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The New Parliamentary Peacebuilding Paradigm in Africa

The international development community seems to have discovered parliamentarians, at long last, at the intersection of collective efforts to help democratize and develop Africa. At the forefront, a new generation of African leaders has taken up the challenge, in the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), to correct the failures of past leaders and, among other things, put parliamentarians into the front seat, and perhaps eventually even in the driver's seat, of the political process. At seemingly the ideal moment, a plethora of parliamentary handbooks, toolkits and guidelines has emerged around the turn of the century (see annex), in recognition of what parliamentary bodies have been insisting for quite some time: without a central role for parliaments, lasting peace and prosperity in Africa will be an illusion.

The growth in numbers and successes of democratisation processes in Africa, coupled with the changing nature of conflict itself in the post-Cold War geopolitical environment, has significantly affected the role that parliamentarians can play, and has opened the door to a new recognition of their possibilities and responsibilities, in conflict-affected countries. The increased presence of intrastate conflicts in Africa has led to a reassessment of the roles different actors can play in preventing and resolving hostilities, bringing parliaments into more prominence as forums for debate of contentious issues with a potential for contributing to peacebuilding processes. This newly perceived importance of parliament stems partly from the new respect gained by parliamentary institutions as a result of a wave of democratization in Africa.

Africa, through its own leadership, must solve its own problems and take its destiny in its own hands. This is the AU and NEPAD message. The cooperation of the international community will be required in relation to the issues extending beyond Africa's borders (such as aid, trade, debt and bribery), but the message is clear: that parliamentarians stand ready to take up a new and exciting role as champions for human rights. Their single most enticing challenge as an antidote for bad leadership, is to be the voice of the people in poverty reduction, conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. Parliamentarians are more conscious than ever of their responsibility to create an environment conducive to long-term sustainable relationships that don't spiral into violent conflict. All they lack are the resources to play this role. The international donor community has, however, encouragingly, begun to realize the added value for their other investments of having a parliamentary capacity building component in their assistance programmes.

This paper will make the case that conflict management is possible in Africa with stronger parliamentary democracy, and that one key element of political stability is parliamentary action to implement NEPAD and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Issues of capacity will be returned to in the final section. The chief implication of this new paradigm for parliamentary engagement is that the international community could usefully rethink its development cooperation targeting, delivery and accountability mechanisms. Parliament should be a first consideration, not an afterthought, when it comes to conflict management.

Conflict Dynamics in Africa

African leadership has had to weather the successive storms of slavery, colonialism, Cold War cronyism and foreign-supported tyranny. However, the African Union has emerged with its home-grown NEPAD plan, and has established a Pan-African Parliament to provide oversight and advice. As called for in the AU's NEPAD programme, good political, economic and corporate governance are the basic building blocks for harmony and development in Africa. Where they are weak and inadequate, parliamentarians will need to play a key role in strengthening and maintaining them. How they can make this important contribution to conflict prevention and peacebuilding depends on the type of conflict dynamics in a given national or regional context.

By definition, conflict is found wherever competing and mutually-exclusive interests are present. Virtually everywhere, conflict is therefore a naturally occurring phenomenon. Where competing interests are coupled to a lack of respect, conflict turns ugly. Examine any of Africa's past or present conflicts, and one finds an atrocious lack of mutual respect: for human dignity, for human rights, for women, for parliamentary process and institutions, for minorities, for governing or opposition political parties, for refugees and displaced persons, and for neighbouring countries and their citizens. Without respect for each other and for their most basic rights, human beings turn into animals. War is primarily the domain of men, and it is hard not to be disgusted by the depravity and atrocities this gender of humans is capable of when conflict gets out of hand.

Most conflicts in Africa occur within countries, not between them. Evidence suggests that internal conflict is related to poverty, that a society's vulnerability to conflict goes up as poverty increases and persists. Statistically, there is a strong negative correlation between outbreaks of violent conflict and per capita income (MPR, 2005). The OECD has identified a number of triggering or accelerating factors that can result in an escalation of pre-existing tensions into violent conflict:

- sustained economic decline
- changes in degree of internal cohesion
- shifts in control of central authority
- change in distribution of political power
- external interventions and arms shipments
- large movements of people and capital.

In the context of work to achieve the MDGs, the World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF, among others, have come to realize that parliamentarians are key players in poverty reduction and political stabilization strategies. Helpful resources, such as handbooks, have been developed to assist in the parliamentary response, and indications are that donors may also be leaning toward parliamentary assistance packages in this area.

