbouring countries as well as by those outside of Africa. He is equally stingy when it comes to "economic motives", and he singles out those "… who profit from chaos and lack of accountability, and who may have little or no interest in stopping a conflict and much interest in prolonging it." (p.5)

All in all, thus, the Secretary-General has the harshest criticism for the personalised nature of state and the "winner-takes-all" nature of politics in Africa as the main culprit. This, and the lack of good governance and the absence of the rule of law, are the root causes of conflicts in Africa. The "historical legacy" and the "external factors" are there, but, Annan says, after over three decades of independence, "… the continent must look beyond its colonial past for the causes of current conflicts. Today
more than ever, Africa must look at itself." (p.4) In other words, it is no use blaming outsiders for Africa's troubles; Africa must look at its own faults.

Once again, it is important to reiterate that these are the institutional views of the Secretary-General. It is a reasonable assumption that he also shares these views at a personal level, but it is also possible that he has his own private views which he cannot express in an official UN document. Before we come to a critique of this view, let us, as a logical follow-up of these, summarise the Secretary-General's views on how conflict in Africa may be avoided or resolved.

After going into a detailed discussion of what he calls "Responding to situations of conflict", which is really the "technical" matters related to peace-keeping and mediation (such as early warning mechanisms, harmonizing the policies and actions of external actors, avoiding a proliferation of mediation efforts, mobilizing international support for peace efforts, improving the effectiveness of sanctions, stopping the proliferation of arms, and supporting regional and subregional initiatives - all important issues), the Secretary-General gets down to the real meat of the matter.

There are essentially two planks to the Secretary-General's "theory" of how conflicts in Africa may be avoided or resolved. One falls under the general rubric of "good governance", and the other under "sustainable development". It is a combination of policies and institutions that ensure good governance and sustainable economic development which, according to the Secretary-General, provide the basis for lasting peace in Africa. We shall only list the important aspects of these without elaborating (for this, see the Report itself).

The following, according to the Secretary-General, constitute the main elements of "good governance":

- Securing respect for human rights and the rule of law
- Promoting transparency and accountability in public administration
- Enhancing administrative capacity
- Strengthening democratic governance

As for "sustainable development" the following are its main elements:

- Creating a positive environment for investment and economic growth
- Emphasising social development: Investing in human resources, public health priorities; focusing on social justice; eliminating all forms of discrimination against women
- Restructuring international aid
- Reducing debt burdens
- Opening international markets: access to markets; adjusting to a globally competitive trade environment
- Support for regional cooperation and integration
- Harmonising current international and bilateral initiatives

As stated earlier, the problem with mainstream thinking is that it has sufficient merit to acquire some credibility, but it does not tell the whole truth of the matter. We shall come to the "missing dimension" in the Secretary-General's analysis later, but for the
present let us record that it is not hard to agree with Kofi Annan that at the root of the conflicts in Africa lies, for example, the "personalised" nature of state power in Africa. Similarly, he is correct in saying that without reducing Africa's debt burden there can be no economic salvation for Africa. These are home-truths about Africa. All this is well and acceptable. So, what then is the "missing dimension" in the Secretary-General's analysis? What is there in the analysis that we need to bring in that the Secretary-General missed out either because of his institutional limitations or because of his own personal biases?

There are actually two missing dimensions in the Secretary-General's analysis of the causes of conflict in Africa and the possible "solutions" to these. One can broadly be characterised as an inadequate treatment of the "external or international dimension" to Africa's conflicts; and the other is an inadequate "linking" of the various elements that go into the analysis of the causes and the "solutions". Let us elaborate. In elaborating on this we shall call it the alternative view of the causes of conflict in Africa.

