

WINTER 2019

SECURING THE FUTURE: LESSONS FROM HISTORY #1

PEACE IS THE MISSION

EVENT REPORT



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Co-funded by the
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IN PURSUIT OF PEACEKEEPING, PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

When a country's peace and security are threatened, United Nations peacekeepers must intervene only after politicians have exhausted all possibilities for conflict prevention. This was one of the key conclusions emerging in the first debate in a new series of 'Lessons from History', held in Brussels by Friends of Europe on 19 March 2019. Featuring three peace and security experts and focusing on recent UN operations in Africa, this event aimed to illuminate past and current challenges to better prepare for future conflicts and crises.

"We can all learn lessons from UN peacekeeping operations in Africa. Around half the UN's work takes place in that field, with missions in Congo, South Sudan and so on, including hybrid operations between the UN and African Union," said the moderator **Jamie Shea**, Senior Fellow at Friends of Europe and former Deputy Assistant Secretary General at NATO. Africa today provides the bulk of UN peacekeepers, while Italy is the biggest national contributor from the EU, with around 1,600 military and police forces.

The debate focused on Rwanda and Liberia, respectively considered as a failure and success in UN peacekeeping history. Mr Shea opened the debate by asking what the European Union and NATO could do to support UN peacekeeping in Africa and beyond, so as to enhance its success.

All three panellists agreed that countries and peacekeepers must prioritise prevention and leave intervention by external actors as the last resort. That is more important than ever, as African countries are rightly cautious of such interventions noted **Alice Musabende** – a survivor of the 1994 Rwanda genocide against the Tutsis and someone who lost close family members to the tragedy.

A former Canadian journalist, Ms Musabende is now a Gates Scholar in Politics and International Studies at Cambridge University. "In my research, I focus on intervention in African crises by external actors. Intervention is a thorny issue, because today it involves new peacekeepers such as China and not just the UN, EU or United States." She added that peacekeeping missions in Africa have also changed dramatically and become tougher to handle, due to the growing complexity of conflicts, which now include terrorism, insurgencies and have no clearly defined start or end. In the 1990s, conflicts were mostly of an ethnic origin.

**"We can all learn lessons
from UN peacekeeping
operations in Africa"**

Jamie Shea

Senior Fellow at Friends of Europe and former
Deputy Assistant Secretary General at NATO

“I also believe that the UN is humankind’s greatest experiment and should be accountable”

Linda Melvern

Investigative Journalist and former consultant to the ‘Military One’ trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)

WHAT IS THE MAIN PROBLEM WITH INTERVENTION?

According to Ms Musabende, Europeans and others still have complex post-colonial relationships with Africa and continue “meddling” in the continent’s internal affairs. She noted there are now so many actors that Africans sometimes struggle to deal with them all. “There is no silver lining to Rwanda’s genocide, but Africans learned from it and other crises that they must change the way they deal with conflicts. We made great progress in securing our continent’s peace and security with the AU’s Article 4H, which allows AU member states to intervene in other countries in Africa when there is a risk of mass atrocities, etc., without the consent of the country in question.”

With the AU more proactive during peacekeeping operations on the continent, added Ms Musabende, the EU and UN must now improve collaboration with the AU. It was her view that external actors must learn to listen more to what Africans themselves want in times of conflict. However, despite new African fund-raising initiatives such as the AU Peace Fund, the AU is still under-resourced and mainly relies on EU funding. Hence the importance of peacekeeping partnerships, like that between the EU and AU.

KEY LESSONS FROM RWANDA

“Rwanda was the greatest peacekeeping failure in UN history, but it was not a UN failure, it was ours,” said **Linda Melvern**, Investigative Journalist and former consultant to the ‘Military One’ trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). She has written seven non-fiction books and the third one was on the history of the United Nations, looking at the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda. Her research, including interviews with top people on the UN Security Council, led her to conclude there was a shocking lack of accountability from UN member states and decision-makers regarding the UN’s withdrawal in April 1994 from most of its peacekeeping operations (UNAMIR) in the country. Even today, many of the peacekeepers involved have not been properly debriefed.

“It is my belief that every member of the UNSC should bear responsibility for the decisions taken in 1994,” she said, adding that the UNSC knew the genocide was happening, yet shockingly France sat silent and the UK was the first to call for the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from Rwanda. Ms Melvern said some UN peacekeepers had tried their best to defend the Tutsi population during the genocide.

“I also believe that the UN is humankind’s greatest experiment and should be accountable. Yet this never happens because so many UNSC decisions are made in secret and informal sessions,” said Ms Melvern. She drew two conclusions from this. Firstly, Rwanda in 1994 needed more civilian police to keep law and order, rather than troops with weapons on the streets. Secondly, despite some recent UN reforms, she felt that the organisation has yet to undergo fundamental political transformation.