Another recognized area of intrastate conflict generation is related to elections. Contentious electoral processes may see violence erupting during the campaign period or, more commonly, after the results come in and the losing party (or parties) refuses to accept them. Elections, the showcase of democracy, can instigate war or peace. The Southern African Development Community Parliamentary Forum (SADC PF) established a Conflict Management Advisory Group (CMAG), which, based on the *Norms and Standards for Elections in the SADC Region*, has identified a number of root causes to election-related conflict:

- unfair or inappropriate electoral systems
- archaic constitutional and regulatory arrangements
- misuse of state resources in campaigns
- biased composition of electoral management bodies
- unresolved or unaccepted electoral dispute settlements
- media misrepresentation and bias
- violations (or absence) of codes of conduct.

The SADC PF has also proposed parliamentary intervention strategies and action areas for pre-election, election-phase and post-election conflict flashpoints. Parliamentary goodwill missions in conflict-affected areas are seen as an important option to promote regional parliamentary solidarity with democratic forces, as are regional parliamentary electoral observer delegations. A SADC Handbook on Handling Election-Related Conflicts was called for at the CMAG meeting of July 2004, and was prepared by SADC PF for publication in 2005.

Where an election result is not accepted by dissenting parties, they may boycott or inadequately participate in subsequent parliamentary processes, fuelling tension and perpetuating conflict further. This reduces the possibility for achieving a national consensus on approaches to poverty reduction, and can usher in a period of heightened vulnerability to the emergence or return to violent conflict on the part of minority parties and marginalized groups.

Inter-state conflict in Africa has a far higher potential to erupt where dialogue is absent and cross-border tensions are high. The colonial-imposed boundaries frequently detract from nation-building and national economic coherence. The conflict in the DRC at one point involved in one way or another forces from nine different countries. In such circumstances, there is an even greater need for progress on regional economic integration and regional political dialogue. Both can be realized by an active parliamentary peace agenda.

Parliamentary Strategies to Address Conflict

This section draws on the framework developed in the Millennium Project Report 2005 for country-level processes to achieve the MDGs, with special reference to countries affected by conflict. Within this framework, three areas of attention are presented: investing in conflict prevention, countries in conflict, and countries emerging from conflict. The basic tenet of this work is that contained in the Millennium Declaration (2000), namely that peace and security are fundamental for eradicating all forms of poverty. While the inverse is also true, that the long-term vision of development provided by the MDGs can be effective in promoting stability and buy-in of dissident and (potentially) violent groups. The Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (UN 2004) addresses the following clusters of threats to international security:

- wars between and within States, including large-scale human rights abuse
- poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation
- nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons
- global terrorist networks and transnational organized crime.

The Report places an emphatic priority on prevention, and stresses:

Development has to be the first line of defence for a collective security system that takes prevention seriously. Combatting poverty will not only save millions of lives but also strengthen States' capacity to combat terrorism, organized crime and proliferation. Development makes everyone more secure (UN 2004, p2).

In regard to internal, intra-state conflicts, it is advisable that the increased provision of investments, services and infrastructure needed to achieve the MDGs occur on an equitable basis, and that attention be given to the needs of minorities, marginalized regions and, where relevant, former combatants, refugees and internally displaced persons. The Millennium Project Report cites five areas of investments that can help prevent conflicts:

- conflict early warning systems
- equitable poverty reduction strategies
- participatory decision-making structures
- transparency in flow of public revenues, and
- investments in state security capacity.

Within each of these five key areas, parliamentarians will ideally play a central role. The details of such an agenda will be outlined in the following section. Here it is important to stress the blind spot that is common in the crafting of such measures. While much is often made of the need to provide 'political space' for marginalized communities to express their grievances and aspirations, this is often cast as the exclusive role of civil society organizations - and the role of parliamentarians is subsumed under 'government'. As examples from parliamentary development programmes have repeatedly attested, it is exactly the heightened interaction between parliament and civil society that produces mutually beneficial results in respect of early warning, equitable policies, participation,

transparency and security. Parliaments need to be given explicit attention, as governments cannot be counted on automatically to include them in these processes. On the contrary, dodgy governments tend to discourage parliamentary empowerment.

