HORN OF AFRICA SECURITY DIALOGUE 2026

Navigating Regional Resilience and Security in an era of Declining International Aid

Conference Report

MARCH 12-13, 2026

HORN INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

KONRAD ADENAUER STIFTUNG

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Joint Role in Convening the Conference

The HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies (HORN) and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa jointly convened the Horn of Africa Security Dialogue 2026 to provide a high-level platform for policymakers, experts, and practitioners to engage with the most pressing questions of regional peace and security in an era of dramatically declining international aid. Now in its sixth iteration as a joint convening, this two-day conference brought together government officials, regional organisation representatives, security and humanitarian practitioners, diplomats, researchers, and civil society actors from across the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region.

Through this collaboration, the two institutions sought to promote informed dialogue grounded in credible research and regional expertise; strengthen cooperation among regional and international stakeholders; support the development of actionable policy recommendations to enhance regional stability; and contribute to collective efforts to address aid dependency, institutional reform, and the long-term sustainability of African-led peace and security financing. Together, the convenors reaffirmed their commitment to fostering sustainable peace, strengthening regional institutions, and advancing security and development in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region.

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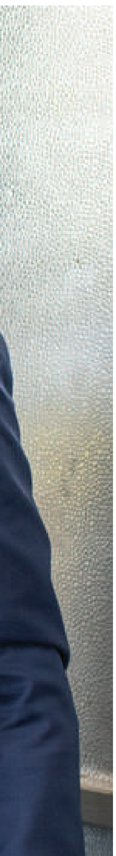

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
ASF	African Standby Force
ATMIS	African Union Transition Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
AUSSOM	African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia
CEWS	Continental Early Warning System
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EAC	East African Community
EACRF	East African Community Regional Force
EASF	Eastern Africa Standby Force
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
ISS	Institute for Security Studies

ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
KAS	Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MINUSCA	UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR
MONUSCO	UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
P/CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PSC	Peace and Security Council (AU)
REC	Regional Economic Community
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNITAMS	UN Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
USD	United States Dollar
WFP	World Food Programme

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Acknowledgements

The HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa wish to express their sincere gratitude to all individuals and organisations that contributed to the success of the Horn of Africa Security Dialogue 2026. This conference was made possible through the collective commitment of many dedicated professionals, and its outcomes reflect the collaborative spirit that has defined the long-standing partnership between the two institutions. Special thanks go to the KAS Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa for its generous support in hosting this event, and to the Conference Organising Committee, whose dedication ensured the seamless planning and delivery of a successful convening: Hassan Khannenje, Ph.D., Director, HORN Institute, Edmond J. Pamba, Ag. Associate Director, Research, Innovation and Development, HORN Institute, Jeremy Oronje, Research Assistant,

HORN Institute, Edgar Mwine, Project Manager, KAS Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa, Bellon Twongyeirwe, Senior Finance and Administration, KAS Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa, Nasir Yusuf, Accountant and Admin Officer, HORN Institute, Elizabeth Radina, Ag. Associate Director, Partnerships, Outreach and Strategic Communications, HORN Institute, Susan Natumanya, Project Manager, KAS Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa, Ivy Ndung'u, Research Intern, HORN Institute, Juliet Uwera, Project Officer, KAS Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa, Bravin Onditi, Research Assistant, HORN Institute, Husna Maalim, Research and Communications Intern, HORN Institute, Judy Mbugua, Communications Intern, HORN Institute, Asha Hassan, Projects Officer, CSCR – The Peace Center and Evans Ombisa, DT Publisher, HORN Institute.

We acknowledge with deep appreciation the moderators of the conference sessions, whose intellectual rigour and facilitation skills ensured productive and substantive dialogue across all panels and plenary discussions: Dr Hassan Khannenje (Opening Session and Day One Chair), Mr Christopher Hockey, Senior Research Fellow, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Nairobi (Session I), Martine Zeuthen, Associate Fellow, RUSI (Session II), Professor Fred Jonyo, University of Nairobi (Session III), and Dr Halkano Wario, Egerton University (Session IV). We are equally grateful to the distinguished panellists who enriched the conference with their expertise, experience,

and candour: Ambassador Erastus Mwencha, Former Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission; Dr Meressa Kahsu Dessu, Programme Head, Training for Peace, Institute for Security Studies, Addis Ababa; Ambassador Mohamed Ali Guyo, IGAD Special Envoy for the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Somalia; Ambassador Maj Gen (Rtd) Fred Mugisha, Former Force Commander, AMISOM; Mr Partha Moman, London School of Economics; Monica Camacho, Head of Mission and Regional Representative, Médecins Sans Frontières; Joanina Karugaba, Senior Inter-Agency Coordination Officer, UNHCR; Michelle Nyandong, Peacebuilding and Security Expert; Professor Peter Kagwanja, Africa Policy Institute; Dr Nicodemus Minde, International Relations Scholar and Policy Analyst; and Dr Winluck Wahiu, Senior Adviser, Constitution-Building Processes, Africa and West Asia Region. Their thoughtful analyses on peace financing, humanitarian response, institutional reform, and regional security significantly shaped the outcomes of the conference.

We particularly acknowledge our keynote speaker, Dr Abraham Korir Sing'Oei, EBS, Principal Secretary, State Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Kenya, for his strategic and intellectually grounded address that set the tone for two days of rigorous dialogue. We also extend sincere appreciation to Mr Edgar Mwine, Project Manager, KAS Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa, for his opening remarks and sustained leadership throughout the convening process.

Finally, we thank all participants — government officials, diplomats, regional organisation representatives, security and humanitarian practitioners, academics, researchers, civil society actors, and the many young professionals who brought energy and fresh perspective to the discussions — for their active engagement and valuable contributions.

We also extend our appreciation to all service providers whose timely and professional support contributed to the smooth running of the event. It is through platforms such as this, and the continued commitment of all involved, that the HORN Institute and KAS will advance the cause of sustainable peace, resilience, and security across the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region.

Executive Summary

The Horn of Africa Security Dialogue 2026, co-convened by the HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa, was held on 12–13 March 2026 at the Radisson Blue Hotel, Nairobi. The conference brought together policymakers, security practitioners, humanitarian actors, regional organisation representatives, diplomats, and scholars to examine the implications of sharply declining international aid for peace operations, humanitarian response, and regional security architecture in the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region.

Discussions were anchored on the theme of navigating regional resilience and security in an era of declining international aid, and were structured across four sessions: peace operations amid funding cuts; conflict, displacement, and the shrinking humanitarian space; rethinking peace and security financing beyond aid dependency; and the way forward for revitalising regional security architecture.

The conference opened with a keynote address by Kenya's Principal Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Dr Abraham Korir Sing'Oei, who challenged participants to move beyond the assumption that aid is a solution and instead articulate five strategic propositions for African-owned security financing. These centred on investing in African institutions, expanding the AU Peace Fund to USD 1 billion, implementing UN Security Council Resolution 2719, building and deploying the Africa Standby Force, and establishing humanitarian logistics hubs within Africa.

Session I examined the structural, political, and operational dimensions of African peace operations in a context of declining funding. Panellists converged on a central finding: AU's normative frameworks are sound, but the fundamental deficit is political commitment by member states. The growing role of private security companies was identified as a competitive marketplace challenge that traditional peace operations must respond to pragmatically rather than ignore. The East African Community Regional Force's experience in the DRC was cited as a cautionary lesson on the consequences of inadequate command and control planning before deployment.

Session II produced the most emotionally charged analysis of the two days, with humanitarian practitioners documenting the ground-level consequences of aid cuts across the region. Of the USD 8.6 billion requested for the region in 2025, only 34 per cent was received. UNHCR's hyper-prioritisation — selecting 800,000 people out of five million for assistance — was described as 'the cruel math of aid cuts.' Critically, the session established that the collapse of humanitarian aid is not just a humanitarian crisis but a security crisis: communities deprived of food, services, and livelihoods become recruitment pipelines for Al-Shabaab and other armed groups, with charcoal production emerging as a direct terrorist financing mechanism.

Session III focused on rethinking financing mechanisms. Dr Nicodemus Minde's analysis of the AU Peace Fund found it to be an important but structurally insufficient instrument, with its USD 600 million target falling short of what a single major mission cost. The most realistic path forward was identified as a hybrid financing model combining UN assessed contributions, the AU facility, and diversified private and civil society contributions. Dr Winluck Wahiu examined institutional reform, identifying the broken link between the AU's Continental Early Warning System and early action as a critical dysfunction requiring urgent attention.

The final plenary generated forward-looking recommendations from across the room, including two direct interventions from younger participants who challenged the conference for marginalising youth voices and called for investment in technology to offset financial shortfalls in peace operations. Panellists highlighted that approximately USD 320 billion in recoverable resources — from government waste and illicit financial flows — exists within Africa and would more than suffice to finance the entire AU budget and all current peace missions. The conference produced the following headline findings. The shift in donor priorities represents a structural transformation, not a temporary dip, and African institutions must plan accordingly. The phrase 'African solutions to African problems' can only be meaningful if accompanied by African money. The AU Peace Fund, while a genuine advance, requires reform to become fit for purpose. The political economy of conflict — in which actors benefit from prolonged instability — is the deepest structural barrier to sustainable peace. The security-humanitarian nexus is not rhetorical: humanitarian collapse actively creates security crises. Africa's USD 3.7 trillion economy, diaspora networks, religious giving, and private capital are systematically under-mobilised for peace and security financing.

