



**BUDAPEST CENTRE
FOR THE INTERNATIONAL
PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE
AND MASS ATROCITIES**



**AFRICAN TASK FORCE
ON THE PREVENTION OF MASS ATROCITIES**

Launch of the Initiative "Africa Task Force on the Prevention of Mass Atrocities"

Addis Ababa, 18 March 2015

SUMMARY

The Budapest Centre for the International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities has convened a Task Force comprised of prominent African researchers to examine continental capacities to prevent mass atrocities. The official launch of the Initiative took place in Addis Ababa on 18 March, 2015 in the presence of representatives of African regional organizations and African Union (AU) member states. The agenda of the meeting and a short description of the 18-month Initiative - including the members of the Task Force - are attached.

In his opening remarks, Dr. George Wachira, Head of the African Governance Architecture Secretariat of the AU welcomed the Initiative, calling it a timely contribution to discourse addressing peace and security in Africa, while expressing AU support for its implementation. Dr. Wachira also challenged members of the Task Force to further pragmatic and actionable recommendations that will enhance atrocity early warning and response on the continent. He reminded the Task Force leadership that multiple projects have explored related phenomena in an African context, and that preparing a report that is rigorous, innovative, and actionable was paramount from the perspective of policy-makers in Africa.

In the keynote speech Hon. Samia Nkrumah, Co-Chair of the Task Force recalled the Initiative of Ghana's First President Dr. Kwame Nkrumah for the establishment of an African High Command able to intervene in internal conflicts in member state and stressed that regrettably, Nkrumah's repeated call was not implemented. She reminded the participants that despite the remarkable progress to prevent conflicts and atrocity crimes in Africa over the last decade, millions have died, suffered torture, and become forcibly displaced.

She pointed to the progress made in collective African endeavors to prevent mass atrocities on the continent, while emphasizing that serious challenges remain including the inability to enforce compliance to ceasefire arrangements, resource and capacity constraints, and UN Security Council interference using veto powers. The Co-Chair underlined African citizens need a frank assessment of the preventative capabilities of regional organizations and Member States, and particularly in light of the present realities on the ground. She also underscored the need of a framework for prevention of atrocities that would complement and enhance the relevant activities of the African Union.

Ms. Nkrumah raised the need to amend the existing AU legal framework to conceptualize sovereignty and intervention as fundamental responsibilities, and in parallel develop creative and alternative sources of funding for peace operation, take steps to develop various structures of the Peace and Security Architecture to enhance peace operations and focus on prevention.

Ms. Nkrumah strongly believes that the African Task Force initiative is a step in the right direction and it will complement the ongoing efforts in preventing atrocities in the continent and develop into a truly African-owned and African-led framework providing guidance for preventing atrocities.

When presenting the objectives and main features of the Initiative, Gyorgy Tatar, Chair of the Budapest Centre underlined that the African Task Force will complement the efforts of African regional organizations made over the last decade, and explore further synergies between policies, instruments and actors. According to the Budapest Centre, the Initiative will also promote the implementation of the letters and spirit of the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance and contribute to the Report of the African Human Rights Year in 2016.

He pointed to five specific features of the Initiative:

- The Task Force will be applying a "mass atrocities lens" over the course of the project.
- It will focus on five primary regional actors playing a distinctive role in maintaining peace and stability, and preventing violent conflicts in Africa.
- It will combine the theoretical knowledge of researchers, and expertise and experience of practitioners, to prepare viable options and feasible recommendations for development.
- It will apply a holistic approach to assess the capabilities not only from the aspects of security and stability, but also development policies, economic growth and collaboration with the international community.
- The whole project will be owned by the African experts and complemented by the expertise of Budapest Centre obtained during the assessment of the capabilities of the European Union (EU) in 2013.

The senior researchers of the African Task Force summarized their early findings and gave an overview of the legal framework and the main structures of the concerned regional organizations to detect the risks of mass atrocities and respond to the threats.

During the ensuing discussion representatives of regional organizations and AU member states shared their views under Chatham House rule. There was a broad consensus on the fact that the lack of political will is one of the main obstacles to effectively prevent mass atrocities in Africa. The Task Force will explore the conceptualization of political will and decision-making within each regional body as a primary theme as its research progresses.

The launch event ended with a summary of next steps including regional workshops in the 5 headquarters and it was announced that the State of the Art Report of the African Task Force - which will take stock of the current capabilities of the concerned regional organizations by leveraging a recent case - will be presented in Addis Ababa in October, 2015.

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