One area where parliament can assist in conflict prevention is through an equitable distribution of socio-economic development across regions and communities, through income and opportunity distribution policies using the national budget. Parliaments in Africa are often not in a position to pro-actively intervene in **budgetary reallocations**, for example on opportunities for education and employment, even though it is their constitutional responsibility to approve the budget. This is an areas where parliaments need specific skills development and institutional strengthening to play a greater role.

Confidence building measures are also required to improve relations between ruling and opposition parties. Transparent decision-making structures, such as on electoral processes, and enabling parliamentary committees to hold all-party debates on key contentious issues, can make the difference between a spiral down into violence or up into a multi-party consensus on national priorities. This is especially the case when new threats emerge to challenge a nation's (or a particular group's) prospects.

Currently the biggest and most dramatic development challenge faced by Africa is the **HIV/AIDS pandemic** and its immediate impact, which is creating orphans in numbers unprecedented in human history and threatening the survival and future of these and millions of other vulnerable children. The UN estimates that in 2005 some 15 million children in sub-Saharan Africa have been orphaned by AIDS, and that by 2010 there will be some 50 million orphans in this region by all causes, of which about half caused by AIDS. By the end of 2003, already 15% of all children in sub-Saharan Africa were orphans. Of these, 55% are adolescents, many with behavioural and depressive disorders after witnessing the slow, painful death of one or both parents, and often of siblings. These children are, in relation to non-orphans of their generation, on average more undernourished, undereducated and excessively vulnerable to sexual and other exploitation, including as sex slaves and child soldiers.

To make matters worse, only 3% of orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS are being supported by efforts of the international community. This is a global policy failure, with national implications. Ministries dealing with children and AIDS are characteristically the weakest, and African Heads of State pledges to devote 15% of the annual budget to health have not been met. UNAIDS, UNICEF and AWEPA produced a parliamentary toolkit on what to do about AIDS, which has been introduced in a number of parliaments and translated into several local languages. With more funding, more could be accomplished. A parliamentary action plan on orphans has been developed (Cape Town Declaration, September 2004), but Africa's parliamentarians still lack the resources to implement it properly.

Another aspect of managing conflict is **civilian control of the armed forces** and police, including the limitation of military budgets and military involvement in politics. This is an area where parliament can (if sufficiently resourced) and should play a leading role.

During conflicts, parliaments can act to provide transparency in the diversion of government finances toward military efforts, and they can interact with international donors to ensure that humanitarian assistance is targeted in an equitable way. Consideration also needs to be given, in open and inclusive parliamentary debate, to the implications of internal and cross-border migration, and to the needs of women who are at risk of sexual violence, HIV infection and psychological damage from wars.

An example of the role of parliament in ending conflicts was given in the Pretoria peace negotiations for Ivory Coast. The morning after the peace accord was signed, Prime Minister Seydou Diarra presented the results to the plenary session of the Pan-African Parliament (7 April 2005). The following main elements of the accord were listed as having a direct relevance to the parliamentary process:

- all-party political cooperation and dialogue would need to continue to fuel the ongoing negotiation process
- cross-party confidence-building measures were needed if the disarming of militias was to succeed
- complicated logistics were being worked out for militia regrouping centres and planning for security and police redeployment
- parliamentary and presidential elections were being prepared for later in 2005, with international mediation
- a number of Bills were being prepared for swift adoption by a new National Assembly to guide issues in the electoral and peace processes
- among these the funding of political parties, including an equal amount for the ruling and the main opposition parties, was still being prepared.

Ambassador Mongella, the President of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), interpreted the presence of the Ivorian leader as an indication of a new respect afforded parliament by African leadership. She pledged that the relevant PAP Committees would give proper attention to the implementation of the Pretoria Accord, and saw the process as an example of how Africa was more able than in the past to solve its own problems.

The role of **parliamentary committees** is especially important in the post-conflict period. As societies emerge into a new understanding for the future, parliamentary committees can help to bring the conflict from the realm of individual personalities and groups of people, into the realm of ideas, policies and proposals for the future. Simply by allowing the disadvantaged and minority parties to express their grievances in open debate can act as an important pressure-release valve and cross-party confidence-building measure. This is especially so if the debate is part of a learning process whereby members of competing parties move from a position of sworn enemies to one of political adversaries, from shooting to shouting. The Mozambican political context in the aftermath of the 1994 transitional multi-party elections is a case in point. [Insert Box]

The SADC PF has established a Conflict Management programme that proposes conflict early warning and mitigation mechanisms and includes the following activities:

- establishing databases and institutional memory of election-related conflict
- training parliamentarians and staff on mediation and peacebuilding

- preparation of materials for conflict prevention in upcoming elections
- conduct ongoing pre-election assessments and stakeholder consultations
- coordinate and collaborate with conflict management organizations.