Background

Over the past two decades, regional peace and security architectures—particularly in conflict affected regions such as the Horn of Africa and the broader Sub-Saharan Africa—had been heavily reliant on external financing. Traditional security partners, notably the United States (US) and the European Union (EU), played a central role in funding peacekeeping operations, peacebuilding initiatives, humanitarian assistance, and post-conflict recovery efforts, either unilaterally or through multilateral frameworks such as the UN. At the UN level, peacekeeping operations alone consistently operated on annual budgets exceeding USD 6–7 billion, with Africa hosting the majority of active missions. Notably, several of these missions were concentrated in the Greater Horn of Africa, including operations in Sudan (UNITAMS), South Sudan (UNMISS), the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), and Somalia (AUSSOM).

However, the global aid and security landscape underwent a profound shift, with major donor states increasingly redirecting resources toward domestic priorities, thereby reducing available funding for overseas assistance. For instance, in 2025, the US government announced a major reduction in its foreign aid budget, with total US foreign assistance projected to fall to approximately $38.4 billion from about $61.8 billion in 2024, representing an estimated 38 per cent reduction in resources for development and humanitarian programming (Donor Tracker, 2025).

“... non-military path acknowledges the need for balancing between national security and human security dimensions of the conflict in Sudan”

Similarly, many EU member states—including France, Germany, and the UK—enacted aid cuts of up to 10%–18% in 2025, as they prioritized rising defence expenditures amid heightened geopolitical tensions in Europe (OECD, 2025). These dynamics introduced growing uncertainty regarding sustained support from traditional security and humanitarian donors.

This uncertainty came amid one of the most severe humanitarian crises in recent history. By the end of 2024, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region hosted approximately 26.3 million forcibly displaced people, including around 5.6 million refugees and asylum-seekers and 20.7 million internally displaced persons (UNHCR, 2025). Many of these were conflict displaced people and were heavily reliant on international humanitarian assistance for basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, and protection. The host states in the Horn of Africa were, however, predominantly low- and middle-income countries with limited fiscal space, constraining their ability to sustain long-term humanitarian and peace support responses independently.

Despite bearing a disproportionate share of the global displacement burden, domestic and regional resource mobilization for humanitarian assistance and peace and security across the Horn of Africa remained weak. While initiatives to establish predictable, African-led financing mechanisms, most notably the African Union’s Kigali Decision on Financing the Union, represented important normative progress, their practical impact was limited by persistent contribution arrears and insufficient political commitment by member states.

As a result, regional peace and security architectures continued to rely heavily on external funding, exposing them to vulnerabilities arising from shifting global donor priorities.

These dynamics underscored the urgent need for sustained, high-level and regionally grounded discussions on the future of peace, security, and humanitarian financing in the greater Horn of Africa, particularly within the context of a reduced-aid environment. It was against this backdrop that the HORN Institute, in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung – Regional Security Dialogue Programme, convened a regional conference aimed at exploring ways of strengthening self-reliance, advancing institutional reform, and rethinking peace and security frameworks to enhance their effectiveness, sustainability, and African ownership.

Objectives

The conference aimed to:

i. Examine the implications of shifting donor priorities for regional peace, security, and humanitarian situation in the Horn of Africa.

ii. Promote dialogue on institutional and policy reforms aimed at developing sustainable peace financing, resilience in humanitarian response and regional security.

iii. Generate actionable policy recommendations for navigating a declining aid order and securing peace financing, resilience and regional stability in the Horn of Africa.

Focus Areas

1. Regional Peacekeeping Missions in a Declining Aid Order
2. Conflict, Mass Displacement, and Humanitarian Assistance
3. Institutional Reform amid Shifting Donor Priorities

Target Audience

The conference convened government officials and policymakers; representatives from regional organizations; diplomats; security, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance experts; development and humanitarian organizations; as well as scholars, researchers, and policy analysts.

Expected Outcomes Outputs

iv. Enhanced understanding of the security and humanitarian implications of a declining aid order.

v. Policy-relevant dialogue on sustainable peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and institutional reform.

vi. Practical recommendations for building regional resilience and autonomy.

vii. A Policy Brief

Opening and Keynote Address

Opening Session - Why the Era of Declining International Aid is Here

The session was moderated by **Hassan Khannenje Ph.D.,** Director of the HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Welcome Remarks by Hassan Khannenje, Ph.D — Director, HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies

> ... agency and sustainability are fundamentally inseparable from financing, asserting that the moment a region cannot fund its own peace and security initiatives, it cedes control over them

The session opened with welcome remarks by Dr. Hassan Khannenje who warmly welcomed participants and expressed appreciation for their presence, he provided the intellectual framing for the conference, grounding the discussion in the stark reality of the continent's occasional lack of political goodwill and the absence of sustainable structures to ensure that critical operations continue. His central provocation, a theme he returned to throughout the day was that "the philosophy of African solutions to African problems, while beautiful as a slogan, is likely to be more effective when accompanied by African money." He argued that agency and sustainability are fundamentally inseparable from financing, asserting that the moment a region cannot fund its own peace and security initiatives, it cedes control over them. He challenged the room to think concretely about how the continent can move beyond rhetorical ownership toward genuine, financial independence.

Explaining the impetus for the gathering, Dr. Khannenje noted that the HORN Institute and KAS organized this conference specifically to navigate and build resilience for regional stability at a time of sharply declining international aid. To address this challenge, the convening brought together a diverse group of panelists with deep expertise across government, academia, and the military. Invoking the strategic mindset often attributed to Barack Obama's Chief of Staff - to "never let a good crisis go to waste" he urged participants to view the current funding vacuum as a vital opportunity for structural reform. He concluded by framing the conference as the start of a series of activities designed to produce actionable ways of becoming more resilient, ultimately aiming to build a safer, more secure, and sustainably self-sufficient world by the end of the year.

Opening Rremarks by Edgar Mwine — Project Manager, KAS Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa

> Africa must critically rethink what ownership truly means and demonstrate the willingness to finance the solutions it demands

Mr. Mwine opened the conference on behalf of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), welcoming participants during the holy month of Ramadan. Acknowledging the distinguished guests, he extended special appreciation to Dr. Korir, Kenya's Principal Secretary for Foreign Affairs, for providing strategic framing grounded in local realities rather than "spreadsheets in Geneva." He also praised the long-standing collaboration with the HORN Institute, describing it as the intellectual engine driving KAS's programming across 14 countries in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. Framing the significance of the gathering, Mwine noted a troubling global shift: the region's hurdles, once universally accepted by the international community as "common challenges" with shared responsibility, now face a fractured sense of global purpose.

This reality is starkly reflected in the current humanitarian crisis. By the end of 2024, the region hosted approximately 26.3 million forcibly displaced persons; men, women, and children relying on an overburdened system. Furthermore, the underlying peacekeeping architecture, including AMISOM, MONUSCO, and MINUSCA, is operating on stretched budgets amidst looming funding cuts. Mwine warned that institutions built on donor dependency are now staggering under the weight of these reductions.

To break this dependency, he argued that the aid crisis must be resolved not just operationally, but intellectually. Africa must critically rethink what ownership truly means and demonstrate the willingness to finance the solutions it demands. Highlighting the continent's profound resilience and capacity for adaptation, he pointed to West Africa's ECOWAS Standby Force. The recent commitment by member countries to self-fund this 5,000-strong force represents a bold experiment in African nations taking charge of their own troops, strategies, and finances.

In closing, Mwine challenged the attendees to use the two-day convening to build a new vision for authentic regional security frameworks that directly match the political will to finance them. Reaffirming KAS's commitment to supporting uncomfortable but necessary dialogue, he thanked the participants for their time and anticipated contributions to resolving these hard questions.

> By the end of 2024, the region hosted approximately **26.3 million** forcibly displaced persons; men, women, and children relying on an overburdened system

Opening Remarks by Mustafa Yusuf Ali, PhD — Chairman, HORN International Institute for Strategic Studies

> "... what we are witnessing are not temporary adjustments, but a structural transformation in the global aid and security landscape"

Dr. Mustafa Yusuf Ali, welcomed excellencies, partners, and distinguished guests, including Kenya's Principal Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Dr. Abraham Korir Sing'Oei. He framed the conference, held in partnership with the KAS Regional Security and Dialogue program, as a conversation that is not merely timely, but long overdue. Blending institutional framing with deeply personal testimony, he emphasized the urgent need to address the future of African ownership and the financing of regional peace and security. Dr. Mustafa highlighted a profound shift in the broader architecture of global cooperation.

For decades, regional peace operations, humanitarian systems, and post-conflict recovery frameworks have relied heavily on external financing. Today, that model is under severe strain as major donor states recalibrate their geopolitical priorities and foreign assistance budgets shrink. He stated unequivocally that "what we are witnessing are not temporary adjustments, but a structural transformation in the global aid and security landscape." This reality is especially stark given the disproportionate burden the region bears. Dr. Mustafa pointed out the irony that while global media and political attention remain fixated on the Middle East and other theaters, roughly 26 million people - a full quarter of the world's 108 million displaced persons and refugees reside in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. Moving from statistics to ground-level realities, Dr. Mustafa provided a poignant illustration of what these sweeping aid cuts look like in practice. Drawing from his own humanitarian work in the Kakuma refugee camp, he shared that his organization was forced to lay off more than 350 staff members in a single year, the majority of whom were teachers. Consequently, watchmen and security guards are now being tasked with teaching and caring for the camp's children.

Despite these grim realities, Dr. Mustafa argued that moments of structural change are inherently moments of structural opportunity. He challenged the conference to move beyond slogans toward genuine institutional reform. He defined resilience not merely as the capacity to absorb shocks, but as "the ability to adapt, to reform, and to emerge stronger." This juncture, he noted, demands stronger domestic and regional resource mobilization, strategic coherence, and, most importantly, authentic African ownership in financing, implementation, and leadership. Commending Kenya for its strides in developing novel approaches to resource mobilization, Dr. Mustafa cautioned that the country is not an island of peace; the surrounding fragility demands proactive engagement. He cited recent post-election violence in Tanzania as a sobering reminder that even historically stable nations are not immune to instability. Ultimately, Dr. Mustafa characterized the two-day convening as a vital strategic reflection space aimed at interrogating the future of peace financing, humanitarian sustainability, and regional security coordination in what may well be a permanently aid-reduced environment.

