

Address at the National War College

Abuja, Nigeria 8 December 2003

Rear Admiral Amos Adedeji,
Distinguished course participants,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for inviting me to address you at this prestigious college that has trained many of our senior African military officers. Institutions such as yours play an important part in preparing our officers to assume their proper role as peacemakers and peacekeepers, as envisaged in the founding instrument of the African Union (AU), the Constitutive Act.

We know that in the past our armies have at times not played the role of peacemakers and peacekeepers.

This National War College was, I am told, established on 16 June 1992, a day and month that will always bring to mind poignant thoughts about the yearning of youth for freedom. 16 years earlier, on the same day, the youth and students in South Africa stood up and faced a system that the United Nations defined as a crime against humanity. The youngsters fought tyranny, and its bullets, with stones and bare hands. Thousands died. Today, that evil system stands thoroughly defeated.

Free South Africa is especially indebted to Nigerians who worked hard to shore up world support for the struggle against apartheid. We can never thank you enough.

I have been invited to address you on the important subject relating to the security challenges facing our modern world, as well as our responses to some of those challenges.

Peace, security and stability remains as one of the more serious challenges facing our continent.

In spite of good progress towards peace and development that we see in most of our regions, the scourge of conflict is still a part of our reality. This constitutes a major impediment to efforts to eradicate poverty and ensure sustainable development on the continent.

The Constitutive Act that established the African Union states that one of the objectives of the Union is the promotion of peace, security and stability on the continent.

To that end, the Act calls for the establishment of a Peace and Security Council.

The mandate that is given to the Peace and Security Council is informed in large measure by our experiences as Africans, especially as regards the response of the world to our security needs.

While we are aware that the United Nations, primarily through the Security Council, has the primary responsibility to guarantee international peace and security, our experience of the discharge of their responsibilities in regard to conflicts on the continent has not always been positive.

The Force Commander of the UN Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), L Gen. Roméo Dallaire, has written a book that he says reflects "nothing more than an account of a few humans who were entrusted with the role of helping others taste the fruits of peace...(but) watched as the devil fed on the blood of the people we were supposed to protect".

He notes in the book that, when asked whether he still believed in God after his experience in the Rwanda genocide, he replied: "I know there is a God because in Rwanda I shook hands with the devil. I have seen him, I have smelled him and I have touched him. I know the devil exists". (*Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*:Random House, Canada)

We know that in the face of widespread murder and gruesome atrocities in Sierra Leone, some of those who were willing to participate in the Kosovo operation announced their refusal to be involved, even though they had proclaimed a new ethical foreign policy with their intervention in Kosovo.

I am happy that nine years later, the devils in Rwanda are being exorcised. That sister country of ours has held successful local, parliamentary and presidential elections, under a new political order that commits Rwanda to peace, development and protection of human rights. Rwanda stands on the brink of an inspiring new statehood that is likely to confound the critics and encourage those who see in Africa not the gloomy visage of chaos but growing peace and development.

In Burundi, we have again experienced the hesitation of members of the Security Council to act as peacemakers and peacekeepers. So too in Liberia, where the ECOWAS forces assumed that responsibility with courage and determination.

The prevention of conflict, peacekeeping and post conflict reconstruction remain as some of the urgent tasks of the AU structures.

The agreement on the establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the AU is an important step towards the attainment of the goal of peace and development on our continent.

The Council will be a standing decision-making organ of the AU for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. The Council will also have, as part of its structures, a Panel of the Wise, an Early Warning System, an African Standby Force and a Military Staff Committee.

The AU has, through the Council, defined a new role for the military forces on the continent. Not only are our forces going to take the lead in the maintenance and promotion of peace, security and stability in Africa, but would also participate in the process of creating the conditions conducive to sustainable development.

The Council will also be involved in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction activities, in the promotion of democratic practices, good governance and the rule of law, as well as the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. This emphasizes the necessity for an eminent college such as this one to educate our military leaders about the importance of the principle and practice of civilian control of our military forces.

From a history of being instruments for military coups and dictatorships, our military formations now join hands with the political leadership of the continent to support efforts to create a better life for all Africans.

From being instrumental in denying Africa's children their childhood by recruiting them as child soldiers, our military forces are now called upon to be the protectors of the right to childhood of these children..