6. An Alternative View of Causes of Conflict in Africa

Let us start with the "external or international" dimension first. The easiest entry point here is the economic sector. Take the debt issue, for instance. The Secretary-General's facts about the debt burden are generally accurate. In 1995, Africa's external debt totalled $328.9 billion - of which approximately 45 per cent was owed to official bilateral sources, 30 per cent to official multilateral sources, and 25 per cent to commercial lenders. To service this debt fully, African countries would have had to pay to donors and external commercial lenders more than 60 per cent ($86.3 billion) of the $142.3 billion in revenues generated from their exports. In fact, African countries as a whole actually paid more than 17 per cent ($25.4 billion) of their total export earnings to donors and external commercial lenders, leaving a total of $60.9 billion in unpaid accumulated arrears. (p.27)

In other words, Africa could not even service its debts; it paid $25.4 billion of the $86.3 billion of the interest it owed to its creditors. Thus, instead of reducing the debt stock it actually increased by a further $60.9 billion. The debt goes on piling year after year. An incidental question that arises here is why the creditors appear to be satisfied with receiving only a part (a small part - only about a third) of the interest owed to them on past debt. One explanation is that they cannot afford to ruin the potential market in Africa for their goods and for their future investments, which is what would happen if they forced Africa to make the debt payments in full. Thus the IMF has created this wonderful, but quite silly, concept of "sustainable debt", debt that can be paid out without ruining the economy. It is the same thing, really, like "sustainable poverty", keeping poverty in Africa at a level where people actually do not fall down dead.

In the case of Mozambique, to illustrate the point, "sustainable debt" means letting Mozambique pay a certain portion of its export earnings so that it continues to import at least something from the rest of the world. We do not have more recent figures, but during 1992, Mozambique paid out $33.9 million in debts service (current debt service), but it already had accumulated interest arrears of $1,708.0 million (arrears),
and so its scheduled debt service for the year came to $1,741.9 million, and its arrears as % of scheduled Debt service was thus 98.1%. In other words, its $33.9 m. was able to discharge less than 2% of its scheduled debt service for the year. By "going easy" on Mozambique this way, the creditors create the illusion that they are being "nice" to Mozambique, but all the time the debt noose is tightening around its neck because it is getting bigger and bigger simply through interest arrears. The creditors can use this debt noose then to impose structural adjustment programme on the state, and to "persuade" it to keep the doors open to foreign goods and capital.

Let us return to the bigger issue of debt. In Kofi Annan's analysis, what the Secretary-General does not go into are two important related questions: how did the debts arise in the first place, and why is it that whilst it is generally recognised that without removing the debt burden there is no hope for development in Africa, very little is in fact done to remove this formidable barrier to Africa's development? These issues become important when we make the LINK between debt and economic development, and between lack of economic growth and conflict, the argument that one of the significant causes of conflict in Africa is the struggle for survival in a situation of scarce resources. Add to this the argument that the struggle for resources manifests itself in the struggle for state power, and, further, that given the historical division between ethnic groups in Africa (exacerbated during the colonial rule, as in Rwanda, for example), the conflict can trigger into civil war and even genocide, and you have here one root cause of conflicts in Africa - its debt burden. In other words, the debt carries a heavy responsibility for civil strife and war in Africa; its cancellation can be a major move to sustainable development and peace in Africa. Of course, every aspect of conflict and peace cannot be pinned down to debt. Complex matters cannot be reduced to single factors, but given the linked nature of all these factors it is difficult to separate the significance of one factor from that of others.

Given this caveat, let us address the two questions on debt. A comprehensive answer is not necessary to show: one, that the principal reason of debt is the unequal trade relations between Africa and the rich countries; two, that it is not in the "rule of the game" of global financing to simply write off debts because such a move can have serious systemic consequences; and three, that even if the debt were written off today they will spiral up again given the inherently unequal economic relations between Africa and the industrialised world.

None of these issues is explored in the Secretary-General's report. This apparent "oversight" is not for lack of knowledge. It is because in the "dominant" discourse these "systemic" causes of debt cannot be revealed; they could illegitimate the system itself, and thus endanger the system's own survival. It is far easier to offer to Africa technical "solutions", such as the HIPC (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) initiative which seeks to write off part of the debt in return for certain binding commitments, than to raise political issues which put to question the whole system of Africa's exploitation by the industrialised countries.

