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EARLY WARNING, PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY AND THE MANAGEMENT OF ARMS  
CONFLICTS IN AFRICA:  
AN EXPOSITION OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY OF THE AFRICAN UNION

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the deliberate effort made by African Union in her quest for appropriate conflict-prevention and conflict-management mechanism. The African continent continues to experience a high incidence of violent conflict, which not only derails its development trajectory, but also hinders peace and progress, have brought about death and human suffering, engendered hate and divided nations and families. Conflicts have forced millions of African people into a drifting life as refugees and displaced persons, deprived of their means of livelihood, human dignity and hope. In a content analysis, drawing largely from the Secondary sources, we have examined Early Warning, Preventive diplomacy and the Management of Conflict in Africa from three segments: Early Warning, Preventive Diplomacy, and as the current trajectory of conflict management in Africa. It is revealed in this work that: Simply knowing about a developing crisis is not enough, No matter how accurate the early warning, the real test is whether it leads to early action. Every intervention to prevent, transform, manage or resolve conflict must therefore be flexible and configured to the needs on the ground and not according to the institutional set-ups. In summary, if these strategies are used effectively, timely and efficiently, they will change the future and fortune of Africa from a violence endemic region to an arena of peace, engendering progress and development.

*Keywords:* Conflict Management, Diplomacy, Security, African Union.

1. INTRODUCTION

“No more, never again, Africans cannot...watch the tragedies developing in the continent and say it is the UN’s responsibility or somebody else’s responsibility. We have moved from the concept of non-interference to non-indifference. We cannot as Africans remain indifferent to the tragedy of our people.”  
(Ambassador Said Djinnit, AU Commissioner of Peace and Security, Addis Ababa, (28 June 2004 cited in ACCORD, 2013)”

The African continent continues to experience a high incidence of violent conflict, which not only derails its development trajectory, but also hinders peace and reconciliation efforts (ACCORD, 2013:15). Africa is also a continent that has remained volatile and vulnerable to external factors and factions (Aderinwale, 2001:59). No single internal factor has contributed more to the present socio-economic problems in the continent than the scourge of conflict in and among African countries. They have brought about death and human suffering, engendered hate and divided nations and families. Conflicts have forced millions of African people into a drifting life as refugees and displaced persons, deprived of their means of livelihood, human dignity and hope. Conflicts have gobbled-up scarce resources, and undermined the ability of African countries to address the many competing needs of Africans (Agu and Okeke, 2013: 281).

Africa's key Peace and security challenges reflect a deep structural instability. These typically include conflicts over the control of natural resources, violent ethno-nationalism, weak democratic structures, youth vulnerability and exclusion and challenges of rebuilding and reform, in situations of State fragility or following State collapse, difficulty in managing diversity. Over the last decades, African states have become increasingly active in seeking African-owned solutions to the continental challenges, and taking measures towards development of their peace and security mechanisms (UNECA/IGAD, 2012 cited in Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), 2013:1). In the 21st century, the African continent still faces the challenge of addressing ongoing and recurrent conflict (ACCORD, 2013:15), with each emerging conflict, Africans are realising that responsibility to intervene lies with actors on the continent (ACCORD, 2013 :31).

The most important initiatives in this respect, of Africa's continental and regional stakeholders, have been put forward by the continental organization, AU and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs). Thus, a key institutional element of this was establishment of an approach in which the duty to protect and the right to intervene are enshrined in the Constitutive Act of the Union. This means in effect that the members of the Union as a body have both the right and the duty to intervene in the affairs of a member State where necessary to ensure the common peace and security threats (UNECA/IGAD, 2012 cited in Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), 2013:1). The most comprehensive of these initiatives is the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). APSA is initiated by AU but its structure and capacities are such that it will need to rely on the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) for some aspects of its implementation. The importance of APSA goes beyond the source of its mandate and the comprehensive nature of its contents, to the ways in which it envisages working with the different stakeholders, to address Africa's continental security needs (UNECA/IGAD, 2012 cited in Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), 2013:1).