Our countries, so too our military, have started scoring some victories in these processes of peacemaking and peacebuilding.

We should recall the significance of events in 1997 in the Democratic Republic of Congo, when the military forces of Laurent Kabila removed the long time dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko from power and started a process that, six years later, has led to a transitional government of national unity being inaugurated in that sister country.

And it goes on, gaining a snowball effect. During the early hours of Wednesday, October 8 this year, the transitional government of Burundi and the rebel group CNDD-FDD signed agreements that usher in the full participation of the CNDD-FDD in the transitional processes in that sister country.

On August 11 this year, Charles Taylor of Liberia handed over the Presidency of the Republic of Liberia to his Vice President and travelled out of the country of his birth, going into exile in your country. Today the people of Liberia are well on the way to implementing the agreements they reached in Ghana to ensure that their country prospers under conditions of peace, security and stability.

We have reversed what happened when in the early hours of Wednesday, 16 July 2003, the military in the Central African island of Sao Tome and Principe carried out a coup d'etat.

We are also encouraged by last Thursday's new ceasefire agreement between the government of President Gbagbo and the rebels in the North in Cote d'Ivoire. We must all give our support to the disarmament process which is scheduled to start soon, as well as similar process that has started in Liberia.

Good progress is being made in the Sudan, the Central African Republic and other countries.

The examples I have mentioned show that African countries are on an irreversible path to democracy and development, and that the 21st is indeed going to be the African century.

We have to rid the continent of the ugly legacy of the many conflicts that have ravaged our countries.

Countries that were involved in conflict would of necessity have assembled large armies. Once the conflict has been resolved, and because of the levels of underdevelopment in our countries, it is usually not possible to absorb all the former combatants into formal employment.

In other countries members of former armed rebel groups end up not coming into the agreed processes of demobilization.

Mercenaries are becoming a plague in Africa, especially in West Africa, as pointed out by many ECOWAS leaders.

We must act together to ensure that the use of these forces, whose only loyalty is to money, comes to an end and that we continue to implement the legal instruments pertaining to efforts to combat mercenarism. It is essential that we should act nationally and co-operatively not only to prevent the use of mercenaries but also to bar our own nationals from contributing to mercenary activities. South Africa has adopted national legislation to seek to achieve this goal in the form of the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act.

Our continent has also taken firm positions against terrorism. We already have our own Convention on Terrorism, which commits us singly and collectively to act against this threat to the safety and security of both our peoples and the peoples of the world.

One of the challenges to our common goal of the African Renaissance is the threat that the proliferation of conventional weapons, especially small arms and light weapons, poses to the stability and security of Africa.

These weapons and their use sustains conflicts, exacerbates violence and fuels crime, terrorism, poaching and human trafficking. The illicit use of these weapons and their excessive and destabilizing accumulation, inhibit development and undermines good governance. The human suffering that they cause can no loner be tolerated.

We as Africans are acutely aware that our continent is the most affected by the deadly menace of anti-personnel mines.

Our peoples have been victims of the horrific effects and tragedies wrought by the use of anti-personnel mines. Long after the conflicts in which these weapons were used have ended, large tracts of African land remain inaccessible due to the presence of these mines and other explosive remnants of war.

Our men and women are prevented from tilling the land and our children are prevented from enjoying their youth.

While we all know the enormity of the problem that confronts us and the challenges it poses, we as Africans, together with our partners in the broader international community, have responded positively to eradicate these weapons and to prevent their future use.

In 1997, the OAU adopted as a common goal the establishment of Africa as an anti-personnel mines-free zone, and at a Continental Conference of African Experts on Landmines held in South Africa, adopted a Plan of Action to achieve this objective. Through the unity and purpose of our African representatives at the Oslo negotiations on a total-ban of anti-personnel mines, Africa played a pivotal role in ensuring that such a ban was adopted, without reservations or exceptions.

In truth Africa was the foundation for the accomplishment of the international 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of the anti-personnel mines and on their destruction, which is also known as the Mine-Ban Treaty.

Four years after its entry into force, 46 of the 53 of the African states have become parties to the Mine-Ban Treaty. However we should not be satisfied with these accomplishments, and in this context I welcome the decision of the recent AU Summit in Maputo to convene a follow up continental conference on the problem of anti-personnel mines in Africa.