Keynote Address by Abraham Korir Sing'Oei, Ph.D., EBS — Principal Secretary, State Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Kenya

> "... hope in the utility and integrity of aid can only be resurrected when it is long-term rather than episodic, driven by national priorities rather than idiosyncratic donor objectives"

Dr. Abraham Korir Sing'Oei, delivered the intellectual centerpiece of the opening session at the Horn of Africa Security Dialogue 2026, where he addressed esteemed colleagues and practitioners by first commending the HORN Institute and KAS for facilitating a platform that advances practical solutions to complex challenges. He framed the Horn of Africa—a region home to more than 300 million people—as a distinct and complex strategic theater defined by political instability, state fragility, violent extremism, and intense geopolitical competition, noting that the region is increasingly interconnected with security dynamics stretching from the Sahel to the Middle East, specifically highlighting the Red Sea arena as a space of strategic competition and the growing militarization of the Western Indian Ocean. While the visible consequences of these pressures are felt by 26 million forcibly displaced people, including 19 million IDPs and 5.5 million refugees and asylum seekers across the Horn and Great Lakes, Dr. Sing'Oei argued that despite these vulnerabilities, the region should not be defined solely through the lens of fragility but must also be recognized for the immense economic potential of its people, resources, and geography.

Challenging the fundamental assumption that aid has been a "magic bullet" for humanitarian response or security, he cited two foundational critiques: Dambisa Moyo's Dead Aid, which argues that aid entrenches dependency, creates institutional hierarchies, and distorts national priorities, and William Easterly's The White Man's Burden, which problematizes the top-down, donor-driven model that displaces local agency. He asked the room directly how much aid the Horn of Africa has received over the past four decades, noting that many remain unaware of the answer due to the fragmentation and lack of transparency in delivery systems, and he further interrogated whether this aid fostered resilience and secured peace or simply fed an "aid complex" and entrenched dependency. He submitted that hope in the utility and integrity of aid can only be resurrected when it is long-term rather than episodic, driven by national priorities rather than idiosyncratic donor objectives, and anchored in coherent capacity strengthening, calling for a new architecture of partnership grounded in co-creation, aligned results frameworks, and a shift from reactive to preventive programming.

To achieve this, Dr. Sing'Oei proposed five strategic propositions for regional resilience, starting with the imperative of investing in African institutions to stop "exporting" the resolution of the continent's challenges to other spheres of influence—an act he argued robs the continent of agency, undermines ownership, "illegitimates" institutions, and forfeits the opportunity to build critical capacities that foster self-confidence. Second, he called for a "new financing normal" based on budget and burden sharing, noting that President Ruto, as the AU champion for institutional reform, is an ardent advocate for Africa's control over its security architecture and financing; in this regard, Kenya has been at the forefront of proposing that the AU Peace Fund be expanded from its current USD 400 million endowment to USD 1 billion within the shortest time possible, utilizing the existing AU financing architecture of a 0.2% levy on imports (with certain exceptions) which has the potential to generate a sufficient pool of resources if met with political will and the resolution of chronic arrears by member states, a vision also supported by President Lula's advocacy for African financial control.

Third, he urged strong advocacy for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2719, a landmark framework adopted in December 2023 that allows the UN to finance up to 75 percent of AU-led peace support operations through UN-assessed contributions—a historic shift in the UN-AU partnership that requires joint planning and compliance with UN standards but remains currently unutilized. Fourth, he emphasized that Africa must build and actually be willing to deploy the Africa Standby Force, giving the direct example that when the Sudan conflict erupted approximately three years ago, Kenya's position was that the force should have been activated from the very first days while the bombs were going off in Khartoum; he stated that while the necessary capacities were in place, the lack of political consensus and will to deploy resulted in state collapse, fragmentation, and a massive humanitarian crisis that might have been slowed by a deliberate, intentional deployment.

Fifth, he proposed nesting humanitarian logistics hubs within Africa—specifically in cities like Nairobi, Kampala, and Accra—to replace the "dangerous strategic dependency" on depots in Dubai and Brindisi, Italy, which are vulnerable to geopolitical shocks,

> “Kenya has been at the forefront of proposing that the AU Peace Fund be expanded from its current USD 400 million endowment to **USD 1 billion** within the shortest time possible”

arguing that African hubs offer a cost-benefit advantage through shorter supply chains and the building of durable capacities closer to conflict theaters.

Dr. Sing'Oei concluded by identifying three overarching priorities: enhancing African ownership of peace and security initiatives among state and non-state actors, academia, think tanks, and NGOs like HORN and KAS; strengthening institutional resilience by providing IGAD, the AU, and the Africa Standby Force with resources and critical political backing; and developing innovative, diverse financing mechanisms that blend domestic resource mobilization with regional tools and strategic international partnerships. He emphasized that these conversations are a "regenerative discourse" intended to generate real utility and solutions, asserting that peace and security in the Horn must ultimately be built on African ownership, institutions, and leadership, a vision to which Kenya remains committed in collaboration with neighbors and international partners.

Session **One**

Peace Operations Amid Funding Cuts

Moderated by **Christopher Hockey,** Senior Research Fellow, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Nairobi.

Ambassador Erastus Mwencha, ECES — Former Deputy Chairperson, African Union Commission

Ambassador Mwencha provided a frank institutional assessment of the AU's peace and security architecture. His central argument was consistent throughout: the frameworks, norms, and structures of the AU are actually sound, and the problem is not architectural but political. He pointed to the AU Constitutive Act as an example of progressive institutional design that already permits intervention in member states without host-government consent under specific conditions — genocide, war crimes, or grave threats to order — going further than the UN Charter. African states have agreed to this on paper, but the failure lies in honouring these commitments in practice.

Ambassador Mwencha identified chronic financing arrears as a structural dysfunction that undermines the entire edifice of African peace and security cooperation. Member states consistently commit to financial obligations and then fail to meet them, making planning, deployment, and sustained operations impossible. The deficit, he stressed, is not in norms or capacity on paper, but in the political commitment of member states to act collectively when conflicts arise. The architecture is designed to work — it is being prevented from working by the very states that designed it. On the question of RECs, he noted that IGAD, the EAC, and other regional bodies each have comparative advantages, but the expectation that they will simply deploy troops without the mandate, resources, or political backing to do so is both unrealistic and unfair to the institutions concerned.

Meressa Kahsu Dessu, Ph.D — Programme Head, Training for Peace, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Addis Ababa

Dr Dessu focused on the political economy of peacekeeping and the cascading consequences of the research and knowledge crisis that accompanies funding collapse. He argued that peacekeeping has always been shaped by donor interests as much as operational need, and that as donor interests shift — driven by domestic political pressures, populism, and fiscal austerity — the political economy of who funds what operations, and on what conditions, is changing fundamentally. African actors must understand this dynamic rather than simply react to it.

Beyond the operational funding crisis, Dr Dessu identified a second and less-visible failure: the loss of research and analytical capacity. Institutions like ISS that produce the conflict analysis, early warning assessments, and policy recommendations informing peace operations are also experiencing severe funding cuts, creating what he described as a double failure — losing not only the capacity to respond, but the knowledge needed to respond wisely. He raised the wider question of Africa developing its own research agenda, funded by African resources and addressing African priorities, rather than continuing to rely on externally-funded research that answers questions important to donors and not necessarily to the communities affected by conflict.

Ambassador Mohamed Ali Guyo, Ph.D — IGAD Special Envoy for the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Somalia

Ambassador Guyo addressed the diplomatic and operational dimensions of peacekeeping in a funding-constrained environment, with particular focus on IGAD's role and the Horn's maritime security dimension. He stressed that IGAD has a critical and irreplaceable role in regional peace and security but that this role requires sustained resources and coherent political backing from member states, both of which are currently unreliable. He highlighted the Red Sea as an increasingly militarised and geopolitically contested space, with growing involvement by external powers adding pressure to an already fragile regional environment. Maritime security and terrestrial security crises in the Horn are becoming increasingly entangled, with any disruption in the maritime domain translating almost immediately into humanitarian and displacement pressures on land.

Ambassador Guyo argued that the intersection of declining aid, growing geopolitical competition in the Red Sea, and deteriorating state capacity in Somalia and Sudan creates a particularly dangerous convergence that regional institutions are ill-equipped to manage without sustained international support. He called for a more principled approach to burden-sharing — one in which countries that benefit from regional stability are prepared to contribute to maintaining it, financially, militarily, and diplomatically.

Ambassador Maj Gen (Rtd) Fred Mugisha — Former Force Commander, AMISOM (2011–2012)

General Mugisha brought the military operational perspective and was the most direct and candid voice of the session. His interventions were pointed, grounded in operational experience, and occasionally blunt. He opened with the military principle of 'selection and maintenance of aim' he argued that African actors must select their aim clearly and then maintain it through concrete action, not rhetoric. He challenged the disconnect between Africa's stated commitment to self-reliance and the practical behaviour of African states and institutions.

> Africans must select the aim and walk the talk. Walking the talk means using the means you have. The level of disappointment is proportionate to the expectations. If we speak too much and do not deliver that much, we will perpetually be complaining that we are poor.

He offered a striking example: a rebel movement he knows well in the region had a strong culture of genuine self-reliance while fighting - they were effective, disciplined, and self-sufficient. Once that same movement came to power and gained access to external aid flows, the culture of self-reliance collapsed. They became dependent and dysfunctional. His point: self-reliance is an institutional and cultural commitment that must be sustained through policy and practice, not just proclaimed in speeches. It disappears the moment external money arrives if there is no institutional structure to protect it.

