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Report of the 5th International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR)

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5th International Conference on the Great Lakes Region: *"African Mechanisms for Conflict Transformation: Ownership and Expansion"*

Kigali, Nobleza Hotel, March 21st-22nd, 2013

Preliminary Report

By Charles RUTIKANGA and Ernest MUTWARASIBO

Introduction

This conference was organized by the Center for Conflict Management (CCM) of the National University of Rwanda (NUR) with support from the *Swedish International Development Agency* (SIDA). The two-day Conference brought together various academic, policy makers and practitioners who produced a critical and enriching review of home grown solutions within the African Great Lakes Regions.

As it was noticed during the conference, such review would serve policy-makers from the ICGLR member states to canalize their decisions in the area of peace and conflict transformation. This review and expansion of home-made solutions would, as expressed by participants at the conference, shall make it possible to increase the socio-political stability and security, a huge need of the Region. That is why, as said Prof Paul Rutayisire, CCM Director, for the 5th conference on ICGLR, preference had been given to proposals that addressed and contributed to important and interdisciplinary questions and controversies, including gender perspectives, case studies, empirical research and comparative analysis.

It goes without saying that the following subthemes were chosen to lead presentations and discussions in this conference:

- *Justice sand reconciliation*
- *Conflict Transformation*
- *Restoring community and national unity*

- *Structural conflict and transformation*

In his speech of opening remarks, Dr Augustin Rudacogora, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Media and Social Sciences at the National University of Rwanda, on behalf of NUR Rector and on behalf of the Minister of Education stated that the theme of the conference was very suitable for the African Great Lakes Region since it has been for a long time a hub of conflicts. *"For the last decades up to now, Great lakes region has been a zone of conflicts and wars. In fact, when there are conflicts in one member state, they affect other neighboring countries. Our region needs to stand as one and develop the culture of home grown solutions to handle our problems. There is a call upon researchers to be engaged and play a key role in this process to advance knowledge about that culture"* Dr Rudacogora said.

During the plenary sessions, both remarkable academics and practitioners in the areas of peace and conflicts transformation came back on the necessity of expanding experiences of 'home-made' mechanisms. Reflecting on Rwanda's Gacaca Courts, Prof. Paul Rutayisire said: "*Gacaca jurisdictions are genuine Rwandan courts. After Genocide against Tutsi in 1994, these traditional courts known as Gacaca were contextualized with post Genocide situation in order to serve the justice. In less than 15 years, these courts accomplished the work which can be accomplished with classic courts in hundreds of years. This is a substantial example that in case Africans can use their knowledge and resources they are able to handle their problems without a direct support from outside*".

Presenting on idea of African mechanisms of conflicts transformation and peace building, Prof Tony Karbo, from the University for Peace Africa Program in Addis-Ababa, indicates that there is hope that Africa can develop the culture of home grown solutions. He said: "*With the determination that Africans are coming up with starting with African union and sub regional organizations, heads of states and government to take the responsibility of building peace in societies in Africa, there is hope that Africans can own their problems and commit themselves to find solutions of their problems.*" Prof. Karbo also notified that the international community support to resolve local problems can't be excluded however it can be welcomed as secondary to the local leadership efforts. "International interventions can't be ruled out. The sense is that

much responsibility has to be taken by local leaders, communities; international community can play a different role for example assisting African union or sub regional organizations in material or financial ways. The leadership of any intervention in the conflict on the continent should be taken by local people," explained Prof, Tony Karbo.

After the plenary session, participants continued their discussions in workshops. From there, various persons reflecting different backgrounds, who managed to attend this conference from Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and some speakers from out of Great Lakes region such as Ethiopia and South Africa, formulated the following resolutions and recommendations:

1. Increase of Trust in local-based and traditional Mechanisms in post-Conflict Transformation and in post-genocide Reconstruction
2. Ensuring local African community's full participation in home-grown approaches of peace research and Conflict Transformation
3. Commendation of a Holistic approach in conflict transformation scenarios
4. Deeply contextualize the whole history of suffering through which a community went in order to suggest applicable solutions
5. Understanding and presenting **Justice** and **Reconciliation** as complementary instead of separate/opponent. 'What is wrong is justice righting?' should lead the considerations on Reconciliation as an outcome of Justice.
6. Protect Gacaca's outcomes in post-genocide Rwanda so that parts of them should be used for other minor issues and or 'adapted' to other situations in and outside Rwanda.
7. Join efforts to sensitize about the 'Protocol against Illicit manufacturing and trafficking of firearms within the ICGLR
8. Set up a holistic integration of ex-combatants in post-warring communities within the ICGLR for both their individual life and the national peace building initiatives.
9. Incorporate 'Fighting Stigma against former child soldiers' within governments and civil society programs
10. Need to contextualize 'Forgiveness' in its specific conditions so that it remained a personal decision instead of a way to political agenda
11. Thinking about more comparative studies on home-made mechanisms within ICGLR

12. Develop efficient mechanisms to fight against the dehumanization of the 'other' and for conflicts/genocide early warning within ICGLR

13. Conduct many debates and studies on various aspects and outcomes of Memory in post-crisis situations

14. Supporting the construction of strong States in order to make it possible for local initiatives and sustainable peace

15. Lesson learning practices among ICGLR member States in the area of peace building and conflict transformation

16. Referring to Decentralization/Democracy more as a Dynamic Process instead of a fixed Way to follow

17. To Fill in the knowledge-gap on competing and some conflicting discourses of democracy in the region

18. Set up sustainable mechanisms for solving land-based litigations within the ICGLR

19. Strengthening civil society organizations for them to assist in the sustainability of local mechanisms of conflict transformation

20. Create a network of scholars across the region that could impact policy makers and civil society organizations in the area of peace, Conflict transformation as well as genocide prevention