FIFTY VOICES

FIFTY PLACES
Fifty years gone by, looking to the future with hope
This year we celebrate 50 years of the African Union (AU) and its precursor the Organization for African Unity (OAU). Many will remember the OAU’s role in the struggle against colonialism and apartheid. After the fall of apartheid it became evident that the OAU needed reform to respond to the emerging needs of African people and support growing democracy, good governance and lasting solutions to rising inter and intra state conflict. Today, some countries are thriving economically and enjoying relative peace and stability, and Africa boasts some of the fastest growing economies in the world. There are new opportunities, but there are many more challenges with Africa’s development indices still among the world’s lowest. This situation is compounded by continuous cycles of conflict. Millions of people have died, millions more are living on the brink of starvation and in constant fear for their lives. While men have been affected by conflict, women and children have especially felt the brunt of war and the ever looming fear of sexual violence.

For many people affected by conflict, eking out a living is a balancing act between going out and finding scarce opportunities to earn money, and staying safe. Sometimes it seems there is no work, no food, and no hope.

In this booklet we bring the voices of 50 people from five African countries that are at different stages of conflict. From Somalia, we meet women who are defying all odds and inspiring young and old with their work. In DRC, we meet young people determined to have an education. In Mali, we meet people who are hopeful that a solution to the current conflict will be found. Through song and dance, musicians in Mali are providing hope in the face of despair. In South Sudan, women are back in the markets selling vegetables and lunch, while in Sudan the conflict in Darfur continues yet women are looking to the future and supporting their families. All these stories show how conflict has affected people’s lives, but it also shows that people are still hopeful for a better day. If people are safe, they will get on with their lives. It can be done, but this effort will take political will as well as practical steps to address root causes of conflict and find lasting solutions.

50 years have gone by. Leaders in Africa must stand up and say “enough is enough”. It starts with tiny but incremental steps. Words are no longer enough. We now need to look to the future with hope, but this hope must be accompanied with corrective action. The AU needs to prioritize dialogue centred on the root causes of conflict, contributing factors and resolutions. African governments must listen to their people and unlock the solutions that they are calling for in order to address conflict and poverty and achieve prosperity, development and peace. If colonialism and apartheid could be overcome, conflict is not insurmountable if faced with the same resolve the founding leaders of the OAU displayed.
“My parents went to Khartoum for work, but when the war broke we could not return to our home in South Sudan. We lost contact with our relatives and most of our family. Now peace has allowed my family and I to return to South Sudan. But our country has to have proper security, and our children must go to school and cannot just stay home. There must also be more hospitality to outsiders - we must welcome them.”

Minallah Alfred, 35
[South Sudan]
The war affected me personally. I’m 27 and could be with a master’s degree, but I’m starting my university education now. I was a refugee in (DR) Congo and just came back three years ago. My father died during the war, even my Mom. (So) I am the one to support myself, looking how to survive. We need the government to construct more schools so that we educate more young South Sudanese. If we are going to improve our country we need to get education.

Emmanuel Gumbo, 27
[South Sudan]
There are many marks from the war. I hear gunshots when really the noise is something else. A plane that is flying into Juba will cause me stress because my body thinks it is a Sudanese plane bombing us. Peace has allowed me to return home to Juba.

Khartoum was nice but we did not have our government because they would not listen to us Southerners. Now we have a government and to them my message is that there are many things happening which are not good. We need your help.

Amojuma John, 17
[South Sudan]
“My family died (in the war) and I saw many lives lost around me. Peace has allowed me to raise my children without constant fear they will be killed. I’m happy that I now have my own government, but there is much work to be done to ensure there is security of life here in Juba. The government must also set a control on the price of goods. Prices move too much and it is already very difficult to feed my children.”

Najwa Bukri, 25
(South Sudan)
In the war I didn’t have proper shelter and had to stay in the homes of friends. I lost uncles, friends and two of my sons. I still think about them. The government must look at the issue of the orphans, so they can go to school and have a place to sleep. It must also help our younger girls go to school. Older women need a loan system so we can start a small business and then repay them slowly. Women need a way to make money. Women need education and opportunity.

Regina, and grandson, Bol, 15 months
[South Sudan]
“The war killed hope for too long. With peace I was finally able to return to a home in South Sudan. To the government my message is that first our children need to go to school. Then second the agricultural sector needs to be improved. People must be able to farm and sell their produce at the market. Right now the market is impossible to connect to because of insecurity and poor roads.

Nahir Henry, 23
[South Sudan]
“After my father died I was unable to go to school until the war ended. We are happy now with peace and no longer having segregation in the heart. Peace also allowed me to come to Juba. Here I have been able to start school and can socialize with friends I was never able to socialize before. The government must improve security so that people are not killed at night. In the next years South Sudan will get better.”