The need to develop and implement paradigms, concepts and new attitudes to increase institutional capacity and make progress toward the goals of stability and prosperity has made African political leaders responded to these needs and emerging trends by proposing a variety of initiatives in regional institutions (Aderinwale, 2001:60). This, in turn, compelled African leaders and institutions to increase their capacity to ensure success in resolving existing challenges, resulting in the establishment of mechanisms (ACCORD, 2013 :31) such as Continental Early Warning system (CEWS) and Preventive Diplomacy (known as Panel of the Wise) amongst others which are major components in APSA. The founding of such institutions reflects a huge watershed in Africa's progress towards resolving its conflicts and building durable peace and security (ACCORD, 2013:31)

Accordingly, in designing a new strategy for confronting the critical challenges presented by the new international milieu, the need was felt to link the requirements of economic development and the demands for peace and security (Aderinwale, 2001:60). The peace and security environment in Africa is made more challenging by the fact that conflicts often have a regional dimension (Shaw 2003). Most regions on the continent, including West Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes region and the Sahel show evidence of having been

impacted by the regional nature of conflicts. Although such conflicts generally have localised origins, they tend to be amplified by regional dynamics, ultimately creating a web of complications affecting efforts to resolve them. The regional dimension of conflicts in Africa is often epitomised by proxy conflicts, as well as the burgeoning populations of refugees in neighbouring countries (ACCORD, 2013:14).

The conflict-management objective is, by virtue of being most integral to the physical and ... protection of ... people, the most important. The political objective of conflict management is to promote trust and confidence and ensure peace, security and stability...The aim should also be to minimize the escalation of conflict and to provide humanitarian assistance and case specific solutions (Maxted and Zegeye, 2001: 53).

A comprehensive conflict-maintenance system has three functional objectives. The first is the political aim of averting conflict, or at least defusing it in its initial stages through trust-building, coalition-building and negotiated settlements. No conflict-prevention mechanism can be maintained without a viable early-warning, risk-assessment system (Maxted and Zegeye, 2001: 52), and a shift to more proactive preventive diplomacy in different regions of the world. Preventive diplomacy (and Early Warning) remains highly relevant along the entire conflict spectrum (Ki Moon, 2011: 2, 3).

## 2. EARLY WARNING

Increasing attention has been devoted to the early warning and prevention of violent conflict, an aspiration embedded in the UN Charter but practiced infrequently (Zartman, 2005). The earlier a dispute or a conflict can be identified, diagnosed and its causes properly addressed, the less likely it is that the situation will deteriorate into violence (Souaré, 2007: 105). Given the heavy and enduring costs of armed conflicts, there is no disputing the fact that making efforts to prevent them from breaking out in the first place is better than waiting until it is too late. This entails two things: conflict prevention measures and early warning systems. Anything that could be done to effectively address the root causes of a conflict before it turns violent may fit into the former, while the latter aims to identify threats to these elements so that effective conflict prevention measures can be taken (Souaré, 2007: 97).

Conflict prevention is the application of conflict resolution, settlement, and management tools at early stages of conflict, before escalation to violence, as well as in post conflict situations in anticipation of possible recurrence of armed conflict (Kriesberg and Dayton, 2012). In recent years, increasing efforts are being made in the field of conflict prevention and management. Almost all international and regional organisations concerned with conflict management, such as the UN, the AU (building on the work of its predecessor, the OAU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the EU have designed policies in this regard (Souaré, 2007: 97). 'Effective conflict prevention is a prerequisite for achieving and maintaining sustainable peace, which in turn is a prerequisite for sustainable development' (Annan 2001 cited in Souaré, 2007: 97). Conflict prevention consists of a number of issues. Anything that could be done to effectively address the root causes of a conflict before it turns violent and the factors that gave rise to it in the first place can fall under the term of conflict prevention (Souaré, 2007: 97).

Normally, armed conflict does not occur suddenly without warning indicators. Thus, in order to guarantee the sustainability of the conflict prevention measures, governments and regional, as well as international organisations must ensure that there are proper mechanisms for conflict early warning in place, based on information gathering and informal and formal fact-finding (Souaré, 2007: 105). Although, early warning has expanded and improved, its

context has changed over the past decades. Only a few years ago, information on brewing situations around the globe was scant; the challenge was to obtain more of it. Today, the challenge is, in some ways, the reverse: information is voluminous and must be sifted, evaluated and integrated (Ki Moon, 2011: 19).

