Dr. Gretchen Eick

Members of the Global learning center

Ladies and Gentleman

I have titled my remarks here as: Inter Ethnic Conflict: A general Framework

An ethnic group is a social group with a common culture. Shared language, values, beliefs, etc.

Africa is rich with ethnic diversity. My own country Uganda has 27 such groups.

The Frequency and Intensity of conflict in the emerging states of Africa has created an availability heuristic about ethnic conflict in Africa; it appears a never ending cycle.

We have had major conflicts in:

* Egypt, Libya, Algeria and S. Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia
* The Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Rwanda and Kenya
* Nigeria, Chad, Cote D’ivoire, Liberia and Serra Leone Etc.

Some of the conflicts such as those in The Darfur Region of the Sudan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone have been raised to levels of Genocide.

One is therefore quick to ask:

* Why is Africa so vulnerable to ethnic violence?
* Why can’t these people live together peacefully?

My answer; Most Ethnic groups in Africa;

* Live/work together
* Coexist peacefully
* Intermarry; and much more.

My thesis: Ethnic diversity is not the driving factor. It has been used as a tool by those seeking power, scarce but valuable resources and wealth to divide people and sometimes kill people. Such people have repeated such practices because it has worked for them and because of lack of institutionalized checks on such abuse of power.

Several years ago my major professor and I contributed three chapters to books an African security issues. At the time, it was easy to trace ethnic and religious strife to:

* slavery networks
* partitioning of African in 1884 without regard to traditional ethnic boundaries
* divide and rule strategies used by colonial powers to play one ethnic group against the other
* the parochial tendencies of the independence movements.

In my estimation, important as these factors are, they cannot sufficiently explain the continuing conflict. They can’t explain what happened in Rwanda, Ethnic cleansing of non-Arabs in the Darfur region, the activities of Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al Shabab in Somalia, The continuing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the 1991 post-election conflict in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Cote D’ivoire or Chad.

So, what appears to be the issues at work:

* Colonial History and neocolonial linkages
* The drop in the price of coffee ( in 1989 in Rwanda)
* World Bank and IMF polices that devalues African currencies that often leads to economic collapse
* Interests of international AID agencies
* Attitude of western countries toward Africa (especially USA and France)
* Ethnic entrepreneurs/ elites that exploit ethnic thinking and mobilization
* The never ending sense of relative deprivation
* Lack of common National Identity that keeps people defining themselves in ethnic terms
* Global Economic integration of these countries into an unfair economic world system

These factors appear to combine in different ways to produce perpetual conflict and sometimes genocide.

**Sources**

Richard Robbins. Global Problems and the Culture of Capitalism (Allyn & Bacon 1992, 2002)

V.A. Olorunsola and Dan Muhwezi. “State Responses to Disintegration and Withdrawal” in Donald Rothchild. The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa. Westview Press. Boulder. 1988.