Vicki, 25
[South Sudan]
“To me, peace is maybe for other people. I don’t know it yet. I want to study so I hope peace will allow me to do that. I hope the government builds more schools. We must have opportunities for young men.”

Abdullah Paul, 18
[South Sudan]
“With peace we have liberty and freedom. Unfortunately this is a young country and some problems have cropped up. One thing still lacking is the provision of food to the people of South Sudan. I’d advise the government to improve the road network—there is much food lying in the countryside because of poor road networks. If there are good roads there would be excess food in Juba and other towns.”

Reverend Samuel, 63
[South Sudan]
I was a soldier during the war and it affected me mentally. My education was cut away. Sometimes people are so used to fighting it takes time to change. The peace between Sudan and South Sudan is one we are still doubting. I’m no longer a soldier but a security guard - I work instead of fight, but physicality is still my work. I need my government to provide tight security because there are still some who want to see this country destroyed.

Michael, 29
[South Sudan]
Without the education and development of young boys there is no peace for us as elders. Me, as an elderly man, I’m less important. The government must focus on the next generation and the youth. This country will be in their hands.

Fred Marco, 62
[South Sudan]
“Mali is for us all. We need all the ethnic groups, there are many, to sit down and discuss the future of the country.”

Bassekou Kouyate, artist
(Mali)
African unity to me means having African states being willing to open their borders for fellow Africans...it means creating an environment where African citizens can live and operate without any or fewer restrictions economically as well as socially.

Tétou Gologo, Craftswoman
(Mali)
To live together in Mali, those who made mistakes must acknowledge that.

BTiecoura Traore, trade unionist
[Mali]
The African Union must implement the seeds of peace in all the communities.

Celia d’Almeida, journalist
   [Mali]
This is the first time I see such a situation in Mali. As a country, Mali is very open and this conflict has shown us another side of our society.

Fatoumata Berthé, professor
[Mali]
“Because of the conflict in Mali, students like me have lost many opportunities like internships.”

Nanaï Touré, student [Mali]
I was sad to see thousands of fellow countrymen flee from their homes, families separated and their hopes and dreams shattered. I was also touched to see how precarious the situation was for the people with disabilities.

Rokiatou Diakité, private sector
[Mali]
“Peace is about the understanding and concord. To know peace, there should be a conflict. And after that, the peace requires social cohesion.”

Mohamed Ossade, cultural worker
(Mali)
“In Mali, through our cultures, we have always been taught to sit together, to speak through old mediation mechanisms.”

Kegnekou Albert Dougnon, student
[Mali]
“The political system should be revised and we will need to go through this stage.”

Ismaïla Diaw, civil servant
[Mali]
I am from Somaliland but work in an area contested by both Somaliland and Puntland. I believe for conflict to end, Somalis should be left as Somalis to deal with their own issues. They should be allowed to do this and be respected. Peace means living in a friendly environment among community members who do not interfere with each other. Each has their own right, they live and work and enjoy life. Other African countries should support the situation in Somalia as the government is not strong enough. Africa should not leave us like that, they should continue to engage in discussions.

Zainab Ayan Ahmed, civil society practitioner
(Somalia)
My message I would like to share with African leaders is to stand shoulder to shoulder with Somalia to get it back on its feet. It must become a government to address issues and its responsibilities in security and protecting Somali people’s human rights.

Abdihaqim Saed Mohamed head master, Darwish school [Somalia]
The conflict has badly affected me. I live in the street with no shelter and food. In order to ease the stress I started sniffing glue three years ago. People in Mogadishu call us names such as “Glue Sniffers” and “Street Kids.” We are teased and at the same time scorned by the people as a result. Had I gone to school, my situation would not have been like this. I wish I could go to school and live a normal life. If there was peace I would like to be a driver. I like cars and I used to make toy cars when I was a kid. To end the conflict the young generation needs to be educated. Children should be taught what is bad and what is good to deter conflict in the future. Peace means everything to me.

Omar Mohamed, internally displaced person
[Somalia]
If there were no gangs and insecurity, I would go back to school and learn. I would be enjoying a healthy life. To end the conflict I would raise awareness to those engaged in crime or conflict that if they don’t stop I would put them in prison for two months. Peace means that children get care and their education is stronger. The government should give us places for we street children to sleep. They should make education stronger, and invest and support the country financially. If there is a conflict, all countries should come together to help and support the negotiations. African countries should support the development of our port and help in bring food and cars.