This is what we mean by the "partial" nature of the mainstream discourse on the causes of Africa's conflicts. Even the UN cannot afford to tell the whole truth about debt, let alone such "hard core" institutions as the World Bank and the IMF.
Of course (to take the matter of the debt a stage further), Africa's debts have many complex political and economic causes. Take the debts left by Mobutu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or those left by the apartheid regime in South Africa. In Congo's case, everybody now accuses Mobutu of corruption and bad governance. With better use of borrowed money and with a more accountable system of governance, the country should not have faced the present problem of debt. But the question is: why did the rich countries go on putting money into Mobutu's coffers in the full knowledge of his corruption (the very visible villas in Switzerland, for instance) and undemocratic governance? Why was it not made an issue before, and why now?

Much is made in the "mainstream" discourse about the "mismanagement of borrowed funds". And to be sure, it IS a factor in creating debt. Also, another factor, is the inability or incapacity of civil society to subject governments to account for the use of these funds. These management or governance factors raise a whole lot of other questions - both historical and institutional. But the point is that whilst all these factors are relevant, and linked, why were they not raised in earlier times, and why now?

Mismanagement and corruption aside, the truth has to be faced that the most significant reason for the debt is the unequal trade relations between Africa and the industrialised countries. There is a structured, or systemic, relationship between the products exported by Africa and those imported that ensures that Africa has to go on producing more and more of the same to get less and less of the imports from the rich countries. In other words, it is a "no win" situation for Africa embedded within the system itself. We are saying nothing new, of course. Nyerere drew attention to this when he was still in power in the 1960s, and 30-40 years down the road it continues to be the most significant factor of Africa's sustained impoverishment.

Why some East Asian countries were able to get out of this vicious circle of poverty opens up a different debate. One explanation is that Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong were deliberately encouraged, and assisted, by the United States to build their economic infrastructure to fight against communism. Japan later helped the "second tier" countries, such as Malaysia and Thailand, to industrialise.

These developments thus were a product of the cold war. Now that the cold war is over, the West is systematically rolling back the gains these countries had made during the cold war years. In the aftermath of the East Asian financial meltdown, starting with Thailand in August, 1997, the West has reasserted its control over the banking, financial and industrial centres of power in South Korea, Indonesia and Thailand. Even Hong-Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and Japan are no longer protected from mergers and take-overs by Western corporations. Only China is resisting this renewed aggression by the West, though some doubt whether it would hold on for long if it wants to get into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) badly. The point is that it is no longer possible to point to the South East Asian economies as "models" of successful breaks from the dominant control of the powerful countries of the West.

Let us summarise our finding so far. We found that the mainstream discourse on the causes of Africa's conflicts, even by a relatively benign institution such as the United Nations, does not, cannot, tell the whole truth about Africa. Why? Because the truth
will point the finger at the inequities inherent in the system of relations between Africa and the industrialised West. The fact of the matter is that Africa is weak and impoverished because its rich natural resources are taken away from the continent at a fraction of their value. The terms of exchange between Africa's natural resources and the West's capital-and-knowledge intensive technologies continue to remain the basis for vast seepage of net value out of Africa and into Europe, the USA and Japan. The "debt problem" is only a part of it. Africa's poverty does not just "exist", it is systematically created. It is created not by any conspiracy. It is created by the simple operation of the so-called "law of the market".

We took the issue of the debt only as an example. The same kind of analysis can be made of any of the other elements in the mainstream discourse. For example, who can dispute the importance of the rule of law, or the need to have governments accountable to the people - elements which the Secretary-General's Report says are important for establishing the basis for an enduring peace in Africa? Of course, these aspects of good governance are important for Africa, and they are important not because the West now includes these as part of the "conditionalities" for aid to Africa, but because Africans also value life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, just like anybody else.

This brings us to the question of the nature of the African state. How much can the people of Africa depend on their states to protect their lives and liberties? How much is the African state responsible for civil strife in Africa?