These actions are vitally important because, as the World Bank has established, ‘countries emerging from conflict show a 44% tendency to relapse into conflict within the first five years’ (MPR, p187). The post-conflict setting requires significant investments to reconstruct war-torn areas, resettle refugees and internally displaced persons, and reintegrate former combatants, as well as to rebuild the basic infrastructure in education, healthcare and transport. Government capacity also needs rebuilding, and special attention must be given to the parliamentary process in order to prevent reversals.

According to the Millennium Project Report, the priority for successful peacebuilding is an early and sustained investment in a long-term **MDG-based development framework**, with attention for healthcare services, education and income-generating opportunities. Also, in the aftermath of armed conflict, the weapons need to be collected and destroyed. Experience from the Great Lakes region of Africa demonstrates that government decrees alone are insufficient to make a success of small arms reduction programmes. In order to implement the Nairobi Declaration on small arms reduction, which sat on a shelf for four years after government signature, it was necessary for parliamentary action to be taken. This work was coordinated in a UNDP-AWEPA programme, that not only developed a special handbook but launched it in multi-party political forums and introduced it in both national and regional parliamentary workshops, followed by stimulation and monitoring of parliamentary action on e.g. harmonization of legislation. This was incorporated into the Nairobi Parliamentary Action Plan for Peace in the Great Lakes Region (April 2005), and helped secure a joint DRC-Burundi-Rwanda parliamentary arms reduction initiative.

The UN Secretary General’s Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region, Ibrahima Fall, speaking at the AMANI/AWEPA conference on Parliamentary Democracy and Peace in the Great Lakes Region, 14-16 April 2005, stated that parliament has the power to declare war, but asked whether parliament can declare peace. Parliamentarians, he said, are very important for preventing conflicts, by being an early warning mechanism to draw the executive’s attention to growing tensions in local constituencies and communities in different parts of the country. Parliamentary committees need parliamentarians to function as peace actors and demonstrate good neighbourliness. He expected that parliaments would need to ratify the Security, Stability and Development Pact coming out of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) process, to make it legally binding, and that the region’s parliaments would be an important monitoring mechanism so that the Pact is respected and implemented.

In the first meeting of the Technical Thematic Task Forces of the joint UN/AU Secretariat of the ICGLR, a number of priority projects were identified, including in the area of good governance, such as:

- establishment of a regional centre for democracy, good governance and human rights
- setting up of a regional anti-corruption mechanism

- setting up a regional forum of parliaments
- creation of a regional civic education centre
- establishment of a regional mechanism on gender equity, and
- setting up a multi-functional regional centre for youth.

Special attention will be given to the empowerment of women, youth, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and marginalized groups. This is an active conflict prevention and peacebuilding agenda that requires full parliamentary engagement. Ambassador Fall has contended, at the above-mentioned parliamentary conference, that parliamentarians can be taken up by their governments, as experts, in the ICGLR Technical Task Forces, and he strongly welcomed parliamentary pressure on governments to put members of parliament, including women, into their delegations. Other leaders called for gender norms for such delegations, and for sanctions (as in the IPU) on non-compliant delegations.

In the end, peace is sustainable only in a context where the legitimate grievances of the people are aired and listened to in the halls of power, in parliament and government. A strong civil society must be able to articulate the concerns of the people, and parliamentary structures must be in place to engage with constituent and other groups. Civil society organizations cannot on their own assure effective leadership in these processes, but once engaged in the parliamentary process they are bound to succeed in being heard, and listened to. Parliament-civil society relations is, as yet, an underdeveloped aspect of democracy support programmes.

In terms of **cross-border conflict**, regional parliamentary dialogue and networking can be a crucial element of sustainable peace. Sharing experiences and good practices between parliamentarians from countries with different historical background and systems has proven effective for mutual learning. In the context of conflict prevention, regional parliamentary institutions (SADC PF, East African Legislative Assembly, ECOWAS Parliament) can play an important role in confidence-building measures via parliamentary diplomacy and exchange of information and experience. Regional parliaments debate protocols, observe elections, and can assist in harmonization of legislation, for example on small arms reduction and arms trafficking.

