



**Institute for Security Studies**  
**Institut d'Études de Sécurité**

Knowledge empowers Africa • Le savoir émancipe l'Afrique

# EARLY WARNING AND CONFLICT IN AFRICA

*William Godwin Nhara*

*Co-ordinator, Conflict Prevention and Research,  
Organisation of African Unity, Addis Ababa  
and Research Associate, Institute for Defence Policy*

Occasional Paper No 1 - February 1996

---

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The 1990s has so far witnessed events that will remain as serious indictments in the history of African political development. Never before has there been such 'bloody experiences', leaving well over three million dead, more than ten million refugees and a historical legacy for our children and future generations of democides and ethnocides.

*"Conflicts have turned Africa, the most diverse of all the continents in the world, into a Continent unable to turn its trend of diversity into opportunities for development ... Conflicts have torn the social fabric of the African Society. Conflicts have separated and split families. Brother has risen against Brother; Father against Son and Son against Father."<sup>1</sup>*

The issue of credibility lies heavily on the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). With the end of the Cold War, to which some observers attribute the exponential rise in intra-state conflicts, and the demise of apartheid rule in South Africa, which heralded the completion of the continental project to 'liberate Africa', there have been calls to review the OAU's role. These calls have been made against a backdrop of increasing insecurity, instability and economic decline in many African countries. To this end, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government passed a Declaration on the Fundamental Changes in the World and their Implications for Africa, in July 1990 in Addis Ababa. The realisation has been spreading throughout Africa that it needs to respond appropriately to the new challenges, especially with regard to conflict resolution, economic development and democratisation.

This "*paradigm shift*"<sup>2</sup> was marked by new inter-state and intra-state relations in Africa and led to the creation of the Division for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution within the General Secretariat of the OAU in March 1992. It was followed by the establishment of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution by the Heads of State and Government, in Cairo in June 1993. It represented a departure from the *ad hoc* arrangements hitherto employed by the OAU to tackle conflicts, in most cases of an intra-state nature. This served as a tangible expression of the OAU Heads of State and Government's commitment, made in July 1990, "*to work towards the peaceful and speedy resolution of all types of conflicts on the Continent*".

In order to fully comprehend and develop a practical system of Early Warning in Africa, the causative aspects of the conflict need to be understood. One useful set of causal approaches includes the basically general theories about the nature of society and social change in Africa. Liberal approaches to social organisation suggest that conflict depends on a system of production and distribution. The changing nature of relationships between production and distribution in many African States imply that individuals and groups may be forced into conflict. Other related causes of conflict focus on visible political, ethnic or religious persecution. A broader causal scheme, however, would point to human rights violations by governments or social forces as the fundamental factor in African conflicts. Such rights cover

and go beyond political, racial, ethnic or religious persecution to include the notion that people who do not enjoy a basic minimum of material and social rights, might be forced into conflict. Their marginalisation may result either from deliberate government decisions, explicit social practices, or from their own failure to act in such a way that will produce a reasonable level of personal welfare.

The OAU Mechanism has a three-fold objective to prevent, manage and resolve conflict. In the realms of preventive activities, to a larger degree, and managing conflict, to a lesser extent, there is need for an effective Early Warning system in the OAU.

## **DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF AN OAU EARLY WARNING SYSTEM**

Efforts have already been made to create an Early Warning system for conflict situations in Africa. 'Early warning' in this context, consists of an information system that can provide data and indicators that will be used to forecast the emergence of conflict.

Kumer Rupesinghe sees early warning as "*information that can provide a timely alert to potential conflicts*"<sup>3</sup>. An Early Warning system also serves as a useful management tool and provides an ongoing learning process for those who are to utilise such a system. The purpose of such a system will be to collect information and data on the social, economic, political, religious, cultural, educational, resource utilisation, and military situations as available in OAU member states. The data and information will form part of a data-base currently being developed at the OAU Secretariat.

