

(MFI) The international community continues its mobilisation in support of conflict prevention and peacekeeping in Africa, as prerequisites for development, in order to enable the Africans to ensure themselves the security of their continent in the longer term.

Some African civil wars have finally come to an end, as Angola's, and Sudan's north-south conflict. And Liberia, long the scene of bloody clashes, has been able to hold democratic elections in 2005. But violence continues elsewhere, internally or at the regional level. Peacekeeping in the continent appears as a difficult task, all the more so since most African countries that intend to play their part in such ventures are short of resources and count on external aid to do so.

The United Nations, the G8, the European Union (EU) and, bilaterally, countries such as France and the United States, are determined to accompany African efforts in the field of security, both in order to enhance the efficiency of poverty eradication in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and for reasons of international security. The International Organisation of Francophonie (OIF), whose members include a majority of African states and donor countries like France, Belgium and Canada, is concentrating more on mediation efforts and building capacity for good governance, both in order to prevent violence and to assist countries emerging from conflict.

An African Standby Force by 2010

The African Union (AU) officially inaugurated its Peace and Security Council in May 2004, and the African Commission President, Mali's former Chief of state Alpha Oumar Konare, who has made peacekeeping one of the priorities of his tenure, has set himself the objective of building up an African Standby Force by 2010. This intervention force will be based on pre-deployed regional brigades in each of the continent's five regions – North Africa, West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa and Southern Africa. These brigades will in principle be linked to regional organisations, where they exist and are operational, such as ECOWAS, the SADC, the CEEAC or IGAD.

The choice of headquarters for each of the five brigades however still poses problems. In West Africa, the matter will be settled in liaison with ECOWAS; in East Africa Kenya appears as the favourite choice; and Botswana, host to the SADC headquarters, has the agreement of most Southern African countries including South Africa, the region's economic and political "locomotive". Things appear more difficult in Central Africa and North Africa. Angola, which has a strong, well-equipped army hardened by the years of civil war, and sees itself as a rival to South Africa, has filed its candidacy both in the SADC and in Central Africa, where it would be in a position to play the "big power" game.

For the moment, security in Africa mainly remains a task for the United Nations and its "blue helmets". Half of the UN's 16 current peacekeeping operations worldwide are taking place in African theatres – in Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Western Sahara, Sierra Leone and Sudan. The UN is working in liaison with the AU and has decided to strengthen its relations with regional organisations as far as peacekeeping is concerned. UN Secretary Kofi Annan considers that the success of the UN peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone – which put an end to several years of civil war – *"marked a turning point"* in that it restored the confidence required for the organisation to go ahead with the deployment of new complex peacekeeping operations in Africa, after the failures of the 1990s (Somalia, Rwanda, and unsuccessful attempts in Angola). He also considers that most of the new missions are *"multidisciplinary"* in the sense that they are not confined to observation and overseeing the implementation of peace accords that have been signed. They are also supposed to tackle the *"deeper causes"* of conflicts; hence the importance of both conflict prevention and post-conflict aid.

Chirac: France is not the "gendarme of Africa"

The G8, which groups the seven major industrial countries and Russia, has for several years pledged their help for the African countries to reinforce their capacity to promote peace and stability in the continent – by training, and if need be equipping, several thousand soldiers as peacekeepers by 2010. The latest G8 commitments, announced at the Gleneagles (Scotland) Summit, include coordinated technical assistance for the African Standby Force, help for the deployment of units at the UA's HQ and the regional brigades, and support, including flexible financing, for African operations such as transport, logistics and financial management capacity. Post-conflict aid has not been forgotten: the G8 has also committed to granting countries emerging from conflict rapid and flexible multilateral and bilateral debt relief and financial support for reconstruction.

The European Union (EU) which, for the first time launched an punctual autonomous military operation in 2003, in the Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and with the approval of the UN Security Council (operation Artemis under French command), has also singled out peacekeeping as one of the priorities of its African policy. Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Development and humanitarian aid, emphasised in September 2005 that Africa must be helped to meet itself the challenge of restoring lasting peace. He also noted that the EU established a 250 million euro Peace Facility in 2004 funded by European Development Fund resources. This facility has notably help finance African Union operations in Sudan's troubled Darfur region and the regional Peace Force in the Central African Republic. Sharing France's concern that this facility may soon be drawn down, Louis Michel urged the need to make it permanent.

France, on the other hand, in 1997 launched the RECAMP programme to train, equip and support troops from African countries and help them assume responsibility for security in their continent. Paris has concluded agreements with the EU and the AU which have become full partners of RECAMP. *"France has no intention whatsoever to play the part of the gendarme of Africa. It will commit itself for peace, at the request of the UN, the African Union or the African countries themselves,"* French President Jacques Chirac said in June 2005. A view shared by the AU's Alpha Oumar Konare, who during a visit to Paris in October 2005 welcomed this position and France's support for the African Union and the continent's regional organisations.

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