Our leadership on the continent continues to be part of the global security discourse.

Henry Kissinger writes that:

"At the dawn of the new millennium, the United States is enjoying a preeminence unrivaled by even the greatest empires of the past... The United States considered itself both the source and the guarantor of democratic institutions around the globe... applying economic sanctions and other pressures if its criteria were not met".
(*Does America Need a Foreign Policy?: Towards a Diplomacy for the 21st Century* :Simon & Schuster)

And so it was that when a heinous act of terror was carried out against the American people on 11 September 2001, the United States argued that nations have the right to act to protect their citizens from attack even before such attacks take place.

We need to devote some time to debate this matter. We stated in the General Assembly debate in September this year that it would be unreasonable and irrational to expect states not to act to deter terrorist actions against themselves

In the same debate, the Secretary General of the UN expressed concern that should States feel that they have the right to use force without seeking the UN's legitimization of such action, it could result in a "proliferation of the unilateral and lawless use of force, with or without justification".

He went on to observe that it is not

"enough to denounce unilateralism, unless we also face up squarely to the concerns that make some States feel uniquely vulnerable, since it is those concerns that drive them to take unilateral action... We must show that those concerns can, and will be addressed effectively through collective action".

On their part, African nations, through the agreement to establish the Peace and Security Council, agreed that such a Council should have as some of its objectives the capacity to anticipate and prevent conflict, as well as to coordinate and harmonise continental efforts in the prevention and combating of international terrorism in all its aspects.

The AU also provides for the Union to intervene in a Member State in respect of grave circumstances.

The debate about the circumstances under which pre-emptive strikes may be justified continues. What surely must be our response is that such a matter should be determined within the multilateral fora we have collectively set up for our common security.

The horrors that are inherent in the existence and threat of the use of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons are threats that confront us all.

Africa has, and must continue to, make effective contributions to eliminate these weapons from the face of the earth. All of our African nations are States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and most of us are also parties to the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention. On 11 April 1996, African States also effectively contributed to international peace and security when we gathered in Cairo to sign the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, that is also known as the Treaty of Pelindaba.

We should all encourage the African States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Pelindaba Treaty as soon as possible so that it may enter into force without delay. The Maputo African Union Summit also adopted a decision on the Implementation and Universality of the Chemicals Weapons Convention.

We are opposed to all weapons of mass destruction (nuclear, chemical and biological weapons). The African continent should continue in its efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving complete nuclear disarmament.

Though we in Africa face serious challenges, old and new, we have cause to reflect with some satisfaction on the more hopeful events that are unfolding before our eyes.

We are determined to overcome the legacy of half-a-millennium of slavery and underdevelopment and take our rightful place among the community of nations as an equal partner.

In fact much of what is now happening on the Continent has confounded the pessimists. So sustained were the negative images of Africa that The Economist even described ours as a "hopeless continent".

Those that only see hopelessness on our continent do so because of the sort of things that we referred to earlier: a succession of military coups, wars and violent confrontations, the massacres of people and genocide such as the one that took place in Rwanda, the denial of human rights and the abuse of political power for corrupt purposes.

In pursuance of the ideal of peace and development on the continent, The AU has adopted the New Partnership for Africa's Development as its primary socio-economic programme.

The adoption of NEPAD has set the continent on a path to sustainable development. NEPAD is work-in-progress which gives content to the key principles of the Constitutive Act of the African Union.

Central to the NEPAD Programme is the implementation of the vision of self-reliance and regional integration espoused in the Monrovia Declaration of 1979 and the later Abuja Treaty.

Through NEPAD the leaders of the continent are proclaiming a new beginning in the relationship between Africa and the developed world. As Africans we are saying however weak we are and however meagre our resources may be, we will do everything we need to ensure that we achieve the African Renaissance. Through NEPAD we are evolving a practical programme of action with regard to:

- information and communications technology
- political, economic and corporate governance
- human development, specifically health and education
- infrastructure development;
- diversification of production and exports
- international trade and market access;
- capital flows and the debt question; and
- the environment

The NEPAD leadership and secretariat are hard at work on the projects and collaborative linkups which promise to propel Africa into self-sufficient and sustainable development, and end, once and for all, the picture of Africa as a perceived place of permanent need and the proffered begging-bowl.