As Kuroda states, Early Warning "*should not be an end in itself; it is a tool for preparedness, prevention and mitigation with regard to disasters, emergencies, and conflict situations, whether short or long-term ones*".<sup>4</sup> While preparedness, prevention and mitigation, as the three pillars of an Early Warning system, are of critical importance in understanding the purpose of such a system, it should be borne in mind that even if the detection mechanism is perfect, it is of no use unless there is the capability for a timely reaction. In this regard, the provision of information alone does not constitute Early Warning. Such information should serve a specific purpose. One of the critical issues is the origin of the information and data, and the time frame in which it has been developed. The receiver of such a forecast and what is done with the information provided become critical in determining the success or failure of an Early Warning system.

## **EARLY WARNING, FOR WHOM?**

The possible clients of Early Warning information and forecasts could include four main entities, namely the OAU member states, the Secretary-General of the OAU, the OAU Central Organ and non-government organisations (NGOs). These represent the obvious consumers of an Early Warning system that could be employed both to anticipate conflicts and even to avoid them by securing changes in the conditions identified as possible causes of such an impending conflict.

Early Warning should be directed at those parties that could best utilise it for a specific situation. Consequently, choices will be required on the part of those who assemble early warning reports. According to Gordenker<sup>5</sup>, these choices are essentially political judgements about who will respond, in which way and for what reasons. In some instances, early warnings could have negative effects on conflict situations, or even on the organisation receiving the data.

## **POLITICS OF EARLY WARNING**

Discussion on early warning is bound to be controversial, particularly when interpretations of issues such as sovereignty and forms of interventions differ, as is currently evident in Africa. There are political dangers involved, especially in the light of the fact that the very issue of establishing the Mechanism in the OAU was supported by all but two member states. Recently, some scepticism has been expressed on the viability of an Early Warning system in Africa, by a number of states that have been party to the establishment of the Mechanism. There is a real danger that the forecasting agency may be criticised or even repressed by governments who very often react defensively towards external criticism. The same reaction can be expected from social groups that violate the rights of others. Thus, the form that an

Early Warning system takes on and the level of transparency that it attains, could have an important bearing on its results.

While early warning is an integral and necessary tool for any mechanism to prevent and manage conflict, prevention may not always be possible. However, Early Warning allows for action that may affect the political causes of conflict in particular. Ted Robert Gurr and James Scarritt<sup>6</sup> have determined that there are at least 261 minority groups at risk in 99 countries. Gurr's work with Barbara Harff<sup>7</sup> on state repression of groups considered as 'outsiders', indicates that there have been 44 instances of genocide and politicide in all world regions since 1945, with estimated casualties numbering between seven and sixteen million people. Rudolph Rummel<sup>8</sup> contends that, "*the world-wide risk of being killed by one's own government because of one's race, ethnic group, politics, etc. is more than three times greater than the risk of war.*" Focusing specifically on Africa, Gurr<sup>9</sup> indicates that

- since 1960, 28 full-fledged civil wars have been fought in Africa, in addition to the protracted proto-revolutionary conflict in South Africa; and
- eleven genocides and politicides occurred in Africa between 1960 and the late 1980's, compared with 24 elsewhere in the world.

The worst may still lie in the future if Africa remains a spectator to its own demise. In another global survey of minorities at risk of involvement in future conflict, and at risk of victimisation, Gurr and Scarritt<sup>10</sup> identified 74 such communal groups among 29 per cent of the total regional population in Africa, a proportion far higher than in any other region in the world.

In the context of the OAU, this is further complicated by the commitment to non interference in the 'internal affairs' of other states as contained in the OAU Charter. This does not augur well for Early Warning systems and the prevention of conflict on the continent. Furthermore, the issue of prevention will call for peacekeeping, actual military intervention, peacemaking and peacebuilding, Galtung's<sup>11</sup> famous tripartite classification of peace strategies. In this context, peacebuilding entails the need to change attitudes, encourage contact between ordinary people in conflict situations, economic development, confidence-building measures, education to enhance mutual understanding, technical assistance and co-operation between states to reduce conflict.

The nature of the OAU as an intergovernment organisation casts some doubt on whether a reliable system could in fact develop. Assuming that indicators of conflict would be similar to those regarding human rights violations, the Secretariat of the OAU could be criticised for bringing such issues to the fore.