The circumstances that give rise to violent conflicts can usually be foreseen or predicted. The first critical task in prevention is to determine where and when the most disastrous conflicts and confrontations are likely to occur. The capacity to anticipate and analyze possible conflicts is a pre-requisite both for any prudent decision to act and for effective action itself (Biswaro, 2013: 58). Because dangerous circumstances rarely degenerate into violence without a warning, what is needed is not simply more information, but rather the right kind of information and a reliable interpretation of its meaning. Every major government maintains an active watch over the world's "hot spots" and many have developed capacities to track and predict developing trends. Yet, even prompt early warning will not ensure successful preventive action unless there is a fundamental change of attitudes by governments and international organizations. A systematic and practical warning system should be combined with consistently up-to-date contingency plans for preventive action (Biswaro, 2013:59). Above all, there is a need for us to better anticipate those "threshold moments" when parties to a conflict decide, or feel compelled, to use or escalate violence to achieve their aims. The more we understand the motives and calculations of key actors, the better we will be able to tailor a preventive response. The analysis of any situation improves with proximity, local knowledge and regular contact with a multitude of actors (Ki Moon, 2011: 19).

The Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) was established under article 12 of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) Protocol to "facilitate the anticipation and prevention of conflicts". It is a key element of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which is the umbrella term for the main AU mechanisms for promoting peace, security and stability in Africa. CEWS gathers information about potential conflicts or threats to the peace and security of Member States. It receives reports on a daily or weekly basis from operational staff, including field missions, liaison offices and early warning officers. This information is forwarded to the PSC in the form of reports from the Chairperson of the AU Commission (AU Handbook, 2015: 49). The CEWS is one of the five pillars of the APSA. It is responsible for data collection and analysis and is mandated to collaborate with the UN, its agencies, other relevant international organisations, research centres, academic institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) by providing information, to be used by the chairperson of the AUC to advise the AU PSC on potential conflicts and threats to peace and security in Africa, and recommend the best course of action (ACCORD and African Union, 2014:22).

Since the 2003 Maputo Summit, the AU Commission has placed particular emphasis on the issue of conflict prevention and the anticipation of conflicts at an early stage. The Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) was originally envisaged to go fully operational by the end of 2009. Article 12 (1) of the PSC Protocol specifically states that a 'Continental Early Warning System to be known as the Early Warning System shall be established' (Bah et al, 2014: 46). Accordingly, CEWS is a key component of the APSA as well as the various organs of the Commission, through the provision of analysis and early reporting. The PSC Protocol introduced the concept of early warning and mechanisms of early response attaching high importance to the need for early detection of conflict. The Chairperson of the Commission shall use the information gathered through the Early Warning System to advise the Peace and Security Council on potential conflicts and threats to peace and security in Africa and recommend the best course of action (Bah et al, 2014: 46).

Two things must be noted: first, during the early stage of the crisis, policy-makers should not only be attentive to how circumstances could worsen but also be alert for opportunities to make constructive use of local issues and processes that could help to avoid violence. Second, they should exercise great care as to whom they support and how that support is offered (Biswaro, 2013:61). Logically early warning should be given first to those

who can take constructive action. This generally means governments and groups likely to be immediately involved in the crises, governments and leaders nearest to the scene of conflicts, the United Nations Security Council and Regional Organizations. Religious organizations may also be warned, particularly of situations in which local religious leaders and institutions could play a positive role. Further, media, business committees, NGOs, etc., should be kept informed (Biswaro, 2013:61). According to Sesay and Omotosho (ND:20):

The AU's Peace and Security puzzle is the Continental Early Warning System, CEWS, the heart of which is the —'Situation Room' located at the Conflict Management Directorate of the AU. We are of the view that the challenge for the AU like the OAU is its ability to react early and credibly. Thus what the continental body can do with some measure of success is to get actively involved in strengthening the regional early warning mechanisms that are already in place in some parts of the continent, and to encourage those regions that are yet to put similar facilities in place to do so without further delay. The logic is that since conflict starts in the regions, it is the regions that really need the early warning mechanisms and not the continental AU. What the AU and RECs could do, however, is set up a twenty-four hour hot line between their headquarters to facilitate easy communication at all times. Such a mechanism is not only cost effective; it could also enhance the roles earlier identified for the Pan African organization.

