

N° 652

AFRICA-FRANCE

05.11.03

Crises and conflicts

(MFI) Africa is still shaken by crises and conflicts and the civilian populations continue to be the main victims. And this in spite of the return of peace in regions or countries devastated by civil war, such as South Sudan, Angola, Sierra Leone and Liberia. And in spite of current African and international peace efforts in Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in Sudan's western Darfur region, and in Togo.

Africa's regional economic communities have actively engaged themselves in the field over the past several years, each according to their means, in a bid to put an end to conflicts in their areas. ECOWAS has intervened over the past decade in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire. In East Africa, the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) has taken the lead in mediation efforts in Sudan and Somalia. And the African Union (AU) has deployed troops in Darfur to contain violence, helped by the European Union (EU) and NATO. All of this with the inevitable blessings of the UN, which remains the moral and operational high authority in charge of international peacekeeping.

Côte d'Ivoire: "Elections by October 30, 2006"

The UN Security Council has endorsed UA decisions that, notably, provide for maintaining President Laurent Gbagbo in office beyond the expiration of his mandate on October 30, 2005, and the organisation of presidential elections within 12 months. But the Ivorians were also due to seek agreement as soon as possible on the nomination of a Prime minister acceptable to all the signatories of the 2003 Linas-Marcoussis agreement, including those who are pressing for President Gbagbo's departure, led by Guillaume Soro's *Forces Nouvelles*.

The UN thus approved as its own the decision adopted on October 6 by the UA Peace and Security Council, and stressed its intention to take early steps to support its implementation in order to organise "*free, fair, open, transparent and credible elections at the earliest possible date and no later than October 30, 2006.*" The UN took note of the African request for the reinforcement of the troop strength of the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire, which now tops 7,500 men and is supported in the field by 4,000 French troops taking part in Operation Licorne under a UN mandate. The UN is now also contemplating individual sanctions against those who block the peace process or those responsible for human rights violations.

The evolution of the Ivorian situation – also marked by ups and downs in relations with France – is the result of initiatives undertaken by South African President Thabo Mbeki, henceforth aided by his Nigerian opposite number Olusegun Obasanjo. The two leaders are the targets of criticism from both Ivorian parties. French President Jacques Chirac, on the other hand, in September reiterated, in talks with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, "*France's support for the efforts of the UN, the African Union and the ECOWAS.*"

DRC: MONUC's mandate extended

The Security Council meanwhile extended MONUC, the UN Mission in the DRC, until September 30, 2006, calling on the Congolese authorities to guarantee "*free, transparent and peaceful*" elections by June 2006. The DRC has been in a transition phase since June 2003 under the authority of President Joseph Kabila – after a civil war that triggered the intervention of troops from seven African countries – and remains in a situation of "neither peace nor war", in particular in the eastern regions.

Kinshasa has benefited from substantial support from the international community, as well as the military presence of MONUC's "blue helmets" whose strength has been constantly increased: the authorised force now stands at nearly 19,000 soldiers. A succession of accords signed since Lusaka in 1999 in the end resulted in the setting up of a national union government in June 2003, a year after the deployment of MONUC. President Joseph Kabila and his four vice presidents – including two from the main former rebel movements – are in charge of the transition and the preparation of nation-wide polls initially planned for June 2005 but now expected to take place 12 months later.

Sudan: peace in the South, '*alarming worsening*' in the West

The peace agreement between Khartoum and South Sudan has failed so far to end the conflict in Darfur in the west, which has resulted in hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees in neighbouring Chad. The UA has deployed its biggest ever peacekeeping force in Darfur, with the aid of the EU and NATO. The UA mission was due to reach its total authorised strength of 6,171 military and 1,586 policemen by the end of October 2005. But the UN in September denounced an "*alarming worsening*" of the security situation and criticised the Khartoum authorities for their support to tribal militias which cause terror in Darfur, in flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions demanding that the militias be disarmed and taken to court.

In spite of these appeals, the international community has been unable to put an end to the conflict. The threats of sanctions, notably by the United States, have not materialised. Observers say this is not only because China, a permanent member of the Security Council and Khartoum's principal partner in the oil sector, has threatened to veto any such move, but also because Sudan no longer is a burning issue on the international agenda. The only concrete measure so far has been the submission by the Council to the International Criminal Court, at the initiative notably of France, of a list of persons suspected of committing crimes against humanity in Darfur. On the other hand, the international community has promised Sudan massive financial support – some 4.5 billion dollars – as a backing for the continued North-South peace process.

Togo: gradual resumption of cooperation with the EU

In Togo, ECOWAS succeeded in calming the crisis triggered when, on the death of President Gnassingbe Eyadema in February 2005, his son Faure Gnassingbe took over as his successor. The latter was in the end elected in elections organised in April under African and international pressure. But the UN accused the government of being responsible for the death of 400 to 500 people as a result of electoral violence.

Since then, Togo is seeking a reconciliation with the EU which suspended its aid even before Eyadema's death. The government has discussed the social and political situation with EU representatives, arguing that progress has been made towards implementing 22 commitments made by Togo in 2004. The talks produced agreement on a gradual resumption of cooperation, with EU financing of a general census as the basis for credible electoral lists, and of projects linked to human rights. But a problem that continues to tarnish the government's image, that of the return of refugees, and a genuine reconciliation with the exiled opposition, in particular that of Gilchrist Olympio, remain to be settled.

Marie Joannidis