

BRIEF ON THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE GREAT LAKES REGION.

Background

The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (IC/GLR) was mooted in search of peace, security, stability and development for the people of the Great Lakes Region as early as 1994 following horrendous acts of genocide in Rwanda. The conference picked up momentum after the intra state and inter-state armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo that threatened to develop into all drawn out war for the entire region. The war in DRC pitted the DRC supported by Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia and to a lesser extent Central African Republic (CAR) and Republic of Congo fighting from the western axis against Rwanda, Uganda and partly Burundi from the eastern axis. The three countries fought in hot pursuit of rebels and armed groups remnants of previous governments violently overthrown by the respective regimes. Rwanda and Uganda were later on consummated in territorial battles (for allegedly security reasons) and resource exploitation inside the DRC.

Tanzania remained neutral all along but with great concern and commitment for a negotiated settlement. Regional efforts seeking comprehensive peace negotiations were brought to naught.

Evolution of the Conference Process

The UN stepped in by 1999 and appointed a Special Representative to the Great Lakes Region, Mr. Berhanu Dinka (Ethiopia) to galvanize the efforts towards the holding of an International Conference on the Great Lakes Region that would not only bring an end to the war but also prevent the recurrence of armed conflict between the two neighbours. Upon the expiry of his term, Mr. Ibrahima Fall (Senegal) took over and undertook consultations over the process with leaders and officials of the first group of core countries of the Great Lakes Region, namely: Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo and later on Zambia all of which agreed on the idea and need of organizing an international conference. As the UN failed to fund and constitute an organ for the conference process; Canada and The Netherlands stepped in and teamed up to form and lead a Group of Friends of the Great Lakes Region to work with both the UN and the African Union (AU) and spearheaded the process.

In that regard, the core countries of the Great Lakes Region designated National Coordinators for the Conference process. The coordinators converged in Nairobi from 23-24 June 2003 for the first time under the Co-Chairmanship of the UN and the AU. The meeting was also attended by the UN Special Representative for Burundi and Deputy Special Representative for DRC, together with the Resident Representatives of UNDP in the core countries as well as Heads of UN Agencies in Nairobi.

The meeting came up with the concept of a Conference process based on four (4) thematic areas, namely:

- (i) Peace and Security
- (ii) Economic Development and Regional Integration
- (iii) Democracy and Good Governance, and
- (iv) Humanitarian and Social Issues.

The core group was later, upon application for admission, expanded to include Angola, Republic of Congo and CAR as neighbours who were not only closely linked with the Region but also participated in the War in the DRC and were largely affected by its consequences. Other countries considered themselves linked with the conflict situation in the region and wished to join in, were admitted as co-opted countries including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Malawi, Mozambique, and subsequently Botswana. Furthermore, on account of proximity and national interests, Sudan was also admitted as core country of the Great Lakes Conference. Recently, in the same vein, Egypt was co-opted too during the Lusaka Meeting of Ministers of the IC/GLR that was held from 22nd to 23rd July 2005.

On recognition of our commitment towards conflict resolution and peaceful and democratic governance, Tanzania was requested to host the first summit of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. The inaugural Summit was held on 19th and 20th November, 2004 the hallmark of which was the signing of the Dar es Salaam Declaration (DD) on Peace, Democracy Security and Development by all leaders of core countries. The UN Secretary General, H.E. Kofi Annan attended in person and co-signed the DD as one of the witnesses.

Tanzania became the Chair of the Conference process and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation assumed the Chairman of the Regional Inter Ministerial Committee (RIMC), established by the summit to follow-up implementation of the Dar Es Salaam Declaration. The National Coordinators were to constitute the Regional Preparatory Committee (RPC).

Following the Dar Es Salaam Declaration the Ministers met in Kigali, Rwanda in February 2005 and mandated the technical thematic Task Forces to elaborate on the action plans, programmes and projects as well as protocols covering the 4 thematic areas to constitute a Peace Pact for the Great Lakes Region. Consequently, the Thematic Groups have held a number of meetings in Nairobi to undertake the task entrusted to them by the Ministers.

Structure

The UN and AU continue to provide a joint Secretariat based in Nairobi and give organizational and logistical support to conferences and meetings. However, the GoF has, contrary to expectation, indicated that they will only provide funding of the conference process up to the Nairobi Summit previously scheduled for 16th and 17th December, 2005. In the same vein, the UN /AU joint Secretariat mandate ends with the summit but a request was made at the Lusaka RIMC meeting to the UN to extend the mandate of the SRSG/GLR, Mr. Ibrahima Fall by six months and, the joint UN/AU Secretariat, to allow the functioning of a Regional Institutional Follow-up Mechanism. The UN Secretary General is yet to respond but there is need for the RIMC to verify whether the request was actually sent to the UN Secretary General.