## **THE OAU'S ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT**

Although considerable discussion and thought have been devoted in the international arena to the development of Early Warning systems over the last decade, no reliable, functional mechanism to provide authoritative early warning information exists, let alone one concentrated on African conflict. It is clear, therefore, that neither generally accepted conceptual and organisational frameworks for early warning, nor a practical system under active management, has as yet emerged.

If Africa is to move away from the hemorrhagic effects of conflict towards sustained and sustainable economic and social development, the OAU will need to operationalise a system of Early Warning which will facilitate preventive diplomacy efforts. Early Warning strategies and arrangements will have to be developed step-by-step over a longer period of time. The first step, in terms of institutional establishment, has already been taken. The OAU's Conflict Management Centre can serve as a foundation where an embryonic African Early Warning system can marshal its resources and stimulate policy-making and strategies. Here the efforts of member states, NGOs, research bodies and the Secretariat can come together in a creative manner to nurture the development of early warning and preventive arrangements.

According to the Declaration through which the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution at the OAU has been formed, it has the following structure:

- It is built around a Central Organ, composed of the states which are members of the Bureau of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, elected annually, with the Secretary-General and the Secretariat as its operational arm. It convenes every

month at ambassadorial level, twice a year at ministerial level, and once a year at the level of Heads of State and Government.

- Within the context of the Mechanism, the OAU is mandated to co-ordinate its activities closely with African regional and sub-regional organisations, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and co-operate, where appropriate, with neighbouring countries with regard to conflict arising in the different sub-regions of the continent. This is based on the understanding that these regional and sub-regional organisations and countries are more familiar with local issues within the subregion in question.
- Similarly, the OAU has been mandated to co-operate and work more closely with the United Nations, not only with regard to issues related to peacemaking, but also and especially those related to peacekeeping. In like manner, the Secretary General of the OAU will maintain close co-operation with other relevant international organisations.

To be effective, the Conflict Management Centre (which should have the best possible system to gather and analyse information and for making the results of these analyses available to the Secretary-General) will need to put a co-operation system in place with member states, NGOs, UN agencies, church-related organisations, media, academic and research institutions, and sub-regional organisations. These bodies will constitute so-called 'focal points'. It is only a truly co-operative approach to early warning networks that will have any chance of operating successfully.

The net should be cast as wide as possible. Not only should the focal points and sources of information be based over a wide area, but the target of action should also be broad. Responsibility for early warning and preventive action should be shared extensively if it is to be successful. Included in the activities should be, amongst others, the media, NGOs, expert groups, and member states, all of which may be in a better position to obtain preventive or remedial action than the Secretary-General or the Central Organ.<sup>12</sup>

## **MANAGEMENT CYCLE OF EARLY WARNING**

The receipt or availability of information from the various focal points alone does not constitute an Early Warning system. The Conflict Management Division would need to receive data such as that generated by Gurr and Scarritt's 'Minorities at Risk' project. The responsible officers should be able to visit any conflict zone and communicate in person with parties directly involved to obtain first-hand information about the situation, such as the role of the various parties to the conflict, the nature of the tensions, recent developments and the potential consequences for peace and stability within Africa.

If the officers undertaking the analysis and evaluation of the information determine that there is a *prima facie* risk of potential conflict, they would issue an early warning, which would be communicated promptly to the Secretary-General. He, in turn, could decide in close consultation with the Central Organ to enter into further contact and closer consultation with the parties concerned to attempt to find a solution. The Secretary General would need to take such early warnings seriously to ensure that the Early Warning system is optimally utilised. Admittedly, early warnings could also yield negative consequences and worsen a situation.

Early warning is ultimately aimed to assist in addressing the 'root causes' of conflict and must allow for the development of proper understanding of situations, their development, conditions for resolution and guidance to better settlement. It entails ways of forestalling or alleviating the worst effects of conflict, including early intervention to transform or resolve conflicts.

Focal points are a crucial and an integral part of any Early Warning system. They represent the people on the ground, and are closer to the pulse of conflict. They will need to be trained to be aware of the importance of their work, as well as the nature of indicators constituting situations that warrant early warning. The Management Centre will have to provide the criteria for assessment, specific indicators, types and formats of information required. Once this information is received by the Management Centre, it will be processed and analysed by the 'experts' to evaluate the extent to which the situation may involve warning signs.