Simply knowing about a developing crisis is not enough (Biswaro, 2013:61). No matter how accurate the early warning, the real test is whether it leads to early action. The difference between a successful engagement and one that is likely to fail can often be measured in the time lapse between the first warning signs of a problem and the first steps taken to address it. This "warning-to-action continuum" is the challenge the international community can find hardest to meet (Ki Moon, 2011: 19). As a minimum step to arrest potential violence and address humanitarian needs, but without precipitating unwanted and indefinite involvement in a remote crisis, governments should explore the possibilities of expanded frontline preventive diplomacy by using ambassadors, senior foreign service officers and personal envoys of the UN Secretary-General, AU, etc. When the crisis threatens, traditional diplomacy continues, but more urgent efforts are also made-through bilateral, multilateral and unofficial channels to pressure, arbitrate, mediate, or lend "good offices" to encourage dialogue and facilitate non-violent resolution of the crisis (Biswaro, 2013:61).

As an organ, the AU has also undergone a normative shift towards preventive diplomacy by adopting a position that non-interference in the internal affairs of another state should not be equated with indifference (Othieno and Samasuwo, 2007: 30). Hence, article 4 of the Constitutive Act of the AU states that although non-interference by any member state in the internal affairs of another should be upheld, the AU has the right to intervene in a member state pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity (AU Constitutive Act 2002).

### 3. PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY

Diplomacy has been seen traditionally as a set of measures (both positive and negative) whereby one state attempts to alter the behaviour of another; the end goal being either the pursuit or abandonment of a given policy. Traditionally diplomacy has been

portrayed as “a state tool of war by other means,” (Soderlund, 2013: 7), but Stuart Murray (in Soderlund, 2013: 7) maintains that this view is archaic and argues that diplomacy should be seen “as *the business of multi-actor peace* and not only the handmaiden of the occasionally belligerent state”.

Preventive diplomacy has been an enduring idea... Since Dag Hammarskjöld first articulated the concept over half a century ago, it has continued to evolve in response to new challenges. An integral part of broader conflict prevention efforts, preventive diplomacy refers specifically to diplomatic action taken, at the earliest possible stage, “to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur”. Preventive diplomacy as a term suggesting proactive, rather than reactive, responses to international crises, preventive diplomacy seems to be firmly enshrined in the contemporary global collective security arrangement (Salihu, Ado and Yusif, 2015: 0378). Preventive diplomacy remains highly relevant along the entire conflict spectrum (An Agenda for Peace, 1992 quoted in Ki Moon, 2011: 2). Through quiet diplomacy, good offices and/or —presidential mediation as the case may be (Sesay and Omotosho, ND: 19).

Preventive diplomacy, which is vital to implementing conflict prevention, comprises action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflict, and to limit the spread of conflict when it does occur (Mpyisi and Murithi, 2007: v). Preventive diplomacy today is being conducted by a broader array of actors, using a wider range of tools, than ever before. This is due in part to the emergence of stronger normative frameworks in favour of international efforts to prevent violent conflict and mass atrocities and to ensure the inclusion of more voices in governance, peace and security (Ki Moon, 2011: 3).

There are several reasons for this renewed interest. Foremost is the recurring and devastating impact of armed conflict on individuals, societies and economies, coupled with the recognition — all the more acute in these strained financial times — that failure to prevent conflict is extremely costly. Moreover, although quiet successes rarely make the news, a number of recent engagements have reconfirmed that through a combination of analysis, early warning, rapid response and partnerships, we can help to defuse tensions in escalating crises and assist parties in resolving disputes peacefully (Ki Moon, 2011: 2).

For quite some time, the OAU (AU) had taken a number of initiatives aimed at preventing conflicts through the deployment of Eminent Personalities, Special Envoys or preventive diplomacy for purposes of containing a situation and averting its escalation (Biswaro, 2013:129). On the African continent, most notably, the doctrine of non-interference has been replaced by the African Union’s principle of “non-indifference” to imminent threats to peace, security and populations, including unconstitutional changes of government. A number of sub regional organizations in Africa either anticipated or followed the new stance (Ki Moon, 2011: 3). The Panel of the Wise was established as a component of APSA (Bah et al, 2014: 55).

The Panel was established under the PSC Protocol, article 11. The PSC subsequently adopted the ‘Modalities for the Functioning of the Panel of the Wise’ on 12 November 2007 at its 100th meeting (AU handbook, 2015: 50). Under the Modalities, the Panel’s mandate includes advising the PSC and Chairperson; undertaking all such actions deemed appropriate to support the efforts of the PSC and Chairperson for preventing conflict; making pronouncements on any issue relating to the promotion and maintenance of peace, security and stability in Africa; and acting at the request of the Council or Chairperson, or on its own initiative. The Modalities also provide for the Panel’s role to include facilitating channels of communication between the PSC or the Chairperson of the Commission and parties involved in conflict; carrying out fact-finding missions; and assisting and advising mediation teams (AU handbook, 2015: 50).