He addressed the deployment of the East African Community Regional Force to the Democratic Republic of Congo directly, and was frank about its mixed results. The ideation, the planning and conceptual design — diverged significantly from the ground reality. The force encountered a very different reception on the ground than expected. He identified centralised command and control as a structural problem that was not adequately resolved before or during the deployment. Without clear, centralised command authority, a multinational force cannot operate effectively. He called for this to be addressed before the next regional deployment.

On private security companies (PSCs)

He addressed the growing role of private security companies in African peace operations, and was unflinching in his analysis. He described peace operations as now operating in a 'competitive marketplace' in which PSCs offer an alternative that state leaders often prefer:

> If I am the leader of a state and I want to survive - who do I want? Do I want a UN mission that is going to talk to me about women's rights, elections, and all these 'pesky' things that get in the way of my survival? Or do I want a PSC that I can instruct to protect my regime, protect my presidential palace, and protect my interests? The answer, for many leaders, is the PSC.

He argued that traditional peace operations must adapt to this competitive reality. The existing model - premised on states welcoming external accountability — is being rejected in favour of private alternatives that offer protection without conditions. This is not only a funding problem; it is a governance and accountability problem.

On AU norms

He added a supplementary point to Ambassador Mwencha's earlier argument:

> In terms of norms, capacity, and structures — the AU is fine. The problem is the political commitment of member states. They already committed: the Constitutive Act allows interventions even without host-state consent. That is different from the UN Charter. They agreed to this. The challenge now is whether member states are willing to continue that commitment and give the AU the resources and leadership it needs.

He noted that RECs are established to integrate — not to deploy. The expectation that they simply fill security deployment gaps is a misreading of their mandates and comparative advantages.

On women's inclusion in peace processes

He gave a candid personal account. He acknowledged that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for South Sudan; an agreement he was involved with had no women at the signing table. None. He described this as a failure that had real consequences: when the time came to popularise and implement the agreement at the grassroots, the parties had no answer for the hard questions communities asked, precisely because communities had not been involved. The lesson was applied in subsequent processes. He noted that the current Tumaini peace process for South Sudan, in which he serves as co-chair, is proceeding on a 50/50 basis, women constitute half of all stakeholder categories, parties to the conflict, and delegations.

This is well taken care of in the Tumaini process. But it is something that needs to be properly institutionalised — in practice, in standing rules of procedure, in the design of all peace processes from the outset — not treated as an optional add-on.

Mr Partha Moman — Ph.D Candidate at London School of Economics and Political Science

Mr Moman presented on burden-sharing frameworks for regionally sustained peace operations, focusing on their structural and political economy dimensions. His core observation was that burden-sharing frameworks, however well designed, assume a baseline of political commitment from all parties, and that when this commitment is uneven — as it invariably is in regional peace operations — the framework breaks down in practice regardless of how sound it is on paper. The weakest link becomes the defining constraint. He challenged the framing that PSC growth is primarily a funding problem, arguing it is also, and perhaps more fundamentally, a governance problem: states are actively choosing private security precisely because PSCs are more controllable, more loyal to regime interests, and less demanding in terms of accountability. A PSC does not report to the UN Security Council or hold press conferences, and an insecure state often prefers that arrangement. He noted the historical precedent that

the United States itself deployed PSCs as part of peace operations in various contexts, and argued for pragmatic thinking about what models of peace operations can counter these other players in the market by offering what PSCs cannot: legitimacy, accountability, and genuine long-term stability.

Comments, Questions and Answers

Question: The East African Community Regional Force deployment in the DRC has been widely discussed as a test case for regional peace enforcement. What does it reveal about the command and control challenges facing multinational African forces, and what lessons should continental and regional institutions draw from that experience?

Ambassador Mwencha opened the Q&A by characterising the EACRF deployment as *"a perfect case of fractured peace and security"* a phrase that captures both the operational reality on the ground and the deeper institutional tensions that shaped it. He argued that one of the most consequential failures of the mission was the significant gap between the ideation stage, the political agreements, mandates, and expectations that framed the force's deployment and what actually unfolded on the ground. In other words, the architecture looked coherent on paper but proved fragile in practice. At the heart of that gap, he suggested, was the question of command and control. When a multinational force draws troops from several contributing nations, each with its own chain of command, rules of engagement, national interests, and domestic political pressures, operational unity becomes extremely difficult to sustain. The EACRF experience exposed how quickly those fault lines can widen under field conditions affecting everything from tactical decision-making and troop movements to communication and accountability when things go wrong. Ambassador Mwencha's central lesson was direct: command and control must be centralised and clearly defined *before* a multinational force deploys, not negotiated after boots are already on the ground. Attempting to resolve those structural questions mid-mission introduces dangerous ambiguity at precisely the moment when clarity is most needed. He was equally candid, however, about the limits of that prescription. Acknowledging that *how* such centralisation is actually achieved in practice is a far harder question one that ultimately requires deep military expertise, not just political will he stopped short of offering a blueprint. What he left the room with was a provocation as much as a conclusion: that Africa's regional institutions cannot afford to keep treating command and control as an afterthought to the political negotiations that precede deployments. It must become a foundational design requirement, resolved at the institutional level before any operational commitment is made.

Question: There is a tendency in discussions about African peace and security to default to a resource scarcity argument that the continent simply lacks the financial means to fund its own institutions and operations. But is that framing accurate, and if not, what does it obscure about the real obstacles to African institutional effectiveness?

Partha Moman pushed back firmly on what he described as an implicit *"we are too poor"* framing that had surfaced in parts of the discussion and the challenge was worth taking seriously. He grounded his intervention in a straightforward but often overlooked data point: Africa's GDP as a continent currently stands at approximately USD 3.7 trillion, a figure that equals or exceeds the combined economic weight of many groupings of European countries. On those numbers alone, the argument that Africa lacks the resources to finance its own peace and security agenda begins to look less like an economic reality and more like a convenient narrative. If the continent collectively commands the kind of economic weight he described, then the persistent underfunding of continental and regional peace mechanisms cannot be explained by the absence of resources alone. Something else is at work. That something else, he argued, is the absence of collective will and the failure of coordination. The resources exist, but they remain fragmented across 54 sovereign states, each making independent calculations about national interest, political risk, and institutional trust. The result is that a continent of considerable aggregate economic weight continues to rely disproportionately on external donors; the European Union, the United Nations, bilateral partners to bankroll the very institutions meant to express African agency and strategic autonomy. There is a deep contradiction in that arrangement that the resource scarcity framing conveniently papers over. The provocation he left on the table was therefore a political and institutional one rather than a financial one: the question is not whether Africa can afford to fund its own peace and security architecture, but whether its leaders and institutions can build sufficient political solidarity and coordination mechanisms to mobilise what already exists toward shared continental public goods. That is a harder conversation one that implicates sovereignty, trust deficits between member states, and the political economy of regional institutions but it is the more honest one.

Question: Are Africa's Regional Economic Communities structurally equipped to take on peace enforcement, or are they being set up to fail?

A participant raised a structural tension that often gets glossed over in enthusiasm for regional solutions to African conflicts: the fundamental mismatch between what RECs were designed to do and what they are increasingly being asked to do. Institutions like IGAD and the EAC were conceived and built primarily as vehicles for regional economic integration harmonising trade policies, reducing tariff barriers, facilitating the movement of goods and people across borders. That is the mandate they were authorised to pursue, the capability they were resourced to develop, and the logic around which their institutional architectures were organised. Military deployment and peace enforcement are a different enterprise entirely. They require not just different capabilities; trained forces, logistics chains, rules of engagement, command structures but different political authorisations, different legal frameworks, and a fundamentally different relationship between member states and the institution they are empowering to act. Asking a regional economic body to absorb those functions without adequately rethinking its mandate, resourcing, and governance is not an incremental expansion of its role. It is a qualitative transformation of what the institution is. The participant's concern was therefore not simply operational but structural. When RECs are deployed into peace enforcement roles without the necessary mandate clarity, capability investment, and political backing, the risk is not just mission failure in the field — though that risk is real, as the EACRF experience demonstrated. The deeper risk is institutional damage. A failed or inconclusive deployment erodes the credibility of the REC itself, undermines member state confidence in regional solutions, and can set back the integration agenda the institution was originally built to advance. The provocation embedded in the observation is one that policymakers and institutional designers cannot afford to sidestep: if Africa's regional institutions are to play a meaningful role in peace and security, that role must be deliberately mandated, properly resourced, and honestly assessed against what these institutions were built to do not assumed by default because no better option is immediately available. Ambiguity about institutional purpose, especially under operational pressure, is not a neutral condition. It is a pathway to failure.

Question: Why does a gap persist between the African Union's progressive norms and their actual implementation, and what would it take to close it?