Mohamed Yusuf Mohamed, rehabilitated street child
(Somalia)
There is a huge amount of work that needs to be done; so many priorities but so few resources to tackle them. The government urgently needs to improve security. Without security we have no chance of getting out of the abject poverty many people face. We need a focus on building peace using the knowledge of Somalis and should not wait for people from outside to do it for us. The authorities need to do everything they can to let us come together, build peace and get beyond the culture of impunity. We must recognise the role each and every member of the community has to play to improve the situation. Men, women, girls and boys need to stand on their feet and take measures that will help lift them out of poverty. Let us invest in more teachers, feed them, give them secure places to live and then educate our children properly.

Mama Hawa Aden Mohamed, founder and director of the Galkayo Education Centre [Somalia]
African countries should support a Somalia that protects its civilians and their rights; this can be achieved by helping the Somali government in developing policies and frameworks aimed at strengthening the key pillars; security, justice and livelihoods. By committing to support Somalia, African countries will need to dedicate time; resources and technical expertise to measure the impacts of the strategies rolled out and be prepared to hold Somali Governments accountable for commitments not followed through on.

— Ilwad M. Ali, activist
[Somalia]
The conflict uprooted me from my hometown. Life has been difficult for me as an IDP and being away from my village is so tough. I lost everything in the conflict; we even sold some of our land we used to cultivate in order to stay alive. My biggest hope at the moment is to get back to my village. I am not educated—what I was taught was how to cook and take care of my younger siblings. Therefore, that is what I would do if there was peace and stability in the country. The government could confiscate weapons from bad guys and disarm gunmen in the streets in order to reduce conflict. I don’t know how we can end the conflict but I do know that peace will mean something good to me.

Hawo Bashir, internally displaced person
[Somalia]
Concrete nationwide reconciliation needs to happen in order for the conflict to end. Somalis have been killing each other for two decades and there are no losers and winners despite all the bloodshed. Resolution is needed once and for all. Peace means going back to my home village again and starting afresh. I would like to do small business if there was peace. Before coming to Mogadishu two years ago, I was a vendor and I used to sell fruit and vegetables. The government may improve the situation for all by helping maintain peace and stability in the country. It should work on opening dialogue with those who oppose it. Income generating schemes and projects to help unemployed folks might also be helpful because peace will be foreseeable if people have something on their table.

Batulo Hassan
internally displaced person
[Somalia]
“The government needs to provide us with care and security. The government should also support negotiation between communities which is important if we are to stand a chance of peace.”

Ahmed Farah, 13, rehabilitated street child
[Somalia]
The conflict has turned my life upside down and things will never be the same again. I lost a number of my closest family during the prolonged conflict. I am still traumatized by my loss. I have also lost my income and become a destitute who cannot help his children to go to school. I am now above fifty and I feel sick since I came to Mogadishu three years ago. Therefore, I don’t think I can do any sort of work. I ask my children to take care of me. Only Allah knows what needs to happen, we cannot foretell the future, it is in the hands of Almighty Allah.

Abukar Ali, internally displaced person [Somalia]
I would like to ask to the authorities of the African Union to help us, the women of the Congo, the mamas of the city gardens of Kinshasa, because we are feeding the entire Congolese population through our work. To achieve this we would like to ask the assistance of the African authorities, with materials like brooms, fertilizers, sprayers, boots and working clothes. They could help us in constructing some medical facilities for the women working in the city gardens because in these working conditions we are often bitten by snakes.

Lusasi Edenda Gisele, 17 year old orphan, works in the city gardens
[Democratic Republic of Congo]
I have been on the streets since I was nine years old. I am now in a centre for orphaned children and training to be a tailor. Now I can sleep.

Cynthia, 14
(Democratic Republic of Congo)
There are protocols that exist for fighting violence against women but they are not implemented - and we want them to be implemented. In times of war, as in times of peace, there has always been violence against women. The biggest problem that we have in the promotion of women’s rights is primarily our customs and traditions, and these are made worse by conflict. We need political will to address the problems so that our institutions can work and respond to the needs of the people. DRC is a rich country and we can do a lot more so that people can benefit from the natural resources. We would like the African Union to respond to people’s interests by ensuring not only that ordinary people are familiarised with protocols but that these texts are implemented.

Justine Masika
Activist, North Kivu
Democratic Republic of Congo
If there was peace at home, I would stop with the sale of water and trade in clothing, breed chickens and goats. I would also like to travel around the country. With the war, everything is blocked. We cannot travel between the village and city. The sale of water doesn’t earn me enough but I can’t stop this business. In short, war prevents us from doing a lot of our normal activities.

Patrick Sabura Itimana
Water seller in Goma
[Democratic Republic of Congo]
States and authorities should not be the only focus and concern of the AU. If there is a seriousness to solve the root causes of the issues of the continent, and if there is real work for a brighter and different future of the continent, then the AU’s efforts should also reach youth and civil society organizations. The problems are not only at the government level.