Besides the office of the Chairperson of the Commission (Chairperson), a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), an African Standby Force and a Special Fund, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) can call upon the assistance of the Panel of the Wise (Panel). Specifically, the Panel is an integral aspect of the AU's dedicated preventive diplomacy framework given its mandate to anticipate potential crisis situations and intervene in a timely fashion to prevent the escalation of a dispute or resolve existing tensions to reduce the likelihood of a return to violence (Bah et al, 2014: 55). Members are required to be "highly respected African personalities of high integrity and independence who have made outstanding contributions to Africa in the areas of peace, security and development". Members cannot hold political office at the time of their appointment or during their term on the Panel. Members are appointed by the AU Assembly, on the recommendation of the Chairperson of the Commission, for three calendar years. Terms can be renewed, depending on the availability of the members. Pending selection of members, the existing panel continues to work, often leading to extended mandates for panel members. Each member is drawn from one of the AU's five regional groups (AU handbook, 2015: 51). Art. 11 (3) & (4) PSC Protocol (quoted in Bah et al, 2014: 55) shows that:

"The Panel of the Wise is constituted under the terms of Article 11 of the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union. This article provides that the Panel shall advise the PSC and the Chairperson of the Commission, particularly on all issues pertaining to the promotion and maintenance of peace, security and stability in Africa; shall undertake all such action deemed appropriate to support the efforts of the Council and those of the Chairperson of the Commission for the prevention of conflict and may, as and when necessary in the form it considers most appropriate, pronounce itself on any issue relating to the promotion and maintenance of peace, security and stability in Africa."

This provision endows the Panel with a very broad mandate to effectively comment, draw attention and intervene in virtually any situation on the continent that it deems worthy of attention (Bah et al, 2014: 55). Preventive diplomacy must overcome several obstacles. One of the greatest challenges is suspicion of the motives of those who would practice it. Another is the charge that much of this really means little more than traditional diplomacy i.e. statecraft and foreign policy have been composed largely diplomatic and political efforts to forestall undesirable events (Carnegie Commission Report, 1997: 49). A key difference today, however, is that diplomats and politicians need to find ways to cope with crises anywhere in the world and with States as well as between them, not only because these crises are tragic in themselves, but also because they are increasingly costly for neighbouring and many countries beyond. Therefore, diplomacy today is tied as never before to a complex web of economic and social relationships that span the globe (Carnegie Commission Report, 1997: 49).

Conflicts are by nature dynamic and unpredictable. Intra-State wars, for example, start and stop frequently. They can suddenly both deepen and widen. Every intervention to prevent, transform, manage or resolve conflict must therefore be flexible configured to the needs on the ground and not according to our institutional set-ups. This holds particularly true for preventive diplomacy, precisely because much of its value lies in its adaptability (Ki Moon, 2011: 19). Different regions, societies and groups tend to prefer different preventive diplomacy approaches. Indirect talks (between third parties and one party to a dispute) appear to be the preferred model in some regions, while direct talks (between parties to a dispute) are significantly more common in others. In some regions, independent actors not affiliated with

larger institutions will have comparative advantages that others do not. Whatever the approach chosen, and whoever carries it out, our engagements are more likely to succeed if they take into account local preferences and remain flexible, while pursuing clear objectives adaptability (Ki Moon, 2011: 19). Preventive diplomacy typically engages official decision makers during periods of rising political tensions or emerging crises. Once the impasse is resolved or the critical moment has passed, preventive diplomacy efforts tend to scale back down, leaving the question of how diplomatic gains can be sustained (Ki Moon, 2011: 19).

#### 4. EARLY WARNING AND PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY: CURRENT TRAJECTORY OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA

Rajan (2014:22) poignantly suggested that there are three drivers of conflict or threats to peace and security in Africa. First, there are pre-existing conditions like ethnic and communal divide, historic animosities and extreme inequalities. Second, there are catalysts such as the formation of active groups based on ideologies, politicisation of controversial issues and deterioration of the economy. Third, there are triggers which are in form of military coups, inter-state conflicts and militancy due to socioeconomic reasons. In addition to these, there is prevalence of war-like situation between two parties/leaders; organized crimes like piracy, armed robbery, kidnapping, arms trade, drug trafficking and human trafficking. Most crucial of all is the threat from Islamic fundamentalist terrorism spread across the African continent, which is a matter of global concern. It was argued that since the pre-existing conditions and the triggers are not in the hands of the government, the build-up of catalysts can be prevented by means of “preventive diplomacy”.