Building trusting relationships between adversarial stakeholders, particularly among parliamentarians of different political parties and persuasions, is at the core of peacebuilding activities. As the World Bank points out: ‘formal regional institutions promote regional dialogue, build confidence and facilitate learning between members of a region, whilst helping to mediate disputes and provide a neutral space for dialogue’ (WB, p16). The most promising new development in African inter-parliamentary relations is the establishment of the Pan-African Parliament, which initiated a programme of peacebuilding missions with its first delegation to Darfur in 2004. The PAP intends to monitor and advise on all AU peacekeeping operations, if resources allow.

Regional parliamentary networking among women parliamentarians has also been of pivotal importance in bringing the concerns of women onto the development and conflict

management agenda. Examples include the SADC Regional Women's Parliamentary Caucus and the Network of Central African Women Parliamentarians (RFPAC). The following results have been achieved by RFPAC members over the last few years:

- increased knowledge of experiences of women in parliament
- strengthened debating skills of women parliamentarians
- prioritization given to social issues and MDG attainment
- networking skills and avenues developed for assisting peacebuilding
- women's role in DRC/Burundi/Rwanda peace process heightened
- growth in respect of male colleagues for status of women members
- women members became more vocal and prominent on key issues
- Rwandan women's caucus and Nordic networking assisted in achieving the world record 48.8% of women members in Rwandan Parliament.

Other networks in Africa have been developed, for example, around HIV/AIDS (SADC PF), corruption (GOPAC), and NEPAD (Parliamentary Contact Group on NEPAD, NEPAD Parliamentary Forum). Representing divergent groups in different parliaments, these networks have the advantage of multi-party membership and create thereby an additional avenue for cross-party dialogue on issues of common interest and concern, that can be extremely useful in countries and regions at risk of heightened political tensions and conflict.

Parliamentary Peacebuilding Agenda

In order for parliaments to function as effective instruments for peace, certain pre-requisites must be fulfilled. Among these are:

- a transparent electoral system that secures a fair representation of different views and interests within the population
- a constructive relationship between the governing party and a credible opposition, based on mutual respect and respect of minority rights
- conditions that facilitate a smooth transfer of power when demanded by the voters, including possibilities for the opposition to prepare for governance
- open contacts and communication between parliamentarians and constituents, including freedom of association and active engagement with civil society.

With these preconditions met, parliament can function as an insurance policy against violent conflict and an early warning mechanism. With these conditions unmet, a badly functioning parliament will likely be a catalyst for conflict, lacking inclusive representation, unfairly distributing budgetary resources and unwittingly contributing to political instability and the spiral into dissention and violence. A practical peacebuilding strategy enables parliament to defuse the structural causes of conflict, for example, by securing a broad participation of women in political life, passing legislation to secure minority rights, and monitoring the implementation of poverty reduction programmes.

This paper proposes four main aspects of a parliamentary peacebuilding agenda for Africa: **escaping from the poverty trap; valuation of women's leadership;**

transformation of constituent relations; and putting an end to corruption, impunity and abuse of power. This approach does not assume that Africa is suffering from a governance crisis, but rather concurs with the Millennium Project Report's assessment that 'Africa's governance is on par with other regions at comparable income levels' (MPR p146). This is not to say that African good governance is fully on track, it is not. It needs more resources for parliamentary training, information and communication systems, strengthening committees, electoral processes, and the like.

In reducing poverty, Africa has a number of structural disadvantages to overcome. The Millennium Project Report (p147) mentions five key factors that make Africa the most vulnerable region in the world for a 'persistent poverty trap':

- very high transport costs coupled with small markets
- persistent low-productivity rain-fed agriculture
- very high burden of tropical and other diseases
- historically adverse geopolitical position
- very slow adoption of foreign technology.

If these issues are all to be dealt with properly, parliament must have a bigger role. Although parliaments in Africa have been under-represented in terms of involvement in the Poverty Reduction Strategy process, a number of key actions can be taken by parliament, as outlined in the following key sources:

- *Parliaments and the PRSP Process*, World Bank Institute
- *Handbook on Parliamentarians and Policies to Reduce Poverty*, Parliamentary Centre, WBI
- *PRSPs in Africa: Parliaments and Economic Policy Performance*, Parliamentary Centre, GTZ

The **national budget** is a starting point for attention to persistent poverty in any country. When public resources are used to the advantage of one group over another, friction results. An unfair budget that persistently neglects the needs and interests of a group of stakeholders can generate conflict. A parliament which rejects certain expenditures, such as for military and defense expenditures, can free up revenue for use in the satisfaction of other priority development objectives and thereby contribute to a proper management of the distribution of resources. Parliamentarians can do much more to support PRSP processes, such as: ensuring legislative compatibility; educating the public about PRSP programmes; and monitoring PRSP progress. Political parties, both government and opposition, are recommended to prioritise their party platforms with NEPAD and MDG-based objectives, thereby focusing the national debate on a positive development future when peace is sustained. The Parliamentary Contact Group on NEPAD undertook a detailed training exercise on development of NEPAD national action plans, at an AWEPA workshop in September 2004. Additional resources are required to expand and deepen this work.