## METHODOLOGIES OF EARLY WARNING

The management of the Early Warning system will have to be based on a number of methodologies, in addition to the active work carried out by the focal points. Below are some of the information and activities that could constitute the initial parameters for the OAU Early Warning system:

- historical surveys and analyses of events;
- analyses of the content of documents and reports;
- comparative analyses of relevant information;
- physical inspections and field visits;
- statistical sampling and inference;
- operations research techniques;
- economic and econometric analysis; and
- modelling and remote sensing.

As far as possible, the majority of the information should be stored in the database which has already been developed by the Management Centre. It contains, amongst others, four broad categories of information, namely:

- a profile of all countries in crisis (red zone);
- a profile of all countries that have early warning signs of crisis (orange zone);
- a profile of all other remaining countries (green zone); and
- a profile of eminent persons who can be called upon to act as envoys, mediators, or eminent persons, on behalf of the Secretary-General of the OAU.

Further efforts should be made to expand this databank to include other relevant issues, such as the 'Minorities at Risk' project.

## TIME-SPAN

The time-span of the indicators of a pending crisis warranting Early Warning, can be seen as long, medium and short-term. The determination of time-span is the responsibility of the 'experts' at the Conflict Management Centre. The precise length of these times will probably remain somewhat arbitrary, as each incident of conflict has its own particular characteristics. The time-span depends partially on the type of Early Warning signal that is evident. If it has to do with related causes of immediate problems, the time-span must be short-term. If it has to do with the development of more fundamental social trends, then the perspective will be long-term, extending over years and even decades. The medium-term frame probably extends over months and includes readily discernible reasons for conflict.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on a number of challenges that could be confronted in the project to establish an OAU Early Warning system for the prevention and management of conflict situations. It has also indicated that it is an idea with specific relevance for the present, and a concept that could work successfully. Its development depends especially on the choice of an appropriate, clear theoretical basis for understanding the causes of conflict and on a scheme for using the results of analysis. Engaging in conflict prevention without an Early Warning system is like entering into a cave without a torch.

## ENDNOTES

1. C.J. Bakwesegha, *Conflict Situations in Africa in the context of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution*. Lecture at African Centre, London, UK, November 1994.
2. T.S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970.
3. K. Rupesinghe and M. Kuroda (eds.), *Early Warning and Conflict Resolution*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1992.
4. M. Kuroda, *Early Warning Capacity of the UN System*, in *ibid.*, p. 217.
5. L. Gordenker, *Early Warning of Refugee Incidents: Potentials and Obstacles*, in G. Loescher and L. Monahan (eds.), *Refugees and International Relations*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1989.
6. T.R. Gurr and J. Scarritt, *Minorities Rights at Risk: A Global Survey*, Human Rights Quarterly 11, August 1989, pp. 375 - 405.

7. B. Harff and T.R. Gurr, *Toward Empirical Theory of Genocides and Politicides: Identification and Measurement of Cases since 1945*, *International Studies Quarterly* 32(3), September 1988, pp. 359 - 371.
8. R. Rummel, *Deadlier than War*, *Institute of Public Affairs Review* 41(2), August - October 1987, pp. 24 - 30.
9. Harff and Gurr, *op. cit.*
10. Gurr and Scarritt, *op. cit.*
11. J. Galtung, Three Approaches to Peace, 'Peacekeeping, Peace Making and Peace Building', in J. Galtung (ed.), *Essays in Peace Research*, Ejlers, Copenhagen, 1976.
12. In other words, co-operation and interface between first and second track diplomacy. 'Second track diplomacy' is a term coined by Diplomat Joseph Montville to refer to unofficial, non-government efforts to begin a constructive dialogue between conflicting parties, often in situations where governments and state regional organisations (at the first track level) have failed to do so (see Montville and Davidson, 1981/82, Montville, 1990). Montville's fellow diplomat and second track advocate, Ambassador John McDonald (McDonald and Bendahmane, 1987), with Louise Diamond, has identified additional 'tracks' relevant to problem-solving conflict resolution (Diamond and McDonald, June 1991).

