



# REALITY CHECK

DIVERSE VOICES ON INTERNAL CONFLICT

The Fund for Peace

*“Building Peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”*

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*General Daniel Opande began his career in UN peacekeeping in Namibia in 1989 as the Deputy Force Commander of United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG). He also participated in the peace negotiations in Mozambique from 1990-1993, in which Kenya played a leading role. Following his time in Mozambique, General Opande served as the Chief Military Observer for the first United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) from 1993-1996. In 2000, he was appointed as the Force Commander for the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) before being appointed as the Force Commander for the second United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in October 2003. On October 1, 2003 the UN formally took over peacekeeping duties and assumed transitional authority from ECOMIL, the military force of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which led the intervention into Liberia in August of 2003. The FfP interviewed General Opande at UNMIL’s military headquarters in Monrovia.*

**FfP: You have experience in both Chapter 6 peacekeeping missions (Namibia and Mozambique) and Chapter 7 peace enforcement missions (Sierra Leone and Liberia). How different are the two types of environments and what are the challenges of Chapter 7 peacekeeping operations?**

In Namibia and Mozambique, traditional peacekeeping meant there was peace to be kept. The parties were committed and the outside actors supporting the peace process had influence and leverage over the protagonists.

They were able to exert pressure on the parties whenever they tried to deviate from the peace process. When the time for elections arrived, tempers and violence erupted which was disturbing and had to be controlled. UNTAG had a modest force of only three battalions in Namibia and a relatively small number of military and civilian observers to oversee the entire electoral process. Despite the heightened tension, which was not unexpected, the Namibians showed determination in turning out in large numbers to vote. Having undergone a protracted struggle, they were determined to see the dawn of a peaceful change in their country.



*General Daniel Opande*

In comparison with these two countries, Sierra Leone’s case had major flaws in that there was no peace to be kept. The parties to the conflict were not genuinely committed to the peace agreement and persistent distrust of the intentions of the main rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), was a major drawback to the entire peace process. The first attempt in launching the peace process in 2000 was a complete failure from the beginning. The UN, therefore, had to go back to the drawing table in redefining the Chapter under which its enhanced peacekeeping force was to operate. On the second attempt the Security Council mandated a larger and more robust force to be deployed in Sierra Leone to oversee the implementation of the Lome Peace Accords. It was a robust mandate combined with the strength, resolve and determination of men and women all committed and working together for peace which underlined the success of the mission.

The Fund for Peace is issuing an occasional series of interviews featuring leading voices on issues related to internal war. The Regional Responses to Internal War program is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the governments of Canada and the Netherlands.

**FfP: When UNMIL arrived to take over from ECOMIL what was your assessment of the situation on the ground? Did ECOMIL create a solid foundation and was the transition smooth?**

The transition between ECOMIL and the UN went quite smoothly. I must say, however, there were fears as to whether a smooth transition would take place within such a short period of time in a volatile subregion. It was evident that the ECOMIL forces were stretched to the limit and the belligerents outnumbered the subregional force. The likelihood of violence erupting prior to and during the transition was always real. In fact, on the day of the rehatting (when ECOMIL forces were transferred to UNMIL forces) serious disturbances erupted in Monrovia which nearly scuttled the whole peace process. Thanks to the firm action taken by ECOMIL/UNMIL that day, both during and after the disturbances, the situation was addressed.

**FfP: Can the ECOMIL-UNMIL transition serve as a model for future partnerships between the United Nations and regional and subregional organizations?**

In my view regional and subregional organizations do play positive and important roles in partnerships with the United Nations. In situations where the subregional organizations have developed peace support capabilities, such interventions are necessary to stabilize situations while the UN prepares to assume the major responsibility for the long-term intervention. We have seen in the past that when the UN intervenes through peacekeeping operations, a long lead time is required for raising the necessary troop levels for the preparation and eventual deployment of peacekeepers.

For example, the current deployment schedule for UNMIL has yet to be met because the UN has no standing army. On the other hand, subregional organizations may be in a position to react much faster as they are closer to the theatre of operation. In the case of Rwanda, the response by the international community took too long; hence, subregional organizations must work in partnership with the UN to avert disasters like the Rwandan genocide. In Rwanda, it is possible that if a subregional organization had the capacity to respond in support of the United Nations, many lives would have been saved. The timely subregional intervention in Liberia underscores this point.