One of the problems involved in evaluating the effectiveness of diplomacy as a tool of conflict prevention is that much diplomatic activity is done “behind the scenes,” more or less out of the eye of the press and the public (Soderlund et al., 2012: 145). Short-term diplomatic initiatives to avert conflict include the passing of UN Security Council Resolutions, the dispatch of fact-finding or observer missions to the scene of a conflict and the offer of “rewards” for state behaviour seen to contribute to bringing violence under control (Soderlund, 2013: 7).

The AU, RECs, the panels and councils of the wise and institutions of peace-making should make use of early warning information in a timely manner. For example, the AU APRM report of 2006 warned of likely tensions in Kenya. Little effort was made to respond to this early warning in this instance, partly because the report was not widely disseminated and available (ACCORD, 2013: 42). Additionally, available early warning information was not utilised in Mali as the coup d'état happened at the end of the AU Summit in January 2012. This speaks to the need for proactive intervention. It is important for the AU PW not to use the ‘fire-brigade approach’ in resolving conflicts. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, the AU PW should have acted even at the stage when there were indications that the constitution was about to be manipulated (ACCORD, 2013: 42).

A good candidate for this role was Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa. This was a role played credibly by former President Mandela in Burundi, and he contributed immensely to the peaceful solution of that country’s conflict. The AU could use such influential individuals as its good will Ambassadors to douse tensions that could lead to open conflict. It is instructive to note that such very important personalities are regularly used ... to nip conflicts ... in the bud (Sesay and Omotosho, ND:20) Counted among short-term diplomatic successes in the area of conflict prevention is Secretary-General Kofi Annan’s mission to Kenya in early 2008, which was instrumental in constructing a power sharing agreement which curbed the ethnic violence following a disputed election in December 2007 (Murithi, 2009: 97).



UN Secretary General (Ki Moon, 2012: 10) giving some other instances, affirmed that the Organization has played a supportive role. In January 2008, for example, amid postelection violence in Kenya, the African Union mandated a process chaired by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to avert further deterioration into a civil war along ethnic lines. This effort was strongly supported by the United Nations country team on the ground and staff secondments from the Department of Political Affairs, drawing strategically on expert advice from the Department's Electoral Assistance Division and other actors. The power-sharing agreement reached not only served to avert conflict but also provided the basis for a new constitution. Similarly, in Madagascar, a United Nations mediation support team has been deployed to assist the mediation efforts of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) aimed at resolving the political crisis in the country and restoring constitutional order. In his contribution to preventive diplomacy as a tool of managing conflict and mitigating its escalation in Africa the UN Secretary General, Ki Moon, (2012: 10) maintained that:

“In the autumn of 2008, I appointed former Nigerian President, General Olusegun Obasanjo, as Special Envoy for the Great Lakes in the context of growing tension and a widespread fear that the Democratic Republic of the Congo would again become the theatre of regional war. With backstopping from Headquarters and in close consultation with the United Nations peacekeeping operation on the ground, the Special Envoy engaged in intense shuttle diplomacy in search of a negotiated peace in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Collaborating with the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, these efforts resulted, within just a few weeks, in complex peace talks under United Nations auspices, made possible through the rapid deployment of a mediation support team, together with associated logistics, translation services and conference and travel support...”

The UN Secretary General, Ki Moon, (2012: 10) further stated that:

“By March 2009, the talks had led to a set of agreements foreseeing the demobilization and disarmament of rebel groups and measures to address their underlying grievances. With ongoing engagement by the Special Envoy to monitor progress, the bulk of the commitments were implemented within less than a year. In late 2009, Presidents Kagame and Kabila met for the first time in many years, and shortly thereafter Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo resumed formal diplomatic relations. While the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo remains serious in terms of generalized insecurity and humanitarian suffering, renewed regional war was averted.”

As well, UN and international actions pressured Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe to agree to a transitional government in 2009 (Howard-Hassmann, 2010; International Crisis Group, 2010; Soderlund, 2013: 7). The Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) also tried it in Zimbabwe at the height of post-election crisis in that country, but with less initial success. Much more recently, former South African President Thabo Mbeki, Kenyan Prime Minister, Raila Odinga, and Sierra Leone's President Ernest Bai Koroma, were all used by the AU and ECOWAS to persuade former Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo, to step aside after

presidential elections in October 2010, which were won by his opponent, Ouattara (Sesay and Omotosho, ND: 20).