## APPENDIX

### SUMMARY RECORD OF THE SEMINAR FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT, WITHIN THE OAU, OF AN EARLY WARNING SYSTEM ON CONFLICT SITUATIONS IN AFRICA\*

#### PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1. A four-day Seminar organised by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) on the establishment of an Early Warning System (EWS) on Conflict Situations in Africa within the OAU, was held from 15 to 18 January 1996, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
2. Participants in the Seminar included representatives of member states of the OAU and NGOs, as well as scholars, journalists and eminent personalities. The Seminar was also attended by representatives from intergovernment organisations, the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (UNDHA) and some specialist agencies of the UN.
3. The objectives of the Seminar were the following:

*"To provide a forum for the exchange of information, with a view to bringing conceptual clarity and coherence on the measures to be undertaken, as well as the modalities for putting in place an Early Warning system on conflict situations in Africa. To this effect, the Seminar will examine, how to strengthen the capacity of the Mechanism in data collection analysis and information exchange, to support its function of anticipating and preventing conflicts. The Seminar will also explore ways and means of enhancing the capacity of decision-making organs of the OAU Mechanism in providing a timely and decisive response to crisis situations in Africa.*

*To identify actors within the member states of the OAU, the Regional Economic Grouping (REGs), UN Secretariat and the relevant UN agencies and other institutions, who will serve as focal points for the work of the Early Warning network.*

*To examine infrastructural needs and logistical requirements to put such an Early Warning network in place.*

*To establish a framework for determining human resource requirements and training for staff in Early Warning.*

*To provide an opportunity for public awareness-building and information*

*about the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution."*

4. The Seminar was opened by H.E. Dr Salim Ahmed Salim, Secretary General of the OAU, Ato. Dawit Yohannes, President of the National Assembly of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Dr K.Y. Amoako, United Nations Under Secretary-General, and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).
5. In his opening remarks, the Secretary-General of the OAU emphasised that it was expected of the Seminar to make concrete and result-oriented proposals on how the envisaged Early Warning system could be established within the OAU. The objective of the system is to provide the required capacity for the timely analysis and communication of relevant information on which estimates, the defining of options and conclusions could be based that would enable policy-makers within the OAU to take appropriate decisions.
6. According to the Secretary-General, an Early Warning system with a strong analytical base has the potential to be an essential element in enhancing the efficiency of the Mechanism and thus enabling it to respond more effectively to challenges facing it. In this way, an Early Warning system within the OAU would enhance the capacity of the Organisation to promote peace, security and stability in the region through anticipation and prevention of situations that are likely to disrupt regional harmony, resulting in a negative impact on Africa's efforts at economic and other development.
7. The Secretary-General has also emphasised the requirement to develop an efficient and cost-effective capacity at OAU Headquarters, linked to OAU field offices and missions, as well as regional economic groupings (REGs) that could facilitate data collection and analysis for consideration by the Central Organ and the Secretary-General. Moreover, he emphasised the importance of close co-operation with the United Nations.
8. While recognising the primary and overarching responsibility of the United Nations, it is his belief that Africa also has a role to play in maintaining peace and security in the regions, whether in support of United Nations efforts or through its own initiatives. In this context, the OAU is convinced of the importance of establishing a co-ordinating Mechanism to enhance co-operation between the two organisations and in pursuance of the common goals.
9. Ato. Dawit Yohannes, President of the National Assembly of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, emphasised the need for effective co-ordination to avoid duplication and minimise costs. He welcomed the initiative of the UN Secretary-General in support of Africa's efforts, in an attempt to address the scourge of conflict in Africa. He strongly emphasised the inter-relatedness of economic under-development and conflict, and stressed that Africa must assume its responsibility in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts on the continent.
10. In his introductory remarks, Dr K.Y. Amoako, the United Nations Under Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, said that achieving enduring peace, security and stability in Africa is an over-riding objective and a basic precondition for sustained growth, development and prosperity. In this regard, he emphasised that conflict prevention is the most crucial, most rewarding and the only cost effective kind of intervention.
11. The Executive Secretary pointed out that the failure to maintain peace and stability has delayed development in large parts of Africa. In this regard, he explained the content of the UN Secretary-General's Special Initiative in Africa, which proposes, amongst others, specific efforts to strengthen peacemaking and peacebuilding according to four themes and referred to as 'Give Development a Chance'. He stressed the fact that strengthening the capacity of the OAU for peacebuilding and conflict resolution was an important component of the initiative.
12. Dr Amoako informed the Seminar that the ECA will continue to work closely with the OAU and added that their Pan African Development Information



System (PADIS) has much to offer to the OAU's Early Warning system in data collection and international contacts. Specific proposals have already been made to the OAU in this regard.