The **role of the opposition** can be fundamental to the encouragement of political participation that is part of the peacebuilding agenda. Opposition parliamentarians can act as intermediaries, initiate confidence-building measures, and start to create an enabling

environment for governmental interaction to diffuse acrimonious situations. Often a neglected peacebuilding tool, opposition parliamentarians, when given the chance, can function as a bridge between government and conflicting parties. The contentious issue of political party funding is another aspect that can have a positive or negative impact on the enabling environment. When groups in society don't benefit from national revenue, and when they are excluded from avenues to get their views heard, there is no incentive for participation in the political process. Exclusion creates a potential to resort to violent means.

Parliament has the power to take **affirmative action** in favour of groups in society that may be disadvantaged or discriminated against, thereby reducing the socio-economic exclusion of any group and ensuring the realization of their legitimate claims to health, education, land and livelihoods. With regard to the poorest and most vulnerable, orphaned children, a parliamentary action plan has been developed by UNICEF and AWEPA. Children and youth constitute the hope for the future – and any peacebuilding strategy should give them careful attention.

Significantly, the Millennium Project Report mentions only one overarching factor that is needed in order to make investments in improved governance and the MGDs effective: improved political representation and socio-economic status of women (MR p153). The valuation of **women's leadership** starts with giving women a seat at the table, whether in parliament or in peace negotiations. In 1995, the nations of the world signed the Beijing Platform for Action at the global conference on Women and Development, committing their countries to a minimum of 30% women at all levels of decision-making, including in all their parliaments, by 2005. Unfortunately, very few countries have been able to reach this target. In fact, few have even given it serious attention. This is a tragedy. Research indicates that women in leadership give more attention to achieving the MDGs and sustainable peace, than men do. Women's parliamentary caucuses have persistently focused on socio-economic development, prioritized toward the disadvantaged, in cross-party consensus-building.

Experience, and research, also indicates that women leaders possess special gifts in relation to mediation and negotiation techniques, such as the ability to compromise, often found lacking in male colleagues (especially with military backgrounds). Women parliamentarians need to be given more chances, more respect, and more resources, in order to play their peacebuilding role. They must overcome such arguments against their participation as:

- international standards conflict with local culture and norms
- peace accords are gender-neutral, not needing attention to women's rights
- women leaders are not representative of the broader population
- women can be excluded as they are not involved in the fighting.

Arguments against the exclusion of women, and for the participation of women parliamentary and other leaders in peace negotiations, include the following:

- gender equity and justice give women and equal right to participate
- utility and efficiency reasoning to prevent post-conflict marginalisation

- qualitative arguments appreciating women's perspectives on inclusivity
- women's purported greater tendency to coalition and trust-building.

Furthermore, societies that respect women's rights tend to have more social tolerance and inclusivity. Evidence suggests that involving women leaders in peacebuilding yields more equitable access to land and credit, better medical and psychological treatment for women victims, lower complaint levels from local populations, and better protection of peacekeepers from the spread of HIV/AIDS. Legislative and socio-political changes that improve the status of women work to counter the root causes of conflict and terrorism.

Constituent relations is an underdeveloped part of parliamentary life in Africa. This has partly to do with the choice of electoral system. A proportional representation, party-list system does not automatically assure that parliamentarians will feel responsible for a specific constituency. Members of parliaments also have been known to feel themselves, suddenly after their election to office, somehow too elevated for contacts with the common citizens who voted them in, creating a perception of arrogant distancing. The point of parliamentary work is to represent the people, to be the voice of the people, to reach out to all sectors of society. When they do so, they are acting in a peacebuilding mode. When they don't, it is an indication that their public outreach and constituent relations skills need transformation.

