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Perspectives into conflict resolution and peace negotiation in Africa

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Good evening.

1. It is an honour for me to be invited to share ideas with you regarding my perspectives and insights into conflict resolution in Africa. I have approached this subject by first providing the background to contemporary peace building processes in Africa with the objective to bring about a new political dispensation in certain countries.

2. Such initiatives include my role as the Facilitator for the Inter-Congolese National Dialogue that resulted in the current Transitional Government, and expected to lead to free and fair elections in the DRC. I will then conclude my address with some lessons learnt, which I believe they contribute to the body of knowledge on conflict resolution in general.

3. Over the past few decades, Africa has probably suffered more from war than any other continent. Since the 1960’s when many African countries attained independence, several million lives were lost, and several million people became refugees as a result of conflicts. This is not a record that we can be proud of. The tragic Rwandan genocide in 1994 will forever remain one of the darkest pages in our history.
4. Furthermore, thousands of children are increasingly involved in conflicts as child soldiers, in direct violation of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. There are many causes for these conflicts, namely poverty, social inequality and injustice, impunity and the violation of fundamental human rights.

5. African states, including my own country Botswana, have had to make many sacrifices in order to resolve conflicts and promote peace and security. There have been multilateral interventions by African states in Somali, Mozambique, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d’Ivoire, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Such interventions were enormously costly and they highlighted our continent’s weak financial and military resource base.

6. Against this background, I support the view that it is important the United Nations remains the main body in charge of conflict resolution throughout the world, and that the world body assume its global responsibilities in seeking solutions to these conflicts. Furthermore, African states emerging from conflicts must also confront the issue of reconciliation and justice. It is important that we negotiate political compromises that give all involved parties reasons for preferring peace to war.
7. Implementing systems of government that protect human rights and the interests of all parties must be more the rule than the exception. The reintegration of faction fighters and child soldiers into local communities is also a vital task of post-conflict reconstruction and peace building. We must find a balance between the demand for equitable justice and moral and material retribution for the victims of atrocities, on the one hand, and the need to create conditions for peace and stability, on the other hand. We must determine the most appropriate vehicles for achieving these goals.

8. Against this background, I will now discuss the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, based on the Lusaka Cease-fire Agreement, as an essential prerequisite for peace and security in the DRC. The Lusaka Agreement stipulated that the Government of the DRC, the armed opposition -- namely the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD) and the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC) -- as well as the unarmed opposition enter into an open national dialogue. It was then hoped that this would lead to a new political dispensation with national reconciliation.

9. The DRC has witnessed over three decades of Mobutism, characterised by political and economic bad governance with the result of a decadent state, crisis of legitimacy, widespread dissidence and armed rebellion. Its location in the centre of Africa made the DRC a key player in the region. Relations with surrounding countries have often been driven by security concerns. Conflicts in Angola, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Sudan, have at various times created tensions between the DRC and its neighbours.
10. Since 1996, conflicts have wrought havoc amongst the population of the DRC. The scale of the conflict, numbers of killed and displaced populations, the number of countries involved, and the role of DRC’s natural resources in fuelling the conflict have led some analysts to refer to it as Africa’s First World War. Therefore, the Lusaka Cease-fire Agreement was hailed as the only internationally recognised framework for durable peace and national reconciliation in the DRC.

11. Unfortunately, despite the signing of the Lusaka Cease-fire Agreement the war continued. Violations of the agreement persisted. This reduced the momentum of the peace process. Therefore, my mission as the Facilitator for the Inter-Congolese Dialogue was a very difficult one. The peace negotiation process also faced another crucial obstacle. The Dialogue did not take place within the stipulated period of 45 days after the signing of the Agreement in 1999. Lack of political will by all parties involved in the conflict, and inadequate funds to finance the various aspects of this process, were the major stumbling blocks.

12. The Dialogue formally started 2 years after the date stipulated in the Agreement. The process was continuously interrupted. The Dialogue was beset with many challenges and obstacles. After the opening ceremony the Plenary Meeting could not take place because of the absence of the MLC delegation in Sun City. The President of the MLC rejected the presence of
certain representatives of the political opposition and withheld his delegation until his objection was dealt with.