13. The Executive Secretary also informed the Seminar that, subject to Ethiopia's complete connection to the Internet, the OAU would benefit from envisaged ECA network facilities and resources including:

- \* a bulletin board system (BBS) at national level for emergency information, monitoring and management of conflicts;

- \* e-mail computer access for quick and continuous exchange of information between relevant emergency personnel;

- \* ECA expertise in information network development and management.

## **PART II: IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS RELATED TO THE OBJECTIVES OF THE SEMINAR**

1. Participants at the OAU Seminar for the establishment of an Early Warning system on conflict situations in Africa, engaged in a constructive and frank exchange of views on how to achieve the five key objectives of the OAU aimed at operationalising the decision to establish a continental Early Warning system.
2. In undertaking this exercise, the participants were guided by stimulating papers presented by experts and resource persons, who provided both the theoretical and contextual framework for action.
3. On the primary objective of providing a forum for the exchange and processing of information, as well as enhancing the decision-making capacity of the OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, the following have been discussed:

- \* It was agreed in general that the establishment of an Early Warning capacity by the OAU was imperative, if the Organisation was to achieve its mandate of preventing conflict. In this regard, the major focus was on enhancing the OAU's capacity to collect and manage information as a key goal for preventive diplomatic action.

- \* It was recognised that there was a proven relationship between socio-economic underdevelopment and conflict situations. Many participants stressed the fact that underdevelopment, poverty and environmental degradation were sources of, and urgent warning signals for conflict.

- \* The limitations and difficulties of obtaining information in a timely manner were highlighted. Sometimes, government regulations impeded the flow of information as a result of different interpretations of the concepts of sovereignty and non-interference. Therefore, governments were encouraged to provide the required information for facilitating early action.

- \* The changing nature and complexity of conflict were acknowledged. The fluidity of intra-state conflicts, for example inter-ethnic confrontation, made prediction difficult. Failure to pay sufficient attention to Early Warning tools for analysis sometimes tended to inhibit effective multilateral action. The urgent need to develop the capacity of the OAU for early warning and peacemaking was repeatedly stressed by experts and participants in the Seminar.

- \* The need for the OAU to demystify early warning and to formulate realistic resource and personnel requirements for preventive diplomacy was underscored. A further point that was emphasised was the need to match resources to personnel, and to give priority to the consideration of strategic contingency plans for non-military responses, through a division of labour involving the use of eminent persons, NGOs, etc., who should all be part of a



structured approach to preventive action.

\* It was also stressed that strategic constituencies needed to be mobilised for preventive action. According to some, such action could involve building national platforms, establishing a database of information brokers undertaking peace and fact-finding missions, as well as problem-solving workshops, where those involved in a conflict could meet in a non-adversarial way. Early action could take place at every stage of a conflict, whether incipient or full-blown.

\* In terms of enhancing the decision-making process of the OAU, the point was made that in the light of the new and complex nature of intra-state conflicts, a learning period was necessary for the decision-making organs of the OAU Mechanism. In particular, it was felt that the authority of the Central Organ would grow as its involvement in conflict resolution increased.

\* It was identified that information on several issues was necessary, not only on political situations, but also on socio-economic conditions. Quantifiable statistics could be useful, but should never be isolated from qualitative assessments of real-life experiences, relationships and problems. It was stressed that data with both long and short-term relevance should be collected, and that confidentiality should be respected, but not over-emphasised. In all cases, verification, interpretation and evaluation of the available information were of the utmost importance.