“Prevention is our main priority. But this is hard to operationalise, as it requires political will”

Rory Keane

Head of the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Brussels (UNLOPS)

UN REFORMS

Rory Keane, Head of the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Brussels (UNLOPS), said that the UN had made significant progress, thanks to reforms sparked by Rwanda and other conflicts. “It has merged peacebuilding with the political side and merged the peacekeeping operations teams with political teams,” he said. He highlighted other progress, including the Peacebuilding Capability Readiness System, which matches UN needs on the ground with member states’ capabilities, as well as better pre-deployment training for peacekeepers.

Responding to an audience question on what the UN needs from the EU, Mr Keane said the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is a great tool for capacity building: “The UN would like to see more CSDP and more ambition for it, as these would help to stabilise various UN operations on the ground.” He also underlined the important role played by the EU in peacekeeping, not just troops but especially niche skills in languages, technology and capabilities. The UN would also like to see more rotation systems: “We’re talking plug-and-play among European countries in support of UN peace operations and more widely for multilateralism.”

The UN wish list for Europe also includes provision of more niche capabilities, such as transport aircraft and specialised mine-detection equipment, and more EU unity in areas such as the weapons trade and sanctions. “Ultimately, as the UN’s Secretary-General has underlined, prevention is our main priority. But this is hard to operationalise, as it requires political will.” He noted that better prevention requires acting earlier in conflicts, better political analysis and having more agile and flexible instruments in our toolbox. These are all areas that the UN is working on, added Mr Keane. He also noted, in response to a question, the need to protect UN troops deployed on peacekeeping missions, that ‘force protection’ is vital.

“Rwanda is the better country it is today thanks to inspiring women who got involved in peacebuilding”

Alice Musabende

Gates Scholar in Politics & International Studies at Cambridge University, former Canadian journalist and survivor of the 1994 Rwanda genocide

HOW WOMEN ASSIST PEACEBUILDING

During the debate, panellists highlighted how women increasingly play a vital role in peace processes. According to Ms Musabende, “Rwanda is the better country it is today thanks to inspiring women who got involved in peacebuilding. A good example is my aunt, who raised me after the Rwandan genocide.” Mr Keane backed up this view, by pointing out how female troops can boost confidence in camps with internally displaced people – especially where many women have been exposed to gender-based violence. He also underlined how India had sent an all-female UN police force for peacekeeping in Liberia. That’s a lesson Europe can learn about women’s empowerment, he said, while noting how Leymah Gbowee had won a Nobel Peace Prize for her work in a women’s movement that helped bring peace to Liberia.

While Rwanda was clearly a UN failure, the 15-year UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia that ended in March 2018 is generally considered a success story. For Mr Keane, this mission underlined the value of a long-term investment in peace: “We must think about making change over a generation and investing in transitions to proper peacebuilding and consolidation of the process by having an exit strategy,” he said. Case in point: this was a missing factor in the UN’s Libya intervention, and it led to chaos and instability. In Liberia, on the other hand, the UN Peacebuilding Commission aided the country through funding and its political weight, focused on building capacity and accountability in the security sector and supporting national reconciliation.

Another lesson learned is the importance of linking UN operations with local structures, such as ECOWAS in Africa. Further needs include an affordable peacebuilding process and access for victims of conflicts to specialised justice, which is hard to get in fragile states. After highlighting the importance of UN partnerships with the EU and other actors – notably through complementary actions, skills and knowhow, Mr Keane concluded that “UN peacekeeping is our peacekeeping, and can only be effective if the world invests in it.”

THE PROBLEM OF REFUGEES

Refugees are a major concern in many conflicts. Rwanda in 1994 had one million refugees due to unrealistic agreements that did not prevent the conflict, according to Ms Melvern. A similar situation has occurred in Libya, because the 2011 operation to prevent Gaddafi from carrying out human rights abuses against his own population was mainly a “hit and run operation and poorly thought through,” said Ms Musabende. She said this has led to mass migration and

conflicts spilling into Mali and Niger, further complicating African politics and leading to more African distrust in peacekeeping on the continent. She added that this distrust has occasionally been compounded by the crimes committed by a small number of UN staff during peacekeeping operations in Africa – crimes that are not prosecuted due to the fragility of the countries where they have happened.

Wrapping up the debate, Mr Shea said his three main conclusions arising from the debate include the identification of successful examples of UN peacekeeping operations, which means we have good practices to build on. Secondly, prevention and partnerships between the UN and EU, etc. are essential in this field, though there should be more engagement with the AU. Lastly, transparency is vital for peacebuilding operations, however painful it may be, since it boosts accountability.

Mr Shea also drew attention to Friends of Europe's new factsheet, *Peace is the mission*. It summarises UN peace missions since 1948, through to the launch of the 'Action for Peacekeeping' initiative by UN Secretary-General António Guterres. The moderator also recommended that anybody interested in continuing today's debate should visit Friends of Europe's Debating Security Plus (DS+) online platform.



Jamie Shea, Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges Division at NATO and Trustee of Friends of Europe



Linda Melvern, Investigative Journalist and former consultant to the “Military One” trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR)





Rory Keane, Head of the United Nations Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Brussels



Alice Musabende, Gates Scholar in Politics & International Studies at Cambridge University, former Canadian journalist and survivor of the 1994 Rwanda genocide





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