Several participants converged on a point that is uncomfortable precisely because it is familiar: the African Union's normative framework is, by many measures, genuinely progressive. The non-indifference principle enshrined in the Constitutive Act marked a deliberate departure from the rigid non-intervention doctrine that had long shielded poor governance and mass atrocities behind the wall of sovereignty. On paper, the AU gave itself the authority and the moral mandate to act. The problem, participants agreed, is that the distance between that normative commitment and actual institutional practice has remained stubbornly wide. The temptation in that diagnosis is to reach for a technical fix — a new mechanism, a revised protocol, a strengthened early warning system. But the emerging consensus in the room pushed back against that instinct. Mechanisms, participants argued, are not the binding constraint. The AU already has mechanisms. What those mechanisms cannot manufacture on their own is the political will among member states to actually use them, and to use them consistently rather than selectively depending on whose interests are at stake in a given crisis. When political will is absent, even the most elegantly designed institutional architecture sits idle. This points to a deeper challenge rooted in the political economy of the AU itself. The organisation is ultimately an inter-governmental body whose effectiveness depends on what member states are willing to authorise and resource. When those states face domestic political pressures, competing bilateral interests, or solidarity calculations that cut against collective action, the normative framework provides no automatic corrective. Norms do not enforce themselves. The conversation therefore moved toward two interrelated requirements. The first is sustained diplomatic engagement — the kind of patient, behind-the-scenes work that builds the political coalitions necessary for collective action before a crisis demands it, rather than scrambling to assemble consensus after the fact. The second, and harder, requirement is consequences for non-compliance. Without demonstrated costs for ignoring AU norms — whether reputational, diplomatic, or material — the commitment remains aspirational. Member states need to see that non-compliance carries a price, and that the institution is willing and able to impose it. Until both conditions are meaningfully in place, the gap between AU norms and AU practice is likely to persist regardless of how progressive the normative architecture becomes.

Question: Should external actors continue to bear the financial burden of peace processes in conflicts that are fundamentally internal, and what does genuine self-financing of peace look like in practice?

General Mugisha posed a question that was pointed in its simplicity but far-reaching in its implications: why should external actors be expected to foot the bill for peace processes in conflicts that are, at their core, between a government and its own citizens? It is a question that cuts through a great deal of diplomatic politeness about partnership and burden-sharing to surface a more uncomfortable truth that the current financing model for African peace processes structurally externalises a responsibility that arguably belongs, at least in part, to the parties most directly invested in the outcome. The logic underlying his challenge is straightforward. Parties to a conflict have a direct and immediate interest in its resolution far more direct than the donor governments and multilateral institutions that routinely underwrite mediation processes, peace talks, and ceasefire monitoring mechanisms. A government fighting an armed opposition group, and the opposition group itself, stand to gain the most from a durable settlement. They also bear the most intimate knowledge of what is at stake, what compromises are possible, and what a sustainable peace would require. The idea that these parties should be entirely insulated from the financial cost of achieving that peace while external actors absorb it — raises legitimate questions about ownership, accountability, and ultimately the durability of whatever agreement emerges. There is a well-established body of thinking on how financial investment shapes commitment. When parties have contributed materially to a process, the stakes of its failure become more concrete and personal. Conversely, when peace is effectively a subsidised external product delivered to conflict parties rather than something they have invested in building, the incentive structures around compliance and implementation can be significantly weaker. External financing, however well-intentioned, can inadvertently reduce the cost of spoiling a process. This is not an argument for withdrawing international support from peace processes, nor does it ignore the very real capacity constraints that shape what conflict parties can contribute. But it does raise a design question that the conference agreed has not received sufficient serious attention: what would a genuine self-financing dimension of African peace processes look like in practice? How are financial contributions structured into peace agreements? What role can regional institutions play in facilitating and guaranteeing those contributions? And how does the conversation about self-reliance in peace and security extend beyond institutional funding to encompass the financing of the peace processes themselves? General Mugisha's intervention left the room with a provocation that sits uneasily alongside the broader self-reliance agenda the conference was advancing: it is difficult to claim genuine ownership of peace if the willingness to pay for it remains largely someone else's responsibility.

Session **Two**

Conflict, Displacement, and the Shrinking Humanitarian Space

Moderated by **Martine Zeuthen,** Associate Fellow, Terrorism and Conflict Programme, Royal United Services Institute (RUSI).

Monica Camacho — Head of Mission / Regional Representative, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)

Camacho presented from MSF's operational perspective — ground-level, data-grounded, and unsparing. She illustrated her presentation with maps showing the Horn moving from drought conditions to flooding — two extremes of a climate cycle — compounding the already severe baseline of food insecurity. She noted that conflict and climate are the two primary and interconnected drivers of displacement across the region. Sudan has districts officially classified as famine, a determination made by an independent technical body, and this classification represents a catastrophic failure of protection. South Sudan is experiencing increased violence in several states, generating fresh displacement and new cross-border population movements toward Ethiopia and Uganda.

On the funding collapse, Camacho presented stark figures: for 2025, the total humanitarian response plan for the region requested USD 8.6 billion from donors, but only 34 per cent — approximately USD 2.9 billion — was actually received. The most visible cut was made by the US government under President Trump in January 2025, though she was careful to contextualise this as the most dramatic manifestation of a trend already visible across European donor governments. The Americans were the most significant because the US was, by a considerable margin, the single largest humanitarian donor globally. In 2025, some organisations and other donors managed to partially compensate through emergency top-ups and reallocation, but in 2026 those compensating mechanisms are no longer available and the full structural funding gap is now being felt.

The consequences on the ground are direct and measurable. People who were classified in the orange and yellow categories on food insecurity maps — at high risk of deterioration but still managing — were receiving preventive assistance packages to stop them sliding into crisis. Those packages have been cut, and people who were in orange are now in red, while those who were already in red are sliding into famine conditions. Health facilities have been closed, medicine supply chains disrupted, staff laid off, and nutrition programmes cut, with a direct deterioration in child nutrition indicators and an elevated risk of disease outbreaks including cholera and measles. Protection gaps are widening severely: sexual and gender-based violence has increased while survivor services have been shut down due to funding cuts, and child marriage is projected to rise as families resort to desperate coping strategies. These are not projections; they are patterns already visible on the ground.

Camacho also addressed the Trump administration's announcement of a USD 2 billion reallocation of humanitarian assistance managed through a US government mechanism rather than multilateral channels. She showed participants that Somalia was not on the list of designated countries, meaning communities facing acute drought have no pathway to access these resources because they have been allocated based on political criteria, not humanitarian need. She argued that this represents a fundamental breach of the principle that assistance should be allocated on the basis of assessed need. As new conditional donors replace traditional ones, the space to define needs through independent assessment is being progressively compromised. MSF and other organisations are engaged in active internal discussions about whether to accept funding that compromises operational independence, and she described the humanitarian sector as experiencing a crisis of values — the erosion of the principles that have historically defined the space.

Joanina Karugaba — Senior Inter-Agency Coordination Officer, UNHCR

Karugaba presented on the sustainability of humanitarian response from UNHCR's institutional perspective, notably candid about what the existing model had failed to achieve even before the current crisis. She began by sketching the scope of displacement across seven countries in the region. Ethiopia simultaneously hosts 1.1 million refugees and 1.9 million IDPs, with ongoing cross-border movements from South Sudan adding to that burden daily. Sudan is generating millions of newly displaced people while still hosting refugees from earlier conflicts. Uganda hosts 2 million refugees. One in four refugees in the region has been displaced for more than ten years, with some Somalis and South Sudanese born in exile, who name a country they have never visited when asked where they come from. Critically, 87 per cent of refugees in protracted displacement are from four countries — Somalia, South Sudan, DRC, and Sudan — precisely the countries where conditions for voluntary return are most fragile or non-existent.

For 2026, UNHCR is working to support 4.5 million refugees across seven countries with a financial requirement of USD 1.6 billion, coordinating the work of 123 separate organisations. UNHCR's relationship with US funding was exceptionally concentrated: the United States was giving UNHCR approximately two and a half times the amount of the next largest donor, and when that funding was cut, UNHCR was, in her words, really, really badly hurt. The organisations depending on UNHCR were hurt in turn, and the populations those organisations serve were hurt after that. UNHCR's Humanitarian Coordinator Tom Fletcher initiated a process described as a humanitarian reset, whose first announcement bore the title 'The Cruel Math of Aid Cuts.' The reality of that title was the selection of 800,000 people out of five million for prioritised assistance.

> We have five million people we are supposed to be taking care of. We cannot take care of five million. We will take care of 800,000. The rest of you — figure it out. We will focus only on life-saving assistance.

Karugaba was candid that the existing model was already under severe strain before 2025. Legal and administrative restrictions on freedom of movement and the right to work for refugees were already severely limiting self-reliance — refugees who are citizens of the East African Community found themselves confined to camps with no right to work, no access to land, and no way to become self-sufficient. Food rations were already below adequate levels before 2025, with WFP not having sufficient resources to deliver full rations. The system was already triaging before the current cuts.

She was notably critical of the encampment policy that governs refugee management in most countries in the region. When refugees are confined to camps with no right to work, no access to land, and no freedom of movement, they become entirely dependent on external assistance, while host communities who observe them receiving food and services develop resentment. Uganda's long-standing model — granting refugees the right to work, access to land, and freedom of movement — was held up as the correct approach, more consistent with human dignity, more economically rational, and more consistent with the spirit of the EAC's free movement commitments. She also cited Kenya's Shirika Plan as a government-led regional model for refugee inclusion in national systems. On durable solutions, she was direct: voluntary return requires conditions of safety and dignity that Somalia, South Sudan, DRC, and Sudan do not currently meet; resettlement slots have been dramatically reduced; and local integration and naturalisation remain the most underutilised solution. Her concluding argument was unambiguous: the real solution to conflict-induced displacement is peace, and everything else is managing symptoms.

Michelle Nyandong — Peacebuilding and Security Expert

Nyandong made the most analytically forceful argument of the session that the collapse of humanitarian aid is not just a humanitarian crisis, but a security crisis. When formal support systems collapse, survival becomes the only operative logic, and communities are forced into adaptive strategies that feed instability, violence, and radicalisation. She asked the room to think carefully about what a humanitarian system actually consists of beyond food distributions: life-saving food, water, and sanitation; mobile health clinics in areas government services cannot reach; services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence; peacebuilding programmes including conflict mediation and community peace committees — which have been almost completely cut and were among the first to go; early warning and conflict monitoring systems being dismantled precisely when most needed; and the research and data systems that enable evidence-based intervention.