\* The history of a situation should be considered, but the main focus should be on the essence of an emerging problem. It should not be assumed, however, that a problem had just one cause. When a particular situation revealed similarities to a previously known situation, important differences should also be investigated.

\* The major objective of gathering and assessing such information was to arrive at an informed judgement and to make a responsible decision about an appropriate response. Such a response could be planned in the direction of preventive diplomacy and also in the direction of early political action. All peace operations should, from the very beginning, be planned carefully and co-ordinated properly.

4. On the second objective of identifying actors to serve as focal points for the proposed Early Warning network:

\* Participants underscored the fact that the co-ordinating role of the Early Warning system would rest with the OAU, supported by other actors at national, sub regional and regional levels.

\* The potential role that sub-regional organisations can play was debated. It was mentioned that this level would be important for information collection and dissemination, because of its closer proximity to the conflict situation, which would provide the opportunity to assess potential conflict better.

\* The OAU assured the Seminar that it did not intend to duplicate the advanced efforts of the United Nations and its specialised agencies, such as UNHCR, CDR Data Base and HEWS. The enormous contributions that those institutions could make to the OAU's efforts was stressed. The point was made that there was no contradiction in the OAU and the United Nations being involved in a conflict, especially at the level of the Security Council, with its global responsibility for peace and security. On the contrary, there was consensus that the OAU and the UN should co-ordinate and complement each other closely in efforts of preventive diplomacy and Early Warning. Yet the Mechanism can rightfully be appraised and applied as Africa's response to its own problems.

\* It was also felt that the OAU should liaise and utilise the vast reservoir of expertise and knowledge available in Africa directly from governments, universities, research institutes, the media, NGOs, civil society in general, and traditional and local authorities.

\* Special emphasis was placed on the significant role that could be played by NGOs who often had access to information from which other organisations were barred.

\* The Seminar recognised the important role played by the media in providing news and early warning signals related to conflict situations in Africa.

\* Traditional authorities, local communities, well-informed individuals, and the whole of civil society were also recognised as important actors.

5. On the third objective of the Seminar - examining the infrastructural needs and logistical requirements of an Early Warning network:

\* Participants stressed the need for the OAU to develop an efficient and cost effective capacity at OAU Headquarters, linked to member states and especially regional organisations, to enhance the capacity for action by the Central Organ and the Secretary-General of the OAU. Additionally, it was also recognised that the establishment of data processing centres at regional level could be useful to enhance the operational capacity of the OAU.

\* There was widespread support for OAU proposals to develop a database and an analytical capacity at the General Secretariat. Additionally, it was acknowledged that access to the Internet would expand information sharing, that the OAU would benefit from e-Mail, as well as access to ECA's PADIS network, now linked to more than thirty countries in Africa.

\* Initially, much can be achieved with a relatively modest Early Warning system that could later be expanded into a more elaborate and sophisticated programme.

\* The Seminar recognised the importance of undertaking fact-finding missions to areas of tension in order to facilitate its defusing.

6. On the fourth objective of the Seminar - to establish a framework for determining the manpower requirements and training of OAU staff for the Early Warning system:

\* A shortage of human resources in the Conflict Management Division of the OAU was identified. The possibility of personnel seconded by member states could be considered.

\* The experience and expertise of individuals and local communities should be appreciated and utilised as far as possible. It would be helpful when fact-finding and/or field missions were established in a particular sub-region. In all such cases, however, close co-ordination and co-operation were necessary between the OAU and sub-regional organisations and arrangements. This obviously included the appropriate liaison with actors and focal points.

\* It was emphasised repeatedly that however remarkable an electronic system was, it had to be supplemented with human expertise, and that serious attention should constantly be directed at the already existing qualifications of people and the further development of their knowledge and skills through appropriate and advanced training.

\* Participants acknowledged the need to adopt tools and methodology for human resource development and in particular, attention should be paid to

the evolution of conceptual and theoretical frameworks for early preventive action through learning and research.

\* Many participants, especially those from the UN, promised the co-operation of their organisations and institutions to assist the OAU in achieving the task at hand.

\* On the fifth objective of developing public awareness of the OAU Mechanism:

\* Participants stressed the need for knowledge about the OAU Mechanism to be disseminated outside Africa. Within Africa, the objective should be to ensure that the Mechanism reaches out to all societies.