As the World Bank has pointed out, 'A democratic system requires meaningful participation and representation that integrates all groups in society – religious, ethnic, tribal, political, socio-economic and cultural groups – into the decision-making process' (WB p3). Through pro-active constituency engagement, parliamentarians can ensure that groups with divergent vested interests feel they have 'buy-in' and therefore have no incentive to resort to violence. When, as is inevitable, government policy choices eventually adversely affect the interests of one particular group or another, ongoing dialogue with constituents provides the opportunity to explain the rationale of prioritization in policy shifts and, for example, resource allocations, and ameliorate their concerns (WB p14).

It is exactly in their role as representative, even champion, of constituent concerns, that parliamentarians can provide both an early warning mechanism for conflict and a rapid response facility for delivery of conflict management and peacebuilding strategies. Parliamentarians can, in fact should, be advocates for the achievement of the MDGs in their constituencies, their countries.

Ending corruption, impunity and abuse of power is a tall order for parliamentarians, especially when relations between executive and legislative branches are out of balance. An overbearing and dominating executive is not uncommon in Africa, nor is a weak and intimidated legislature. Nonetheless, in the power struggle between branches of government, it is imperative that parliament pulls its weight if the democratic process is to function properly. Periodic elections, which normally bring in new and inexperienced members, often don't help matters. This perpetuating weak spot is compounded when political parties and parliaments lack the resources to provide orientation and induction

training for victorious candidates, as is often the case in Africa. There are three generally recognised avenues open to parliaments that should form part of their basic toolkit:

- oversight of the executive via parliamentary committees
- freedom of information and media, including in electoral processes
- alliances between parliamentarians and civil society organizations.

In order to achieve true accountability, parliaments need to be pro-active in ending corruption and providing for the independence of the judiciary. Within parliament, the rules of procedure and especially the independent role of the Speaker can be determinant in allowing for an inclusive and impartial legislative debate. A disorderly debate can bring the institution of parliament into public disrepute just as fast as the misconduct of its members can tarnish their own image and that of colleagues. Such loss of credibility threatens the possibilities for parliamentarians to be effective peacebuilders. Additional accountability mechanisms include the office of Ombudsman, Auditor General and Human Rights Commissions, which parliaments can create and monitor. Additional methods for holding the military accountable to civilian control are contained in the handbook, *Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Sector*, (IPU, DCAF). Some 30 specific actions, instruments and tools are listed under the following areas:

- general legislative and parliamentary powers
- budget control and approval/rejection
- peace mission and deployment approval/rejection
- military procurement policy review
- general defence and security policy involvement
- defence and security personnel policies.

The beauty of **parliamentary committees** in relation to conflict management is that through open all-party debate, where relevant informed by inputs from civil society, and where needed with the privacy of media absence, the conduct of ministers can be examined, disagreements can be ironed out by compromise and a new understanding and consensus can be worked out. *Prima inter pares* among parliamentary oversight committees is the Public Accounts Committee, providing oversight of the budgetary process and holding out hope for oversight of the security sector. Ideally, this committee would be chaired by an opposition party member, be open to the media, entertain submissions from civil society and actively disseminate information about government spending. An effective parliament is able to reject or amend the budget and can influence future spending patterns via a medium-term expenditure framework.

Freedom of information can be guaranteed by parliaments through appropriate legislation. This assists to create an environment of openness and trust-building, in a context where fundamental freedoms and minority rights are protected. By assuring that minority groups are not discriminated against, and that they have official channels to seek redress of grievances, parliamentarians set a framework for peace. The media can channel information to parliamentarians about social concerns, and parliamentarians can use the media as a channel to explain new policy developments. An independent and qualified media is in a position to challenge questionable policies and help hold the executive to account. When parliament-media relations turn sour, as is frequently the case in a too

restrictive context or with biased and low quality journalism, media practitioners can be labeled as opposition supporters, fueling tensions and conflict. Media that is no more than a government mouthpiece can be misused and shackled, also a bad portent for peace. When parliamentary-media relations are less than optimal, one recognized peacebuilding measure is to bring the legal framework into line with international standards and promote a more positive interaction with political players.

Parliament-civil society relations are often complicated by a lack of impartiality among civil society groups. Unelected with no popular mandate, NGOs often champion critical causes and become identified with opposition parties and hostile groups. In such cases it is no wonder they lack the trust and confidence of ruling parties. Nonetheless, a strong parliamentary alliance with non-aligned and human rights-based NGOs can be a key asset in peacebuilding. Inputs to parliamentary committees are welcomed, constituency relations improve, public hearings and parliamentary visits to the electorate become plausible. Parliaments should therefore be pro-active in their relations with civil society, actively cultivating a two-way flow of information and adopting strategies for the establishment of a continuous policy dialogue with civil society groups (WB p10).