Africa's leaders and its people demand nothing less than full control of their own destiny, social, economic and political. They assume this in company with a growing partnership of developed and other countries which see the vast investment prospects inherent in the NEPAD arrangements. It is a partnership of global significance, and it belongs to Africans.

Through the establishment of the AU and the adoption of its programme, NEPAD, we have reclaimed the 21st century as an African century. Africa has reaffirmed that she will continue to rise from the ashes of slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

Whatever the setbacks of the moment, and we must appreciate that there will be setbacks, nothing should stop us now. Africa has solemnly vowed to be at peace with itself, its neighbours and the world at large. The commitments of the African Union are our word and our bond.

As the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, acknowledged in one of his reports to the UN Security Council:

"Africa today is striving to make positive change, and in many places these efforts are beginning to bear fruits... (That) sometimes... carnage and tragedy... afflict some parts of Africa, we must not forget the bright spots or overlook the achievements."

Africa is becoming a beacon of hope. Its ability to display resilience in the face of adversity cannot go unnoticed, even by the Afro-pessimists.

It is necessary to stress that here, among other things, we are talking about the establishment of genuine and stable democracies in Africa.

We are talking about systems of governance flourishing because they derive their authority and legitimacy from the will of the people. We are talking about accountable governance, respect of the rule of law, respect for the rights of women - all of which must lie at the root of our continent's revival.

The new political order owes its existence to the harsh African experience of many decades of instability and suffering. It teaches us, as Africans, that what we so often tried did not work, that the one party states and the military governments did not and will not work. It teaches us that we must be in charge of our own destiny. In essence, it requires acknowledgement that the people must govern.

To some, the above description might appear as a feel good public relations exercise, but we are justifiably encouraged to take note that between 1990 and 1997 some 25 sub Saharan African countries held democratic elections. Among these were Namibia and South Africa. This great African country returned to democratic rule in 1999.

This indicates that there is an indigenous and sustained movement on the continent towards the elimination of the non-democratic systems and violent conflicts which have in the past given Africa a negative image. Next year, in Southern Africa alone, almost eight member states of the Southern African Development Community will have another round of Presidential and Parliamentary elections.

It can be said that, despite the difficult political circumstances that existed in the past in Nigeria, the establishment of this National War College was an event that could only foster the very objectives that the AU strives for. The fact that joint training and instruction was provided, more than a decade ago, to selected senior service and civilian officers is an indication of the foresight that existed in the cadreship that leads this institution.

There should be no doubt about it that, when we speak of security, we must also speak of, and speak out about poverty. President Obasanjo, has noted the contribution of the college to peace in some other countries that have suffered the misfortune of armed conflicts. He has made the point that "all threats to human security are made more menacing by poverty".

Writing on human security and development co-operation in New York in September 2000, he notes that

"natural disasters are far more devastating to poor countries and poor populations. Poor people have the greatest difficulty protecting themselves from dangers of war or civil conflict. The poor are most liable to suffer the effects of violent crime. And the poor are the most vulnerable to malnutrition, the most exposed to infection, and have the least ability to protect themselves against it. Any human security agenda must, therefore, have at the top of the list a direct and determined assault on poverty and the causes of poverty."

Poverty remains a central challenge to all of us as Africans.

Our continent is moving away from a painful past. In the present context, the military is called upon to defend democracy. In this regard, the military must act as one of the premier defenders of the constitutions adopted subsequent to democratic processes in our countries.

Members of the armed forces have also correctly assumed a leading role in the protection of the life and limb of the African masses, as has been evidenced not only in situations of military conflict, but also during the devastating floods and fires that have ravaged some parts of our continent. We must support all efforts to continue to train members of our armed forces to carry out these necessary civilian functions.

As Africans we need to share a common recognition that all of us stand to lose if we fail to transform our continent into a more caring, humane and renewed entity. This we owe to the child soldier deprived of the most basic necessities, the mother without her child, the limbless uncle who lives in the inner squalor of our cities - and the countless sons and daughters of Africa who fell in the struggles against colonialism and apartheid.

I thank you.