\* The OAU should strengthen its capacity for media relations. In particular, the extensive and powerful influence of the radio may be profitably utilised across Africa.

\* It was generally felt that the formulation of short and long-term approaches that would enhance political education on the activities of the Mechanism would be most useful at this point in time.

\* The Seminar took note of the need to mobilise strategic constituencies and to build national platforms for preventive action, and suggested that peace missions to conflict areas should be organised by the OAU, along with the setting up of a database on fact-finding missions in order to avoid duplication.

\* It was emphasised that one of the most important ways of building support for and public awareness of the Mechanism was through respect for the principles enunciated in the OAU Charter, principles that should underpin the OAU's Early Warning system.

\* The need to decentralise data collection for the OAU's Early Warning system was acknowledged. It was felt that such a system should be flexible enough to ensure rapid and efficient decision-making.

### **PART III: RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The Seminar strongly recommends that the envisaged Early Warning system should function under the exclusive control and as the responsibility of the OAU and its policy making organs. Moreover, it should function as an instrument in the hands of the OAU and its member states and should be transparent. In this regard, the Seminar recommends that the Early Warning system is supported, as far as possible, by expertise available from within Africa.
2. The Seminar is convinced that the adverse socio-economic conditions and environmental degradation evident in so many parts of Africa, are serious early warning signals, which require effective short and long-term strategic planning for sustainable development. In this regard, the Seminar recommends close monitoring of socio-economic indicators in order to plan for early action.
3. The concept of Early Warning should be understood as comprising not only of the gathering, analysis and dissemination of information, and informed decision-making, but also and more critically as providing the framework for actual and timely implementation of appropriate diplomatic and preventive action. In this regard, it is recommended that the Early Warning system is established by the OAU as a modest and realistic, but efficient undertaking, that could be expanded on an incremental basis.
4. The Seminar recognises the limited human resource and analytical capacity of the Mechanism and strongly urges OAU member states, the UN and the international community, to continue to extend all possible financial support and technical assistance to ensure the realisation of the objectives of the Mechanism.

5. In order to overcome the institutional limitations of the Mechanism, the OAU is advised to formulate clear, manageable and realisable proposals to attract funding for human resource development.
6. The Seminar endorses the proposal to identify focal points on the level of member states, regional organisations and other interested parties. In this regard, it recommends the strengthening of diplomatic representation to the OAU to provide the necessary support for the realisation of the aims and objectives of the Early Warning system.
7. The Seminar realises that the essential problem is often not early warning, but rather the political will, preparedness and ability to act appropriately. The Seminar therefore recommends that the aspect of political will in support of an Early Warning system should be promoted.
8. The Seminar endorses the OAU's intention to continue working in close co-operation with the UN and recommends that the OAU should follow up on the implementation of the Special Initiative of the UN Secretary General as a matter of urgency. Furthermore, it is also recommended that the OAU and ECA should work out modalities on how to make full use of the existing information facilities within the ECA, especially the Pan African Development Information System.
9. Lack of norms for good governance is recognised as one of the root causes of instability in Africa. In this regard, the Seminar recommends the promotion of respect for human rights, popular participation, freedom of expression, transparency and accountability.
10. The Seminar notes that NGOs are already establishing extensive networks and that it would be beneficial for the OAU to participate in these networks. The Seminar therefore recommends that the OAU should give consideration to an open-ended consultative forum of NGOs to meet regularly in Addis Ababa and provide their insight to the OAU Secretariat.
11. The Seminar was informed of the existence of more than eight databases monitoring conflict situations around the world. The Seminar therefore recommends that the OAU should obtain an inventory of relevant projects and explore how links with such databases could enhance the operational capacity of the Mechanism.
12. The Seminar recommends that the OAU considers publishing an annual survey of conflict on the continent. Such a survey could be used by the Secretariat for preventive action or resolution.
13. The Seminar recommends that a follow-up mechanism be established in the form of a strategy group to assist the OAU with strategic planning regarding the establishment of the envisaged Early Warning system.

\*This report is published in its original format, with several smaller grammatical corrections.