Madani Abbas, youth activist
[Sudan]
The African Union has to put pressure on all parties existing in the Sudanese political space to find peaceful solutions for the conflict in Sudan. The AU has to play a bigger role in enhancing the democratic transformation and human rights in Sudan.

Mohamed Erwa, human rights activist
(Sudan)
The role of the African Union in Sudan is not a clear one and it is hardly felt by us who are in the civil society. How can the civil society contribute in strengthening the AU? How can we define our role in building and supporting Pan Africanism?

El Tahra Magzoub
Environmentalist
[Sudan]
More coordination between the African leaders is a must if they are to play a bigger role. The AU should be stronger to solve the conflicts on the continent, and ensure peace, security and economic justice with dignity to all African people at all times.

Mohamed Salim, human rights advocate
[Sudan]
“The African Charter for Democracy and Good Governance needs a big campaign to make most - if not all of - the African countries sign, ratify and be committed to it. The most important thing is to give a chance to civil society organizations and African people to play active roles in the African Union, especially on issues related to human rights, democracy, good governance and sustainable development.”

Faisal Salihb, journalist
[Sudan]
“This is a call for African leaders to ensure their people reach a strong union among the African countries, and remove all the walls among them - we must have freedom of movement within the continent.”

Yousif El Tayeb, development activist (Sudan)
Our hopes and expectations haven’t yet aborted. I hope that is because the age of the AU is still small, especially if we compare it with the challenges and historical circumstances under which it was established - very different from the birth of the EU. Our hopes and expectations are that Africa strengthens its existence as a continent and has a global united voice. This one African voice needs to exist, and we need an Africa without borders. The role of the AU should be to prioritize transforming the conflicts in Africa into positive action. We are really optimistic about the AU intervention to solve the conflicts in Sudan.

Dr. Asha Karib,
civil society leader
[Sudan]
Conflict analysis, conflict transformation and peace building is a difficult process. It’s a complementary effort that needs a long time to go through it. The first element is to understand the problem and go deep in its routes through provision of information and listen to all parties to the conflict.

Midhat Afifeldien, media professional (Sudan)
There is one simple thing that the government needs to do in order to address conflict and poverty, and achieve prosperity, development and peace in the country. That is to listen, with an open heart, to the voices that call for justice and equality for all the Sudanese people and all the people of Africa. If that is achieved, I think we can move from where we are now into a better future. In addressing poverty, of course we must address issues related to health and education. There is no doubt that the healthier individuals are more productive. The AU has to encourage African government to invest more in health and education.

Dr. Ahmed Gemaleldin, academic
(Sudan)
“The government must take its responsibility. It must build schools and make education free for all. Peace for me means leaving the house and coming back in one piece. It is very difficult to leave the house and be sure that you will come back. Peace means to be able to eat well, walk freely, and do whatever I want to do freely.”

Marie Mbombo, student at the Free University of the Great Lakes Countries - ULPGL
(Democratic Republic of Congo)
“This war has affected us greatly. It has been going on for a very long time. It doesn’t end. I would like to ask the ‘big people’ out there to take two minutes, just two minutes, to investigate the root causes of this war. After that they must find a lasting solution.”

Francine Chikanine, second hand clothes trader

Democratic Republic of Congo
As Africans we are not united. Even in a single country we are divided. If Africa can be united, then one day she will be able to stand on her own so that she doesn’t need external assistance. On the contrary, others will be coming to Africa for help.

Tonton Lusambo, musician
[Democratic Republic of Congo]
“I am asking the government to help our children go to school. We want our children to have three meals a day. We want them to sleep in peace.”

Justine Kavira, grocery seller
[Democratic Republic of Congo]
As the AU name stipulates unity, I am expecting restoration of unity in 50 years to come. DRC has always said it would undertake military reforms but this is a concrete action that has never been realised. We need the government to restore peace and foster prosperity. One concrete step is the reformation of the army and the regulation of commerce and industry in DRC. These two things are important factors in conflict. We also ask DRC’s neighbours to use diplomatic channels more effectively to help us restore peace in DRC.

Sun Seninga, student at the Free University of the Great Lakes Countries - ULPGL [Democratic Republic of Congo]
In order to better help us the AU needs to give health care a priority, our government needs to supply hospitals with medicine as well as start 24-hour power. Right now if someone gets sick at night then nurses and doctors have to use torches which is very challenging.

Rena Christo, 33 and her son Justin, 9 months  
[South Sudan]
Contact person:
Muleya Mwananyanda
Rights in Crisis Campaign and Policy Manager
Africa Campaign (Gender Peace & Livelihoods)

Oxfam International, Suite 406 TK Building, Bole Rd
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Tel: +251 11 661 1601 | Email: Muleya.Mwananyanda@oxfaminternational.org
www.oxfam.org