New Perspectives on Parliamentary Leadership

This paper has made the point that parliamentary leadership is nothing to be scoffed at, particularly in relation to peace and development. But this is exactly what tyrants and military leaders have done for decades in Africa. European and other northern parliamentarians also have the power to better hold their governments to account for commitments made to Africa, and to help target their own development assistance resources toward their needy African colleagues. But they have failed to do so. Part of the reason why decades of development aid have failed to end Africa's poverty, is that it has been so channeled as to ignore and neglect the parliamentary process in Africa, thereby undermining democratic development. This works to the detriment of peace.

Part of the reason African parliaments have traditionally not played a role of any significance in oversight of the security sector, and have frequently been totally excluded from decision-making in this area, is that they are under-resourced. Classified material has been kept secret from parliament for fear of security breaches, but often a parliament lacks access to even the requisite unclassified information and its members are not fully equipped to digest and analyze it properly. If the security forces are effectively to be held accountable by the representatives of the people, for their actions and their use of public funds, then parliament needs a minimum resource base for this.

The wave of democratic elections in Africa, over the last two decades, has washed up a new generation of African leaders and opened excellent opportunities for strengthening democratic control over the security sector, and for initiating peacebuilding budgetary and development processes. However, chances have been missed by neglect of parliaments. In young democracies, the technical capacity of parliaments needs to be built up before the institution and its members can be fully effective. Not only do new

parliamentary procedures need to be established but also the resource base of parliament must be confirmed. Fledgling executive branches, particularly those with something to hide, are often hesitant to provide their legislatures with sufficient funding for it to fully play its active and independent oversight role. Such resources must be squabbled over internally, but can be usefully topped up from external development cooperation funding. When parliaments do not have the capacity to meet stringent donor contractual requirements, which is often the case, non-partisan intermediary organizations can play an important role in assisting them.

Parliaments in Europe and other developed countries have a responsibility to make sure their countries play a constructive role in NEPAD, and can encourage their development ministries to target more resources toward African parliamentary development. But European parliamentarians suffer from a serious knowledge and capacity deficit themselves when it comes to Africa. It is not only important but urgently needed that European parliamentarians come to understand the conditions and developments within Africa, economic and political, as well as the implications for NEPAD's success of their own political decisions and international policy choices. Armed with such knowledge, parliamentarians in the donor countries can better hold their governments to account for the promises made – and broken – in the past, such as in the MDGs, in Monterrey, and in the G8 Africa Action Plan.

Parliamentarians often don't know their own strength. They have a mandate, a responsibility and an opportunity to change the course of history. Individually and collectively, their actions can make the national, regional and global treaty obligations worth more than just the paper they are written on. Whether in relation to the basic rights of women (CEDAW) and children (CRC), on landmines, electoral reform, small arms reduction, or even the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, government (executive branch) commitments are meaningless without parliamentary action. And parliamentary action would be further strengthened by permanent regional networking and inter-regional parliamentary dialogue and cooperation mechanisms.

This applies to Africa just as it does to other world regions. Experience has shown that inter-regional parliamentary solidarity can be effective in addressing intransigent and seemingly irreconcilable conflicts. North-South parliamentary solidarity instigated sanctions and helped to end apartheid, and it can be put to use in ending war and poverty. The world needs more champions, heroes: courageous leaders, men and women, who are willing to risk their careers, even their lives, for a just cause. They need support to carry this off. NEPAD parliamentarians touring European donor countries in late 2004 concluded that there is a glaring lack of resources for promoting a better understanding of NEPAD among both African and European parliamentarians (Turok, 2005). Both are needed, to secure a peaceful and prosperous future for Africa.

When each nation bow's its head to commemorate the victims of the holocausts of war and genocide, and stops to honour those who gave their lives in the cause of liberation, let them remember that today's heroes should be the ones who prevent the wars, not merely die in them. Each generation needs to learn again that freedom must be fought for, it is never just granted. Parliamentarians need to be invested in, in order for them to function properly, to fight this battle, and in order for democracy and peace to be sustainable. This is the challenge of the current century. Africa should not wait for the next Nobel Peace Prize to be dropped in its lap, but create its own awards to honour those political leaders who have the courage of their convictions, who make it their daily work to build peace, democracy and prosperity.

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