7. The Character of the African State

We noted above that Kofi Annan identified the personalised nature of the African state, and the "winner-takes-all" nature of African politics, as one of the main root causes of civil strife in Africa. Discontented or excluded factions of the body politic often have no means but to resort to some form of violence to be either included in the system or to change the system. The problem is that once they get on top of the system they behave no differently from those whom they displaced. Hence good democratic governance, inclusive politics, and the rule of law are cardinal principles for sustainable peace in Africa.

It would be hard to dispute this argument. Any number of cases can be cited over the last 30 years of Africa's independence to support the argument.

Yet the argument does not go far enough. It does not exhaust the characterisation of the African state. There is much talk about the state these days, not just the African state but state in general. Independent thinkers like J. Habermas argue that under globalisation there is increased alienation between the state and civil society all over the world. Habermas argues that the modern state has relinquished its responsibilities to their citizenry, that there is an effective transfer of functions previously performed by the welfare state to supranational agencies and transnational corporations, and that social peace in Western Europe is now threatened with the breakdown of social welfare state under globalisation.
It is not for us to discuss the nature of the emerging European (transnational) state. But Habermas and thinkers like him point to an important phenomenon. We would say that privatisation and globalisation are not weakening the state but *redefining* its role. The Western State is becoming an instrument of financial dictatorship the world over, and if any evidence is needed for this, one needs to look into the role the United States played in directing the IMF's intervention in South Korea and Indonesia following their financial crisis in 1997/98.

Privatisation is, in fact, neo-liberal corporatist restructuring of society and state to ward off the crisis that capitalism presently faces. This crisis has two facets: one is the overproduction of commodities which cannot find markets, and the second is overproduction of money capital which cannot find enough avenues for profitable investment. This is a deep subject, and would take long to discuss. But it is necessary to know that it is this double crises of capital (the market crisis, and the profitability crisis) that were at the root of the financial crisis in East Asia.

To come back to the African state, it is not enough to characterise it as "personalised state" as Annan does. It is necessary, further, to ask the question: on whose behalf is the personalised state (if that is what it is) using its power? In whose behalf is Mandela using his power? In whose behalf is Mugabe using his? In whose behalf is Museveni? That is the question.

We would say that just as the State in the West is being redesigned, restructured, to meet the global demands of international corporate capital, so is the state in the former colonies being redesigned first to meet the needs of the same international corporate capital and then, secondly, to meet the needs of the local ruling elite.

Let us take the Zimbabwe state as an example. The first change that came with the "home-grown" but World Bank/IMF-inspired Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1990 was not the restructuring of the economy but a restructuring of the state. The state was restructured to divest of any direct role in the economy; it was to facilitate the private sector but not engage in production for its own sake. Thus privatisation of state corporations became an essential part of the restructuring of the state. In the pre-ESAP (1980-90) era, the state exercised a degree of paternalism towards the welfare of the people - by, for example, legislating on minimum wages for workers, and by putting money into education, health and other social services. But after ESAP, this kind of paternalist role of the state was now regarded as too obstructionist in the process of free enterprise. The state had to severely cut down on social spending so that the private sector was not "starved off" the much-needed capital for their export-oriented enterprises. Also, state interference in labour relations was deemed to be damaging to attracting Foreign Direct Investments into the country. The FDIs became the new gods of development.

It is arguable that in the "personalised" states of Uganda, Zambia, Kenya and South Africa, more or less the same things are happening. The states are being restructured to meet the demands of the IMF/WB and foreign direct investors. At the same time, because of financial liberalisation, there is a decreasing power of the African state to control foreign capital.
The African state is sometimes described as too powerful. That is partly true. In relation to the domestic population, many African states display near-fascist powers. The civil society in Africa is generally weak in relation to the state. However, when it comes to dealing with the centres of global capital - including the World Bank and the IMF - the African state is paralysed. Its temerity in front of agents of capital becomes almost disgraceful.