In Guinea, the United Nations Office for West Africa partnered with ECOWAS, the African Union, the International Contact Group and others in facilitating the country's transition from military to constitutional rule throughout 2009 and 2010. Preventing political tensions from escalating into full-blown conflict was a major preoccupation during that period, not least because of the potential destabilization of neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Through steady support to the political process and to the ECOWAS-led mediation, the United Nations assisted Guineans in steering the transition to its completion through the inauguration, in December 2010, of Alpha Condé, Guinea's first President elected through democratic multiparty elections (Ki Moon, 2012: 12).

In their bid to manage or mitigate the revolution in Egypt, Following the communiqué of the PSC, on 8 July 2013, the Chairperson of the Commission established the AU High Level Panel for Egypt, consisting of Mr. Alpha Oumar Konaré, former President of the Republic of Mali and former Chairperson of the AU Commission, as the Chairperson of the Panel; Mr Festus Gontebanye Mogae, former President of the Republic of Botswana; and Mr Dileita Mohamed Dileita, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Djibouti (Peace and Security Council, 2014: 3). The Panel was mandated to: "Interact with the ruling authorities and other Egyptian stakeholders to establish a constructive political dialogue aimed at national reconciliation, as well as to contribute to their efforts as they work towards a transition that would lead to an early return to constitutional order, preserve the gains of January-February 2011 Revolution and consolidate the democratic process in their country" (Peace and Security Council, 2014: 3).

Although there is consensus that panels and councils of the wise are important peacemaking institutions, there is still limited knowledge about their roles. Although mediation is included as one of the initiatives that can be undertaken by panels and councils of the wise, it seems that in practice these institutions, particularly the AU PW, tend to play supporting roles in ongoing mediation efforts or provide suggestions for the AU PSC to consider (ACCORD, 2012: 39). The mandate to mediate is often granted to AU Special Envoys, as well as eminent individuals such as incumbent and former presidents. It is therefore worthwhile to clarify how the AU PW can contribute to these mediation efforts and whether they can initiate mediation. Knowledge on the role and capacity of the AU PW is scarce; perhaps this is an avenue to pursue in terms of enhancing global awareness of the AU PW (ACCORD, 2012: 39).

Sesay and Omotosho, (ND,: 20) in their opinion asserts that: We would suggest retaining the panel of wise persons' but in a proactive manner, to be used in shuttle diplomacy' across the continent to trouble spots before they get out of control. Members could be designated AU Ambassadors' or Special Representatives of the AU, if need be. The Panel of the Wise need not be a permanent organ of the AU but an ad hoc arrangement. That way, it could create a rich reservoir of distinguished Africans at its service at short notice. However, once a wise person' is formally engaged in such a task in any region or country, the AU should come out openly and strongly, to give backing or legitimization to his/her effort, as additional pressure on disputants. And if apposite, it could also muster support for its initiative from the UN, EU or a relevant great power, so that local and foreign spoilers would be restrained as early as possible.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Africa is a rich and greatly endowed continent, yet one of the most volatile and violence endemic regions in the world, prone to all forms of violence with catastrophic consequences which has drained every provision made to redress this ugly incidence. The

transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to Africa Union (AU) has provided the leeway and AU has taken up the gauntlet to devise means to move the continent from its non- intervention stance to that of non – indifference. Central to the management of conflict and peacemaking in Africa, is the initiative by the African Union called Africa Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) with five pillars among which are the Early Warning and Preventive Diplomacy.

It is revealed in this work that the occurrence of conflict in Africa is not spontaneous but it is incremental in nature. In other words conflict does not just occur; there are signs and symptoms that are indicators of the occurrence of conflict and if they are nip in the bud, there is every assurance and likelihood that the occurrence of conflict would have been mitigated if not averted. Early Warning and Preventive Diplomacy are part of the strategies that African Union has put in place to stem down the tide of violence in Africa. We have not only expose the concept and effectiveness of these twin strategies but we have also projected the trajectory, giving instances where it has yielded result in conflict management. We make bold to say that if these strategies are used effectively, timely and efficiently, they will go a long way in changing the future and fortune of Africa from a violence endemic region to an arena of peace, engendering progress and development.

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