**FfP: You mentioned the delay in getting troops here to Liberia. How would you assess ECOWAS's capacity to undertake peace support operations?**

The major problem for subregional organizations in undertaking peace support operations is the inability to raise adequate resources to conduct peacekeeping operations. Training and raising troops is less of an obstacle for most countries in the region as these forces are already trained for peacekeeping duties or have participated in previous peacekeeping operations. The difficulties lie in organizing, transporting and sustaining them once deployed in theatre. The other challenge is securing the political will of countries to actually commit troops. In a subregional organization like ECOWAS, unless a major power like Nigeria commits the bulk of the forces, as in Liberia, the realization of such a major commitment may not get off the ground easily. In my view, ECOWAS has demonstrated the capacity and capability to undertake peace support operations within the region successfully.

**FfP: ECOWAS has begun discussions of pre-identifying troops in member states to have them on standby for regional crises like Liberia. In your assessment, is this a possibility?**

The UN has a system whereby a standby arrangement is in place for the provision of units from various countries which have said they will commit troops, but even then countries do not provide troops in time and when there is a regional requirement to do so. My concern is that if the UN finds it hard to raise troops in sufficient time, subregional organizations may face even greater challenges finding the resources. Readiness to respond in times of crisis is a major drawback in undertaking peace support operations. I am of the opinion that subregional organizations like ECOWAS would find it even harder to pre-identify and deploy peacekeeping contingents without the support of the international community.

**FfP: How do East Africa's regional organizations compare to ECOWAS? Has the region begun to address its security concerns?**

IGAD (the Intergovernmental Authority on Development) is a subregional political organization which, unlike ECOWAS, has no functional security and defense arrangements. It is currently involved in sponsoring the peace talks within the region for Sudan and Somalia. While some IGAD member states like Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia have developed cooperation over the years on defense and security matters, the ability to match ECOWAS is yet to be realized. On the other hand, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have recently raised and trained their forces for peace support operations under the aegis of the East African Community. In addition, these countries regularly cooperate in addressing their security

concerns. In comparison with ECOWAS, IGAD has made tremendous progress in conflict management and prevention but has yet to develop the instruments for comprehensive peace support operations.

**FfP: The African Union (AU) has made statements about the creation of African standby forces. What is your assessment of the potential of this plan?**

I don't think we have reached the stage yet where the AU has the ability to raise a standby army. At this point, the AU is making concrete plans for the realization of this endeavor. Intense preparation and work is required before the AU would be able to call upon its first standing army to respond in times of crises. In recent discussions in Maputo and Addis Ababa, there was serious thought given to this issue and the relevant political components.

**FfP: Do you see Kenya playing a lead role in East Africa and do you think Kenya's involvement in the U.S. - sponsored African Contingency Operations Training Assistance (ACOTA) peacekeeping training program is a good decision?**

Until recently, Kenya was reluctant politically to be part of these subregional peacekeeping groupings although Kenya was always in the lead to provide peacekeepers to UN missions. President Moi was initially against Kenyan participation in ACOTA (then ACRI) training but his attitude became more positive in 1999. President Moi was convinced that it was the responsibility of the UN to keep peace and maintain peace. If a mission was UN mandated, Kenya was willing to commit troops. But the current leadership appears less rigid on Kenya's participation in peace support operations in subregional or regional organizations. I may be wrong, but that is the way I read it, because Kenya is currently forthcoming, not only in peacekeeping, but also in subregional peace initiatives. Our involvement in the Somalia and Sudan peace negotiations is a clear testimony.

ACOTA in itself provides positive and essential training for member states to prepare their forces to respond in a timely manner in peace support operations and other crises. More recently, terrorism has shown that one cannot be isolated from the current global realities. In Kenya, we have had a taste of terrorism in our own backyard and I believe joint training and working with other nations in this time of grave threat is the correct way forward. In brief, it is about cooperation, sharing information and meeting the needs of states to protect their own people, the region, and the world around us.