What are the implications of this restructuring of the African state for peace and democracy? To be candid, the African state is being divested of all responsibility towards the welfare of its people. The "poverty alleviation" programmes are pitifully inadequate, and in any case, they only serve to camouflage the transformation of the African state. The African state's essential role is being reduced to three functions: 1) to maintain law and order; 2) to facilitate entry and non-discriminatory operation of foreign capital; and 3) to administer poverty alleviation programmes.

All over Africa, poverty has increased and not decreased. If conflicts stem from poverty, and the struggle for scarce resources, then the re-colonisation of Africa that is taking place right in front of our eyes is the principal cause of poverty in Africa. There can be no peace in the continent as long as the bulk of its population are poor, and there can be no growth or development as long as the invisible "market forces" continue to enable foreign owners of capital and technology to plunder Africa's rich resources at a fraction of their real value, and as long as the debt overhang continues to enslave Africa to the mercy of its creditors.

8. Transforming the Culture of Violence

The challenge that still remains is that of violence. Why do conflicts degenerate into spasms of uncontrolled violence that defies all canons of humanity, wisdom and tolerance? We have seen human carnage in many conflict-situations in Africa - Rwanda, Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the DRC, to name a few. Erstwhile friends become overnight enemies; neighbours kill each other with machetes; families split along ethnic lines. Why do these things happen?

This is a deep subject, and we are not competent to go into the group psychology where some of the answers must lie to this perplexing phenomenon. It is a matter that cannot be handled superficially or casually. What we can offer are some ideas on how to move forward in this complex area.

Gandhi's answer to violence was not to offer counter-violence, but to sublimate it by offering oneself as "willing" victims of violence and overcoming it with "soul force" (satyagraha). Whilst fighting against the British Raj, this strategy, despite occasional lapses, was remarkably successful. But when the partition came between India and Pakistan, all the lessons learnt from years of satyagraha could not stop the human carnage. Is it because in the struggle against the British, the people were fighting for satya (or truth) against a rule that had become immoral and unsustainable, whereas it was difficult to know where "truth" lay when it came to the partition? Then everyone was for himself or for family or for religion. Truth lay, as it were, on both sides. But this still does not explain violence, the sheer brutality or inhumanity of it - just as in Rwanda or Kosovo today.
In our view, human nature has both evil and good aspects.

It is the function of religions and spirituality to arouse the good against the evil, but religions have not proved to be dependable allies in the struggle against violence. If individual "soul force" becomes a spent force in times of inter-ethnic violence, and if religions are not dependable allies, then the only option left is to create institutional structures that can deal with conflicts without these erupting into violence. We know, for example, that the Bahutu and the Watutsi in the pre-colonial period had complex institutional structures that not only enabled social mobility across class/caste lines but also across ethnic lines. We also know that the clan system in Somalia had complex structures that balanced the rights to grazing and water of different clans, and a system of disputes resolution that preserved the integrity of the clans as well as social peace. These complex structures, in the cases of both Rwanda and Somalia, were destroyed during the colonial period, and nothing viable put in their place except the authority of the colonial powers. So when this authority was removed at independence, there was nothing to fall back on by way of institutional checks and balances.

So a short answer to the problem of violence is that we need to work at various levels - at the individual level with education as the key element; at group level where a culture of tolerance and mutual respect need to be consciously inculcated; but above all, at a national level where durable and credible institutions which balance the rights and responsibilities of groups (however defined) need to be put in place.

Democratic institutions that balance rights and responsibilities and provide for the rule of law are tried and tested methods of resolving conflicts without resort to violence at the national level. But even here we have discovered that the representative form of democracy that is practised in most Western countries cannot deal with other kinds of violence such as inter-state violence, or "structural" violence that is embedded in the economic system. Western democracies are hegemonious and too readily resort to violence and war against countries that do not conform to their order and authority. Also structural violence as embedded in the "free market" system, of which Africa is victim, is something that, within the Western system of morality, is a "permissible" kind of violence. So the system of democracy developed by the West has many defects. We need to try other forms of democracy, such as participatory or communitarian forms about which there is some debate these days.