13. After twelve days of pleading and bargaining, the matter was resolved and the Plenary resumed. However, after only three days of the resumption of negotiations, the Government of the DRC withdrew its delegation from the dialogue. The Government stated reason was that its forces had come under attack from the soldiers of the Rwandan soldiers who had crossed into the DRC territory.

14. In order to address this problem I dispatched concurrent missions to several African Heads of State for conditions to be created, not only for the dialogue to resume, but also for there to be concerted multilateral action by the signatories of the Lusaka Cease-fire Agreement on the withdrawal of foreign forces from the DRC. I also communicated with the UN Security Council to exert the necessary diplomatic and political pressure on the relevant governments to respect and support the peace negotiation process.

15. In spite of these set backs, eventually, progress was achieved. Bringing the Congolese together to talk, after so many years of fighting among themselves, was in itself a significant achievement. Finally, overall 37 resolutions arising from the negotiations were adopted, ranging from
issues pertaining to peace, reconciliation and socio-economic reconstruction in the Congo, to humanitarian issues, and issues of defence and security structures. By April 2003 the Inter-Congolese Dialogue accomplished all that was expected of it.

16. As of now, efforts are continuing under the auspices of the international community -- the United Nations, the African Union and Southern African Development Community -- to assist the Congolese to hold free and fair elections in order to elect a representative government.

17. What lesson have we learned from the DRC crisis? These are many. But I will confine myself to only a few at this moment.

18. On the domestic level, one can say that the security of any regime is linked, in the long term, to the democratic and economic governance of the country and security of the population. The challenge of running the State effectively goes beyond developing physical infrastructures and putting the police on the streets. It is imperative that regimes build strong institutions for participatory democracy and good governance to meet people’s legitimate expectations.
19. **Confidence building among the antagonists must be an important aspect of the peace negotiation process.** Problems of insecurity can be alleviated if the parties understand that their adversaries will have an opportunity to reciprocate their actions the next time they meet. Thus, my facilitation process involved a lot of separate meetings with different parties -- before and during the negotiations -- in an attempt to create a conducive environment for the parties to meet and discuss.

20. **The peace process must involve the smallest number of players.** Conflicts involving numerous actors, many of which continue to emerge as rebel groups factionalise, can be difficult to resolve. In such situations, the large number of actors means that one is frequently facing new actors, and opportunities to establish trust are minimized. Unfortunately, because of lack of trust of one another in the DRC, an all inclusive Inter-Congolese Dialogue was unavoidable.

21. **Confidence is best developed under existing political structures.** Degrees of state collapse range from weakened or illegitimate governments (in the Sudan for example) to near or outright state failure (for example, Sierra Leone, Liberia or Somalia). Where anarchy undermines the likelihood of stable interaction between antagonists, prospects for peace may be improved as its effects are minimized. Ideally, peace processes need to be conducted under a coherent indigenous state structure rather than the chaos of a collapsed state.
22. **Critical resources must be forthcoming.** The establishment of confidence comes not just from the *presence* of a stabilizing force but the *execution* of the peace process itself. The confidence of warring parties is contingent on the prompt arrival of a peacekeeping force and the provision of resources to meet obligations. Otherwise the failure to follow through on promises made to demobilize factions can undermine confidence in the peacekeepers and the peace process in general.

23. **The parties to the negotiations must have confidence in mediators and peacekeepers.** Confidence building involves not only the establishment of trust between adversaries but also, and perhaps more importantly, its establishment between mediators and local parties. Parties see their survival as dependent on their continued possession of weaponry and the even-handed execution of the peace process. Disarmament or other risky elements of a settlement requires them to place enormous trust in those overseeing the peace process.

24. Finally, the attributes of the persons entrusted with the task of presiding over the peace process, their nationality, or the organization they affiliated to, must be beyond reproach. Such persons should be people of integrity and honesty, be clear-minded and strong of character, without
being overbearing. They should be respected for their personal qualities as well as for their actual political attainments.

25. Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your interest. I would be happy to answer any question that you may have.