At technical level, the conference process is managed by the Regional Preparatory Committee comprising of National Coordinators of Member States which in turn constitutes of government experts at inter-ministerial level and non state actors including, the Civil Society, the Youth, Women, the Media and the Private Sector. As need arises, the NPC hires consultants to strengthen its bargaining position in the negotiations. A case in point is the project on “Promotion and Development of Kiswahili language in the GLR” for which the NPC hired Professor Senkoro from the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) which has been approved and adopted, as well as the preliminary project write-up on the “Centre for Good Governance and Democracy” elaborated by Professor Haroub Othman from the same institution and has already been submitted for consideration when the matter comes up for negotiation. The experts from Defense in collaboration with Sokoine University have presented the Demining Project called APOPO for the benefit of the Region.

At Political level, the Conference process is headed by the Summit of Heads of State and Government who provide guiding policy decisions to the Ministers, convening the RIMC as an Executive Body.

A Regional Institutional Follow-up Mechanism embodying the political and executive as well as the operational level is being designed by the RPC. The objective is to come up with a light, non bureaucratic and cost effective structure, which is co-owned by the Region. The GoF is against the establishment of a new structure with attendant cost implications. The key challenge is to establish a mechanism with a capacity to handle all the tasks

hitherto done by the joint UN-AU Secretariat. This is in considering that the former was charged with preparatory work and the new institution shall be charged with coordination, monitoring and implementation of projects, protocols and forums and harmonize the processes in a regional context. By the end of the second summit in Nairobi, the conference process will have held meetings in the capitals of all the core countries with the exception of Sudan.

Tasks ahead

The IC/GLR has only one stage of activity before the Nairobi Summit originally scheduled for December, during which the Heads of State and Government would be expected to sign a Pact on Stability, Security and Development. Prior to the signing of the pact, the Regional Preparatory Committee (RPC) will review and submit to the Ministers for approval, a final prioritized list of projects and protocols. The RPC shall also elaborate and recommend to the Ministers the operationalisation of the Special Reconstruction Fund to be presented by the joint AU-UN Secretariat with the assistance of the ADB, the World Bank and UNDP.

Projects and Protocols

Among the projects and the protocols recommended for approval include:

- i. The Non-Aggression and Mutual Defense Protocol
- ii. Demining – APOPO Project
- iii. Disarmament of Armed Groups
- iv. Regional Centre for Democracy and good Governance

- v. Regional Food Security Project
- vi. Micro-Financing Project
- vii. Reconstruction and Development Zone
- viii. Certification of natural resources
- ix. Illegal exploitation of natural resources Protocol
- x. Rehabilitation of Refugee hosting areas and resettlement Project
- xi. Legal mechanism for Protection of Internally displaced Persons
- xii. Promotion of Kiswahili as a language of the region.
- xiii. Issuance of IDs to refugees and displaced persons.
- xiv. The infrastructure Projects be implemented by the existing Regional Institutions.

Tanzania's Stakes:

- Tanzania will share with Kenya responsibility on the de-mining projects in the GLR.
- Tanzania will take a leading role in the implementation of the project on promotion and development of Kiswahili in the GLR.
- Tanzania will lobby for the hosting of the Centre for Democracy and Good Governance in competition with Uganda, Zambia and CAR.
- Tanzania takes a leading role in the elaboration of the Follow-Up Institutional Mechanism and stands a good chance of providing the first Secretary General.

Challenges

The conference process has come a long way; we cannot afford to lose the momentum. The easing of tension between the DRC and Rwanda should be sustained.

During the last RPC meeting in Luanda, Angola from 26th to 30th September 2005, it was decided that the next meeting of Ministers (RIMC) takes place in Bangui, Central African Republic. There will be major decisions to be taken regarding protocols, deferred projects and agenda of the next summit. Tanzania as the Chairman of the RIMC is expected to chair the meeting, In Bangui. The draft of the envisaged Peace Pact has yet to be finalized by the Secretariat. Hopefully by the time the Ministers converge in Bangui all the necessary documents would be in place.

Funding

Considering that the GoF is unwilling to finance the process beyond the Nairobi Summit, the RIMC meeting could recommend to the Heads of State and Government to ask the UN to factor the post IC/GLR activities into future programs of the UN Peace Building Commission scheduled to take off by December 2005. The Great Lakes Region constitutes by far, one of the largest post conflict single block in the world today. Member states contributions are crucial, both to the success as well as ownership of the process. The formula of assessment is yet to be made and agreed upon.

Way forward

For Tanzania, the success of the IC/GIR is crucial with respect to its border security, the return of refugees to their countries of origin, and the development of mutually advantageous trade links. But in order for Tanzania to provide sustainable leadership and make an impact on the process, adequate preparations and high profile political representation is vital.

In view of the on going electoral process in the DRC the Nairobi Summit has been postponed to 2006. It is our sincere hope that the momentum already generated thus far would not lapse with this postponement.

**MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL
COOPERATION**

October 2005

Annex: The Dar es Salaam Declaration