9. Post-Conflict Peace Building - PCPB

Finally, we come to the question of what happens once a conflict is over or subsides. Some conflicts never subside, or appear never to subside, such as the civil war in Angola even after almost continuous war since 1975. Here peace-building is an ongoing exercise until there is some dramatic change in the balance of forces or change of hearts.

We are here concerned with conflicts that have subsided, such as the end of the apartheid rule in South Africa. There is much debate on the value of "truth and
reconciliation" commissions as a means of sublimating past injuries and bitterness. However, there appears to be no consensus on the matter.

Truth Commissions (TCs) are most commonly negotiated as a process of transition from dictatorships and/or civil wars to popular rule. In Latin America they got rid of several dictatorships in 1980s and 90s in this manner. Since 1975, about 20 TCs have been set up, mainly in Latin America, but also in Africa and Asia, the best known being the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" of South Africa. TCs tend to be a compromise solution to the conflict where the ruling dictatorship gets immunity (interpreted also by some as impunity) against trial in return for surrendering power. But in the process, victims or relatives of victims, looking for justice, usually get sidelined.

The counter to TCs are Judicial Commissions (JCs), such as the International Criminal Court in Arusha on Rwanda. The logic here is that the justice to the victims must be seen to be done, and that the perpetrators of human rights violations should not get away with impunity.

The question is whether TCs or JCs do help damaged societies or heal the wounds of individuals? Do they really produce reconciliation? In Chile and Argentina, TCs led to reparations for the victimised families, but as soon as an opportunity arose to put to trial General Pinochet, his former victims or their families were not slow to demand a judicial trial. In South Africa a dispute arose towards the end between the Chairman of the Commission, Bishop Tutu, and the ruling Party, the ANC. The ANC tried, last minute, to delay the publication of the TC Report, but the court in Cape Town ruled it out. The ANC argued that the TC had not adequately taken into account ANC's objections to the way it had "criminalised" the whole liberation struggle by treating it on same basis as the crimes of the apartheid regime. It comes back to the question of whether Human Rights are to be judged by universal principles or by contextual ones. These are difficult issues and no easy answers. All we can say is that while justice must indeed be done, and be seen to be done, and while perpetrators of human rights violations must not get away with impunity, circumstances might dictate compromises if conflicts are not to go on and on perpetuating strife and violence to people's lives and liberties. Whether the South African was one such case will remain a disputed matter.

Beyond reconciliation, there remains the problem of poverty. The end of conflict does not ensure the end of poverty. Indeed, some might argue that if a conflict is ended in a compromise that leaves intact the power of those who erstwhile controlled the state and the economy, then that compromise is not worth stopping the conflict. In other words, the conflict (and therefore, war) should continue until power effectively transfers in the hands of the people with a capacity to transform the economic basis of their poverty. For if this does not happen, then seeds are laid out for a future conflict between the dispossessed and the new rulers. Whether this is the case in present day South Africa remains to be seen. If our above analysis of the African state is anything to go by, then it would appear that the South African state is constrained by the same globalising forces as every other state in Africa, and therefore the task of the people at the grassroots level has not yet ended.
10. Conclusion

We undertook this research as a practitioner of peace, as a peace activist, not as an academic. The issues of conflict and peace are central to all those who are concerned about the future of Africa. We have seen that over the years the nature of conflicts in Africa has changed. The anti-colonial wars and border conflicts have given way, by and large, to intra-state, or civil, wars. We also noted that the human carnage in civil wars has been so shocking and so brutalising that it is the responsibility of all peace activists to try to understand the reasons behind these conflicts and the brutalities. Our research led to the discovery of two major lines of thought on the causes of conflicts in Africa and the road towards peace. The mainstream or dominant theory tends to emphasise the internal factors within the nation as the root causes of conflict. These have to do with lack of economic growth on the one hand, and poor governance on the other, as the principal root causes of conflict and peacelessness in Africa. The corresponding solutions are, of course, economic growth and good governance. These two concepts summarise the mainstream thinking on peace and conflict in Africa.