She presented what she described as one of the most alarming security trends in the region: the transformation of pastoral raiding from a cultural practice into an armed survival economy. When veterinary services collapse and water assistance dries up, pastoralists lose not only their herds but their status, their capacity to feed their families, and their identity. Cross-border cattle raiding, once a cultural practice between communities, has transformed into an armed survival strategy, with former herders now conducting raids with guns because their herds have been depleted and they have no other means of survival. These groups do not recognise international borders, and a conflict on one side of the Kenya-Ethiopia-Somalia tri-border rapidly escalates across it. Cross-border peace committees funded through humanitarian and peacebuilding budgets are being disbanded because those budgets are gone.

On Al-Shabaab, Nyandong was explicit: the relationship between humanitarian collapse and recruitment is not incidental but direct. When thousands of young people are displaced, hopeless, and angry, with no livelihood and no future, they become prime targets for radicalisation. Al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia move into the gaps, offering food, belonging, and purpose. This is not happening despite the collapse of aid it is because of it, and they deliberately take advantage of these conditions. She also presented the charcoal production economy as a concrete mechanism linking humanitarian failure to terrorist financing: across northern Kenya and southern Somalia, communities cutting trees to produce charcoal for food money are directly funding Al-Shabaab, which controls and heavily taxes the charcoal trade. As she stated bluntly, every bag of charcoal sold to feed a family also funds the insurgents threatening that family's security. Livestock smuggling across the Red Sea and Indian Ocean connects these communities to transnational organised crime infrastructure.

On urban displacement, Nyandong identified a growing but largely invisible protection crisis: refugees and IDPs moving into cities without documentation or services, competing with the urban poor, arriving disoriented or in hiding, and becoming targets for exploitation and radicalisation. This secondary movement from camp to city is not captured in displacement statistics, is not served by existing programmes, and is not adequately monitored. She closed by identifying what she called the resilience paradox: donors are demanding long-term solutions while only funding six-month projects that cannot build the required infrastructure, and this contradiction is known to the system. Her call to action emphasised investing in food systems and African agricultural institutions, funding community-based organisations directly, recognising and explicitly funding the security-humanitarian nexus, moving beyond short grant cycles to multi-year commitments, and recognising that the fraying of the social fabric the relationships between communities, citizens, and governments will, if allowed to collapse completely, seed not merely a humanitarian crisis but the next regional conflict.

Comments, Questions and Answers

Question: How do humanitarian organisations navigate funding from non-traditional donors with conditionality?

Monica Camacho acknowledged an active, unresolved internal debate within the sector. The conditions attached to new money in terms of geographic targeting, political exclusions, and operational constraints are severe, with some organisations declining certain funds and others accepting them under protest. She expressed concern that the sector is in survival mode rather than reflection mode and fears it is missing the opportunity to fundamentally rethink engagement with communities and humanitarian principles. She described the moment as a crisis of values, noting that what was thought to be a system to protect the most vulnerable has demonstrated it is not.

Question: Is capacity building the right response to gaps in African government action on refugee rights, or is something else holding back progress?

Joanina Karugaba challenged a framing that surfaces persistently in development and humanitarian policy circles that's where governments fall short, the answer is more capacity building. Her pushback was direct: there are categories of government inaction where capacity is simply not the binding constraint, and treating them as if it were misdiagnoses the problem and produces responses that cannot work. Her example was concrete. For a government to grant refugees freedom of movement or the right to work does not require a training programme, a technical workshop, or an institutional capacity assessment. These are policy decisions. The legal frameworks exist. The international obligations are clear. What stands between a refugee and the right to work is not a government that lacks the knowledge or administrative machinery to act it is a government that has made a political calculation not to. Sending consultants and convening workshops in response to that reality does not just waste resources; it actively obscures where accountability should be directed. The distinction she drew between technical gaps and political choices has significant implications for how the broader conversation about African institutional effectiveness is framed. Not every implementation failure is a capacity problem. Some are straightforwardly political, and the appropriate response to a political choice is political accountability, not technical assistance. Holding governments to their existing commitments, through regional peer mechanisms, civil society pressure, and diplomatic consequence, is a different kind of intervention entirely and in many cases, the more honest and effective one.

Question: On durable solutions and the xenophobia dynamic in host communities?

The questioner highlighted the tension visible in Turkana and elsewhere where host communities feel refugees are better served than they are. Karugaba responded that the encampment policy is the structural root of this tension: confining refugees to total dependency makes them visibly 'better served' in narrow ways while the surrounding host community fends for itself. Uganda's approach access to land and freedom of movement dissolves this dynamic because refugees become contributors to the local economy rather than recipients of it. She called for a more inclusive asylum space built on the logic of EAC citizenship and free movement.

Question: On community-driven funding and ensuring aid matches community needs?

Karugaba endorsed the localization agenda and community-based protection approaches, acknowledging these are slow but produce better outcomes than transposing programmes from other contexts. Michelle Nyandong added that communities are already demonstrating resilience with very little the emergency response structures emerging from Sudanese civil society are an example and that the time has come to give local communities significantly more credit for resilience building and simply supplement what they are already doing. Conflict sensitivity and do-no-harm principles must be the baseline for any programme claiming to serve community needs.

Question: What does the funding crisis mean for conflict research and knowledge production in Africa, and who should be setting the research agenda?

Monica Camacho confirmed this is a serious and underacknowledged dimension of the crisis: processes of conflict sensitivity work that have been started are now stopped, and valuable learning opportunities are being missed. Joanina Karugaba used this to make a broader point that Africa should be funding its own research agenda rather than depending on externally-funded research that answers questions important to donors, applying the same ownership argument to knowledge production as to operational delivery. She also noted that laid-off humanitarians now setting up their own NGOs must avoid simply reinventing themselves as beggars applying for aid from the same sources, and instead build genuinely different models that deliver closer to the people they serve.

Question: What does the Shirika Plan represent for refugee inclusion in East Africa, and what can the region learn from models like the Schengen Area?

Joanina Karugaba offered a notably positive assessment of the Shirika Plan, endorsing it as the right direction of travel and the reasoning behind that endorsement is worth unpacking. The Plan represents a meaningful philosophical shift in how Kenya, and potentially the broader region, approaches displacement. It moves deliberately away from the emergency encampment model that has defined refugee response for decades a model that warehouses displaced people in geographically isolated, economically constrained settings, often for years or generations toward something more ambitious: genuine inclusion of refugees within national systems of education, health, land, and economic participation. That shift matters because the encampment model, whatever its original humanitarian logic, has accumulated significant costs over time. It creates parallel systems that are expensive to maintain, breeds dependency rather than self-reliance, and forecloses the economic contributions that displaced populations are capable of making when given the legal and practical space to do so. The Shirika Plan's government-led framing is also significant as it signals ownership and political commitment rather than the externally driven humanitarian programming that has characterised much of Kenya's refugee response historically. Karugaba's comparison with Europe's Schengen Area gave the argument a regional integration dimension that resonated with the broader conference themes. Schengen demonstrated at scale that free movement across borders, far from being a burden on receiving economies, can be a driver of economic dynamism building labour markets, expanding consumer bases, and deepening regional interdependence.

Question: Is the current funding and operational pressure on the humanitarian sector an opportunity for transformation, or will the urgency of crisis prevent meaningful reform?

Monica Camacho brought a degree of candour to the discussion that is not always present in conversations about humanitarian reform. Her admission was straightforward: the sector is not doing enough internal reflection, and that failure is consequential precisely because the current moment carries genuine transformative potential. The pressure of doing more with less shrinking donor budgets, rising caseloads, and an increasingly complex operational environment could, in principle, force the kind of structural rethinking that years of comfortable funding never demanded. It could be the moment the sector seriously interrogates its own models, confronts the power imbalances embedded in how aid is designed and delivered, and makes good on long-standing commitments to give communities real voice and meaningful agency in the responses that affect them. That conversation has been deferred repeatedly in favour of operational continuity, and the current crisis creates conditions where deferral is no longer affordable. Her fear, however, was that the same pressure making transformation necessary would also prevent it from happening. When organisations are consumed by the immediate demands of active crises keeping operations running, managing funding shortfalls, maintaining staff the bandwidth for the slower, harder work of institutional reflection and structural reform tends to be the first casualty. Urgency crowds out strategy, and the sector risks emerging from this period having adapted tactically without having changed fundamentally.

Session **Three**

Rethinking Peace and Security Financing in Africa: Beyond Aid Dependency

Moderated by **Professor Fred Jonyo,** Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Nairobi.

Prof. Peter Kagwanja, Ph.D., — Africa Policy Institute

Prof. Peter Kagwanja, PhD, of the Africa Policy Institute, opened his address by situating the current funding crisis within a broader historical and geopolitical frame, arguing that understanding why aid is declining is just as vital as knowing how to address it. He highlighted a central paradox: despite the world being objectively wealthier than ever—driven by new streams of wealth from innovations like renewable energy and artificial intelligence—there is less investment in international solidarity and more in instruments of war. He attributed this to three overlapping structural causes: the enormous fiscal stress and displaced budgetary space resulting from health crises like COVID-19 and Ebola; the lingering political and economic aftershocks of the 2008 global financial crisis, which intensified global inequality and austerity; and the rise of populism, nationalism, and "negative nationalism," akin to Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities," as seen in the "America First" or "Kenya Kwanza" ideologies that make foreign assistance politically unviable in major donor states. Consequently, humanism as an ideology is in decline, and the liberal international order that previously expanded democracy, human rights, and multilateralism has been replaced by unilateral "might-is-right" practices, military modernization over development, and a fragmented "civilizational thinking"—as framed by Samuel Huntington—where common global challenges are recast as individual civilizational problems. For Africa, Prof. Kagwanja argued this is not a crisis but a clarification that the continent can no longer count on external resources, noting that Africa has always possessed the necessary capacities but lacked the collective will to mobilize them. He challenged attendees to broaden their concept of resources beyond mere finances to systematically engage under-mobilized assets: human expertise from African professionals, the immense capital of diaspora networks, the mobilizing power of social movements and civil society, traditional cultural capital for conflict resolution, and the substantial private wealth of high-net-worth individuals in countries like Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, whom the continent has yet to adequately engage.

