

African Regional Approaches to Conflict Management

On 8 November 2010, representatives from the African Union (AU) and the various Regional Economic Communities (RECs) adopted the AU/RECs “Roadmap for the Operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture.” Building on a 2008 memorandum of understanding between the AU and the RECs, which sought to enhance coordination and harmonize their strategic approaches, the roadmap not only examined the current status of cooperation between the various institutions, but also articulated the major priorities and gaps to be addressed moving forward.

The key components of the architecture include: Peace and Security Councils, the African Stand-By Force (ASF), the Continental Early-Warning System (CEWS) and the Peace Fund and Panels of the Wise.¹ While there is general coherence between efforts to create the ASF and CEWS, the rest of the system seems to be developing independently. In particular, Africa’s mediation capacity saw substantial growth in 2011, as many of the RECs began to build structures to better resolve their own regional conflicts.

The Economic Commission for West African States (ECOWAS) has a network of offices in West Africa as part of its Early Warning and Response Network as well as offices of Special Representatives of the President of the ECOWAS Commission that assist Member States in dealing with crisis situations, or provide support in post-conflict settings. In the East African Community (EAC), the drafting process for their “Conflict Prevention Management and Resolution” framework is nearing completion and will provide the guidance for the organization’s development in the peace and security realm.² Within this structure, a Negotiation, Mediation and Good Offices department will establish a Panel of Eminent Persons in order to facilitate regional solutions.³ The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in April 2011 announced that it will soon complete preparations for its own regional Mediation Support Unit. Based upon IGAD’s experiences fostering Sudan’s CPA and its current efforts at the Somalia Peace Facilitation Office, the Unit aims to further enhance IGAD’s mediation capacity and provide a link between the official representatives and civil society.⁴ Furthermore, COMESA (the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa) in June 2011 activated its Committee of Elders when a few members joined an AU assessment mission to Egypt to assist in the country’s political transition.⁵ In Central Africa, ECCAS’s (the Economic Community of Central African States) conflict prevention and mediation capacity receives additional support through the newly established UN Office for Central Africa.

These initiatives are positive developments, as they represent sincere attempts to improve the African peace and security architecture. As these new structures grow, it will be a central challenge of the regional bodies to overcome their institutional differences and inter-state rivalries, and support one another in their efforts to resolve conflict across the African continent.

- 1 Lt Gen (Rtd) Louis Matshenyego Fisher and Dr. Alhaji Sarjoh Bah, African Peace and Security Architecture: 2010 Assessment Study (8 November 2010) available at <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/RO%20African%20Peace%20and%20Security%20Architecture.pdf>.
- 2 East African Community, “EAC Workshop on Draft Policy Instruments Ends in Kigali,” (25 March 2011) available at <http://www.eac.int/component/k2/item/597-press-release-eac-workshop-on-draft-policy-instruments-ends-in-kigali.html>.
- 3 East African Community Secretariat, “The EAC Peace, Security, and Good Governance Initiatives and Strategies for a Sustainable Integration,” New York, 18 October 2010, available at http://www.un.org/africa/osaa/speeches/EAC_Presentation_18Oct2010.pdf.
- 4 Intergovernmental Authority on Development, “A Mediation Support Unit for IGAD in the Making,” 20 April 2011, available at http://igad.int/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=310:a-mediation-support-unit-for-igad-in-the-making&catid=45:peace-and-security&Itemid=128.
- 5 African Union, “Mission of the Panel of the Wise and Committee of Elders to Egypt,” 6 June 2011, available at <http://au.int/en/sites/default/files/Communique%20Panel%20of%20the%20Wise%20Mission%20to%20Egypt-1.pdf>.