We discovered that whilst there is much that may be accepted in the mainstream analysis, it suffers from severe faults. Its principal fault is that it does not adequately analyse the international, or global, dimension of the conflicts in Africa, and it does not connect various factors in a holistic manner. We discovered that this is so because of its stake in the preservation of the existing system, which leads the analysis to become ideological. Thus, the very factors that have impoverished Africa - namely exploitation by foreign capital under conditions of "free market" - are the ones offered by mainstream thinkers as "solutions" to Africa's economic woes.

An African peace activist must not be taken in by these ideological assumptions of mainstream thought. He or she must look at both the internal and the international dimensions of the causes of conflicts in Africa as part of one whole. The external is also the internal. He/she must examine the implications of present day globalisation and how this has transformed the nature of the African state as well as the nature of African economy.

On the basis of this alternative perspective, we conclude that the main reasons of peacelessness in Africa lie in its continuing poverty. Poverty in Africa does not just exist, it is created. It is created by the manner in which Africa is integrated into the global economy. The basis of this integration is the unequal exchange between what Africa contributes to the global economy and what it gets in return. This is legitimated by the ideology of the "free market", but behind the free market are big monopolies and oligopolies that control the markets - from diamonds to beef to Microsoft software. The free market is a myth.

Africa's peacelessness is rooted in this continued impoverishment by the system. Delinking from the system is not a viable or practical way for Africa. But there are ways in which Africa can partially de-link itself from the global market. Already the bulk of Africa's population survive by their activities in the so-called "informal" market. This is not to glorify the informal sector, but to say that a condition of being de-linked has already been a reality for millions in Africa. What is needed is a more concerted effort to strengthen those institutions and structures that are able to survive in a de-linked environment.
A second line of defence for Africa is to re-negotiate its terms of integration into the global system. This the African governments will not do on their own because they are conditioned by the agreements they have entered into with the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, and the donors, and by the specific interests of the elite. They may take action only when pressurised by the grassroots and community organisations. However, where governments have ceased to respond to the just demands of the people, the latter may have no choice but to resort to various forms of direct action in confronting their states.

One issue on which direct action is called for immediately is the annulment of all debts owed by Africa to the rich nations. The various schemes offered by the Bretton Woods institutions (such as HIPC), and accepted by African governments, are mere palliatives that obscure the reality behind debt.

What is needed is the transformation of both the economy and the nature of the state. The economy has to be brought back to the control of the people and to service primarily the needs of the people, and not those of the exporters of Africa's wealth. The kind of state that is needed is not the "minimum" state, much favoured by the IMF and the World Bank, but the "responsible" state. The minimum state leaves power in hands of corporations. What we need is a state that can carry out its social responsibilities. The people need a state that can resist pressure from the WB/IMF and the "donors", one that can ensure food security, build self-reliance in industry, regulate strategic sectors to protect national sovereignty and economic stability, and enable the exploitation of natural resources by indigenous people first and foremost for their own benefit and then for export if necessary. We need to do away with a unitary, centralised, authoritarian state system; to encourage a political culture that recognises ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences; and to create conditions of national unity based on the fullest expression of these diversities.

Beyond partial de-linking, and partial re-negotiations of the terms of integration into the world market, the people of Africa must sow the seeds of a new future based on imaginative alternative forms of production at the economic level and governance at the political level. This would include a new political culture of tolerance, and the creation of institutions which balance the rights of people with their responsibilities. Whilst it is impossible to return to the past, there are valuable insights that the past provides (such as the manner in which in pre-colonial times the people of Rwanda and of Somalia used to resolve conflicts among them), which could form the starting point for self-generated and endogenous institution-building. Only then will Africa move from contemporary peacelessness to enduring peace with justice.