**FfP: You have mentioned terrorism. How has the threat or reality of terrorism changed Kenya's notion of security in the world?**

It has changed the notion of security drastically. When the bomb blasts happened here, it shocked many Kenyans. We asked: why did this happen to us? Since then we have been targeted three more times hence we see the threat becoming more and more of a persistent problem. As we look at our next door neighbor, Somalia, with its unresolved security problems, the threat to our country becomes a reality. We are vulnerable from our unstable neighbors and also from the current global threat. In my view, the events in Afghanistan and Iraq identify the regional and global security threat which underlines the necessity for individual and collective state response to terrorism. We in Kenya can learn something from these experiences.

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**FfP: Many say that the key to a successful peacekeeping mission is cooperation between the military and humanitarian, non-military parties. Are you satisfied with the cooperation in Liberia?**

We have been here for four months and our cooperation and support to other UN agencies and international and local NGOs has been forthcoming and enhanced. We realize that cooperation is the key to success in any peace support operation. We have also organized military escorts for NGOs beyond the area we are currently deployed to help deliver much needed humanitarian aid to the Liberians.

**FfP: What do you see as the potential pitfalls to peace in Liberia and in West Africa more broadly?**

The major drawback would be if the peace accord is not implemented to the letter because Liberians expect the comprehensive implementation of the Accra Accord as the vehicle for sustainable peace. In addition, the disarmament process must be scrupulously carried out to ensure Liberia is fully disarmed. Successful reintegration requires that combatants return to society as law abiding

citizens and that the needs of displaced people and refugees are addressed. It is imperative that the reintegration process encompasses the whole spectrum of Liberian society. Both the combatants and members of civil society must be provided with faith in the future so it is important to reactivate the economy to absorb thousands of unemployed youths and disadvantaged communities. The mistakes of the former leadership must not be repeated; otherwise Liberia's future remains in jeopardy. A regional approach must be developed which pays close attention to the events in Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea in dealing with the main political issues-security, disarmament, weapons, and refugees-that brought civil war to Liberia.

**FfP: So you don't think the regional aspects of this problem are being addressed now?**

Actually, for the first time these issues are beginning to be addressed in a coordinated manner. For example, on the topic of disarmament, we will devise a regional approach to ensure that, regardless of nationality, all combatants in Liberia will be disarmed, demobilized, reintegrated and repatriated in a humane manner to their countries of origin. The UN is fully committed to working with the countries of the region to ensure that cross-border destabilization by mercenaries or combatants is minimized or eradicated. Similarly, the cross-border movement of arms and war material is being monitored through cooperation between the peacekeeping missions in Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

**FfP: How would you characterize the communication among the peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, and Liberia?**

We have had very good communication with the missions in Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire. The level of interaction is regular and functional. We have been having regular meetings between the Heads of Mission and the Force Commanders of the three missions. The first meeting was held in Freetown in mid November and the second one occurred in Monrovia on 23 December 2003. The third

meeting just ended in Abidjan where issues affecting the cooperation amongst the three missions and border security were discussed. This form of interaction permits the exchange of ideas at the highest level and decisions are communicated to relevant authorities for implementation.

**FfP: How many soldiers are currently deployed for peacekeeping here and what are the plans to expand activities outside of Monrovia? Have there been any problems with interoperability with the forces of multiple countries?**

As of today, February 18, 2004, we have 11,749 UN troops deployed across the country. Already, a substantial presence has been made in the interior with the deployment to three sectors outside of Monrovia. However, until the arrival of the remaining troops, we have yet to cover all of the areas earmarked for deployment. Hopefully, by April of 2004, all of these areas will be occupied by UNMIL forces. Although UNMIL is a multinational force, we have had no problems with interoperability or cooperation amongst the different contingents.

**FfP: How has your participation in both UN missions in Liberia affected your personal views toward the hope for peace in this country?**

Having been here as a member of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia from 1993-1995 and now as a peacekeeper, I am encouraged and convinced that Liberia has a chance for sustainable peace. My previous observations left me with serious doubts as to whether the protagonists in Liberia were committed to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. It is clear to me that this time around the international community, the region, and the United Nations have all committed themselves to assisting the people of Liberia in attaining a lasting peace.

— **Interview conducted in Monrovia, Liberia October 31, 2003 with updates provided via email in February 2004.**

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