Citing Equity Bank Kenya's provision of financial services to refugees as a concrete model for private sector integration into humanitarian response, he urged the cultivation of similar initiatives before pointing to Jubaland to illustrate the "develop them out of existence" principle; there, 10 to 15 years of sustained investment has enabled communities to rebuild and protect their wealth against groups like Al-Shabaab, proving development is an effective counter-terrorism strategy. Finally, he delivered a direct warning regarding the survival of think tanks and CSOs, stating that atomized organizations like the HORN Institute and the Africa Policy Institute cannot survive the coming shifts in isolation and must form coalitions to pool resources and coordinate advocacy; however, he concluded by stressing that Africa should not abandon internationalism altogether, but rather actively deepen relationships with the remaining pockets of global solidarity that still believe in collective action.

Nicodemus Minde, Ph.D., — International Relations Scholar and Policy Analyst

Dr Minde opened with characteristic candour, using a self-deprecating anecdote about academic expertise before engaging honestly with the uncertainties around the AU Peace Fund a novel, ambitious, and still-evolving instrument whose outcomes are not yet fully clear. He showed the room a video clip in which Mo Ibrahim challenged African heads of state directly, asking why they are not funding the African Union and pointing out that with a total AU budget of around USD 650 million, less than a third comes from member states themselves. Dr Minde framed his analysis around two concepts: autonomy and agency. Historically, peace operations in Africa were almost entirely externally funded, creating operational and strategic constraints under which external funders dictated timelines, conditions, and exit strategies while African actors had limited control. The AU Peace Fund revitalisation, led under the financial reforms of former African Development Bank President Donald Kaberuka, aimed to transform this by moving from dependence to financial autonomy and ensuring member states contribute meaningfully to their own peace and security architecture. The core financing mechanism is a zero to two per cent levy on AU member state imports.

He detailed the most recent reform initiative, the Accra Committee proposals of 2024 which he described as commendable. The committee aimed to grow the AU Peace Fund from approximately USD 200 million to around USD 600 million through a capital growth strategy building an endowment for long-term sustainability; a substantial increase in private sector contributions from approximately six per cent to approximately 36 per cent of contributions, representing a structural shift from pure government funding toward a diversified base including civil society and philanthropy; enforceable mechanisms for consistent member state contributions to address chronic arrears; and governance reform including independent oversight, professional management, compliance with auditing standards, and transparency to address the known problem of significant fund disbursements going to stipends.

Dr Minde presented three scenarios for the Peace Fund's future. Under Scenario One, African financial autonomy expands through sustained, enforced member state contributions and the Peace Fund becomes a genuine central alternative for peace financing. He described this as achievable but requiring political commitment not yet materialised at the required level. Under Scenario Two — the hybrid financing model, which he identified as the most likely UN assessed contributions, the AU facility, and bilateral security partnerships operate together, producing a larger operational base than the AU can achieve alone but with continued external dependence, with the key phrase being autonomy within partnership rather than full independence. Under Scenario Three, the absence of new contributions means the fund fails to achieve its intended impact and Africa remains dependent on external goodwill. He concluded with a comparative analysis showing the AU Peace Fund at historically high external dependence compared to the EU, NATO, and ASEAN, but argued that the trajectory if the Accra reforms are implemented points toward improvement. His summary framing was direct: between autonomy and agency lies the strategic question, and it is not about financing alone but about African solutions to African problems with African money.

> **“African financial autonomy expands through sustained, enforced member state contributions and the Peace Fund becomes a genuine central alternative for peace financing”**

Winluck Wahiu, Ph.D — Senior Adviser, Constitution-Building Processes, Africa and West Asia Region

Dr Wahiu came directly to the institutional reform dimension of the financing problem. He noted that the new AU Commission Chairperson had announced a commitment to fully internally funding the AU Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security — with a budget of approximately USD 50 to 60 million. This represents a genuine aspirational goal: the department managing preventive diplomacy should not depend on external funding. However, he immediately identified the operational tension — preventive diplomacy missions are expensive, often involving former heads of state as peace envoys whose activities create costs and political obligations even where the AU is not directly funding them personally.

Dr Wahiu identified the AU's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) as a critical case study in institutional dysfunction. The AU was aware that conflict was developing in Mozambique before it escalated, the early warning systems detected it, and no action was taken. The CEWS has effectively been underfunded and undermined to the point where it no longer functions as intended, meaning that by the time diplomats reach the ground they are not benefiting from institutional intelligence. The link between early warning and early action which is the entire purpose of such a system — is broken. He argued for urgently strengthening this link and noted the pointed irony that when member states are told they should see preventive diplomacy as an investment, they ask how they are supposed to see it as an investment which is exactly the right question, and exactly the one that has not yet been answered convincingly.

He addressed the problem of institutional duplication across RECs — every regional community creating its own parallel security architecture, early warning system, rapid reaction capacity, and mediation mechanisms. While geographic and political realities make some duplication inevitable, the current level is wasteful. The AU principle of complementarity and subsidiarity, if properly applied, should govern this, but applying it requires political agreements that member states have not been willing to negotiate.

Comments, Questions and Answers

The following questions and responses reflect the key exchanges.

Question: Is the AU Peace Fund designed to fail?

A participant made a direct structural critique: the Peace Fund is an endowment fund without an annual budget, yet conflicts and missions run on annual budgets. AMISOM alone had a budget of USD 1 billion, while the Peace Fund's goal is USD 600 million — less than AMISOM alone. Even taking USD 300 million from a fully funded Peace Fund leaves it broke for everything else. The AU's own target of funding 25 per cent of its peacekeeping mission budgets means it will take a very long time to reach even 50 or 60 per cent self-sufficiency. Dr Minde acknowledged the structural critique but argued that the Accra Committee proposals — including Resolution 734 — are designed to address scalability, and that the hybrid model explicitly recognises the fund alone is insufficient and must be complemented by other sources. The jury is still out, he said, but the Peace Fund is an initial step in a longer journey.

Question: On private contributions versus mercenaries is it not too trendy to call them 'private sector' when we mean private security companies?

Dr Wahiu responded with historical depth, noting that the AU has a convention on mercenaries going back to the 1977 OAU Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism in Africa. However, the reality is what he called the Swiss model: states already routinely contract military capacity in ways hidden in intelligence budgets and unreported to parliaments. France pays the Cameroonian army to operate in the Sahel; Saudi Arabia paid Sudan to fight in Yemen; the US has funded Kenyan forces for specific operations; Rwanda provides contracted military capability on request. These arrangements are happening in the shadows. His proposal was to normalise them not to expand them, but to create an AU or REC-based governance framework so that they are transparent, publicly reported, and subject to parliamentary oversight.

Question: On structural barriers to resilience and the political economy of conflict?

The fundamental barrier identified was the political economy of conflict entrepreneurs — individuals and groups who benefit from prolonged conflict. They know that mediation talks provide an opportunity to rehabilitate their public image without facing criminal accountability unless taken to the ICC. The South Sudan example was instructive: if SPLM and SPLA were privately asked what percentage of their peace agreement they intended to implement, the honest answer would likely be 20 and 50 per cent respectively. They were never committed to the hybrid court. The US offer of an 'off ramp' — halting the court in exchange for investment access — was welcomed precisely because it gave them an excuse to avoid accountability they had never intended to provide. The panel also noted the deliberate use of low-level instability to attract external resources — keeping a conflict simmering just enough to justify international attention without triggering decisive intervention.

Question: Are parts of Africa already moving toward criminal governance, and what would it take to prevent that trajectory from becoming irreversible?

A participant drew a comparison to Latin America, noting that close to 101 million people live under what is described as criminal governance parallel structures of power that control populations without seeking to overthrow governments. The dynamics described hybrid governance, parallel authority structures, the erosion of the state's monopoly on violence are already present in parts of Somalia, DRC, Sudan, and South Sudan. Whether this represents a trajectory toward full criminal governance or a manageable transitional dysfunction depends on whether the state rebuilding effort is adequately resourced and politically supported.

Question: Is the duplication between the AU and Africa's RECs a structural problem that needs fixing, or an unavoidable feature of how regional peace and security actually works?

Dr Minde argued that the fundamental question is where the duplication actually lies. Geographic and regional realities mean that IGAD, EAC, SADC, ECOWAS, and COMESA each take on conflict management functions relevant to their specific regions, and the conflicts they face have regional specificities that justify parallel early warning mechanisms. The AU principle of complementarity and subsidiarity should govern — the AU acts only where RECs cannot, and RECs act only where member states cannot — but applying it requires political agreements that member states have not been willing to negotiate, meaning some overlap will persist.

Question: The Africa Standby Force exists, is trained, and is ready so why isn't it being deployed, and what does that reveal about the AU's real capacity for peace enforcement?

A participant from the Eastern Africa Standby Force pushed back: 'We ARE the Africa Standby Force. We are trained, capacitated, on standby for deployment. If you are going to normalise contracted armies, where does this leave us?' Dr Wahiu gave a detailed technical response covering multiple operational barriers: the ASF cannot be deployed without a UN Security Council Resolution; there is no agreed framework for command structures as contributing states insist their troops remain under national command with no common doctrine; the only known deployed EASF elements in the DRC were almost entirely Western-donor funded; and the AU has no effective leverage when Gulf states or China are involved in a conflict, with Egypt and Saudi Arabia having stated that nothing happens in Sudan without their involvement. He was candid: the idea that the AU will become strong in terms of peace and security financing and operations is aspirational, and the AU is what the African member states make it unless those states genuinely empower that body, it will remain marginal.

Question: What would it take for the AU to compete with Gulf states as a preferred mediator, and is that competition even winnable?

The response was candid about the difficulty. The day before a scheduled meeting in Nairobi between President Kagame and President Tshisekedi to discuss the DRC crisis, Kagame was photographed being hosted in Doha by Qatar a clear signal that Qatar's convening power and financial resources make it a more attractive mediator. The panel acknowledged that the AU currently has limited structural leverage to change this dynamic without the member state political will to empower it, and that many African leaders and protagonists actively prefer to mediate conflicts outside Africa, further marginalising the AU.

Question: Are hybrid courts genuine accountability mechanisms, or have they become instruments of political bargaining in post-conflict transitions?

Dr Wahiu gave a frank response. Peace agreements have become very lengthy documents covering military, constitutional, electoral, and economic reforms simultaneously, signed by combatants who benefit from the political economy of conflict. In the Gambia, the president keeps threatening to establish a hybrid court whenever the army becomes restive, using it as a political bargaining chip rather than an accountability instrument. The result, he argued, is a dynamic where courts are not instruments of justice but of political bargaining, used to attract external support and signal compliance without actually delivering it. Breaking that cycle requires accountability mechanisms that are structurally independent of donor political interests — which is extremely difficult to design but essential to pursue.

Question: Is external funding for African peace operations aid dependency, or is it a legitimate cost-sharing arrangement for a global public good?

A participant reframed the entire discussion: the AMISOM commander has not been paid for a year, the police commissioner has not been paid, troops are not getting anything. If the AU Peace Fund reaches USD 1 billion, it will still not finance a mission like AMISOM. When we talk about aid dependency in peace and security, the participant argued, we need to understand that the African peace and security architecture was established to fill a gap where others could not act. If the EU contributes money to African peace operations, it is not aid — it is Africa's money, because peace in Africa benefits the whole world. The future of peace operations should be a genuine partnership, not a question of eliminating external contributions but of complementing them with African contributions and ensuring African ownership of the process and the agenda.

Session **Four**

Way Forward: Re-vitalizing Regional Security Architecture

Moderated by **Halkano Wario Ph.D.,** Senior Lecturer, Department of Philosophy and Religoius Studies, Egerton University

Youth Interventions

Two direct and pointed interventions came from young participants, both among the most significant contributions of the two days. The first participant, a Gen Z researcher from Strathmore University, challenged the conference for barely mentioning youth throughout two days of discussion despite youth being the majority of the population. She argued that political will must ultimately come from the population, not the political class, and asked directly why the conference had not discussed how youth will fashion and hold accountable the political class. She noted that recent protest movements in Kenya and elsewhere demonstrate that young people are already generating political change, and that what is missing is not energy or numbers but the connection between expert dialogue in hotels and organised grassroots political agency. The second young participant, also a researcher on emerging technologies at Strathmore University, raised the AI and technology dimension of the financing discussion, arguing that given chronic financial shortfalls, technology — particularly artificial intelligence — offers a significant opportunity to offset costs and make peace operations more affordable. She noted with urgency that ISWAP is already deploying surveillance drones and ISIS is using generative AI for propaganda and operational agendas, meaning violent non-state actors are leveraging AI while peace operations are still debating financing models. She called for investment in technology not just at the onset of conflicts but during active peacekeeping missions — for logistics, early warning, intelligence, and force multiplication — and challenged the conference to bring the technology conversations that younger generations are already having into the institutional space.

Nicodemus Minde, Ph.D

Dr Minde made two substantive contributions to the way forward. His first point was that Africa does not need to look externally for the financial resources to finance its peace efforts and build resilience. Research has shown repeatedly that the cumulative annual waste across African governments equals approximately USD 100 billion the contrast between the motorcades of African leaders and the trains routinely used by European heads of government was offered as a vivid illustration. On top of this, approximately USD 220 billion is repatriated annually from Africa by multinational companies through tax evasion and illicit financial flows, meaning that combined waste and illicit outflows represent approximately USD 320 billion in recoverable resources more than enough to run all multilateral frameworks, fund all RECs, and finance all peace missions currently dependent on external donors. The money is there; the political will to capture it is what is missing.

Mustafa Yusuf Ali, Ph.D

Dr Mustafa's point drew the room's attention to a report by Professor Attiya Waris, the UN Independent Expert on Financing for Development, whose finding was that global peace expenditure amounts to just 0.6 per cent of global military expenditure. His call to action for African governments was direct: avoid going in the direction of countries prioritising military expenditure and instead reinvest resources in the preventive aspects of peace, stability, and growth. Prevention is dramatically cheaper than conflict response and it is more effective.

Winluck Wahiu, Ph.D

Dr Wahiu framed his contribution around a prior question that he argued must be answered before asking how to fund peace and security: why is peace and security in the Horn of Africa worth investing in, not just for Africa but for the world? He noted that Africa does not have a common foreign policy, but if one were being developed it would need to articulate two strategic dimensions of the Horn's importance. The first is ports: all major nuclear powers now have military networks oriented around the ports of the Horn of Africa, meaning security in the Horn is security for global shipping lanes and military logistics, giving every major power a direct stake in the region's stability. The second is food production: Gulf states are making large-scale agricultural investments in the Horn, and deepening food security links between the Horn and the Gulf mean that food production stability in the Horn is a strategic interest of several major global actors — leverage that has not yet been adequately mobilised. His challenge to the room was to articulate this strategic case convincingly before asking for the financing.

Joanina Karugaba

Joanina returned to make one specific contribution on an under-discussed financing source. She noted that within the continent and across the world, there is a substantial flow of religious giving — from churches, mosques, temples, and faith communities — going directly to meet the critical needs of affected communities. This giving is already happening at scale, is delivered by institutions with deep community trust that international agencies cannot

replicate, and often reaches areas where formal agencies cannot operate. She argued that better coordination of religious giving, without compromising its character, could meaningfully supplement formal humanitarian response and merits serious institutional attention — an opportunity that has not yet been seriously explored at the policy level.

Christopher Hockey

Christopher Hockey reframed the entire financing question with a simple analogy: when buying a product, the first question is what it is for. We can raise tens of billions for peace operations, he argued, but that may not be the right amount or indeed enough, because we have not first asked what these operations are actually for and what our money gets us. He applied this directly to current operations: the DRC mission is disliked on the ground, the South Sudan mission is disliked, and the Somalia mission is not working particularly well. Why would you invest in a product where the return is unclear? The question must shift from how do we fund peace operations to what are these interventions for, and what does your money get you for African states, for African citizens, for potential contributors. If that value proposition can be clearly articulated in concrete rather than diplomatic terms, the funding question becomes answerable. He also called for an honest audit of past spending: what has the funding committed so far actually achieved, where has it failed, and what evidence-based learning exists? Without this, the sector is asking people to invest in a product without a performance record. The final contribution from the floor captured the defining tension of the conference: after all that has been said, where do these conversations go? The policies are there, the frameworks exist, and on paper they look good. The question is what spaces of influence exist to start pushing for these conversations to be actioned by the AU Peace and Security Council and African heads of state.

Closing Session

Mr Edgar Mwine — Project Manager, KAS Regional Programme Security Dialogue for East Africa

Mr Mwine offered a closing message that engaged directly with the youth voices characterising the final session. He responded to the question of agency for the younger generation by arguing that the means, the ways, and the mechanisms by which power is taken, managed, and relinquished must not continuously repeat themselves. New ways must be found that are not determined by the challenges being chased but by the actors doing the chasing. He acknowledged the organising team for the long hours and behind-the-scenes coordination that made the conference function, noting that this in itself models what is possible when young people are given responsibility and trust. He made a formal pledge on behalf of KAS to continue supporting the outcomes from the conference, committing that KAS will stand between what happens next and what the HORN Institute is thinking about.

Dr Hassan Khannenje — Director, HORN Institute

Dr Khannenje's closing remarks were substantive and forward-looking. Responding directly to the youth challenge from the final session, he argued that power will not be given — it has to be taken when opportunity comes to those who are prepared. For young people to seize it, organised change is required: an agency that is efficient, coherent, and purposefully directed. He challenged the younger generation not just to want power but to prepare for it by building the networks, analytical capacity, institutional relationships, and political literacy that make power usable when it arrives.

Reflecting on the two days, Dr Khannenje noted several significant achievements: ideas on building self-sufficiency as the necessary foundation for peace and security; ideas applicable beyond peace and security to climate change, women's rights, poverty, and conflict-affected communities; and a provocative observation that more technology seems to have produced less innovation, more networks but less genuine connection. He challenged participants not just to network but to act on what has been discussed. He confirmed that the HORN Institute and KAS will produce a comprehensive conference report, a policy brief extracting the most actionable proposals for decision-makers, and continued programming building on the ideas generated.

> **This is not exactly the time for doubting Thomases, neither is it the time for cynics who have become so profoundly disengaged. It is time to look at ourselves in the mirror and tell ourselves that the change we seek begins with us — that we are going to become the change we seek to see in the world, and that we are going to build partnerships and networks with like-minded persons to move there.**

His final challenge was directed at the scholars and researchers in the room, whom he urged to get out of the hotel and build the kind of networks and agency that allow engagement with policymakers at local and national levels. The journey is long, the work is not easy, but it is the work that must be done. Those who fought against colonialism, for human rights, and for democracy did not stop because it was hard. The change sought begins with us.


Dr. Solomon Gichira
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