

Will the entire reform agenda now be 'dead on arrival' as some observers have implied? When is the time for a post-'Ezulwini Consensus'? This policy brief attempts to address some of these issues by questioning the logic of compromising Africa's position well before diplomatic negotiations have started at UN. While looking at the merits and demerits of the AU's position, the paper concludes by shedding some light on what the authors see as the real obstacles to UN reform.

#### **The controversy around the G4 'compromise'**

There is no doubt that there was a knee-jerk reaction to the AU's outright rejection of the compromise deal on reform reached between some members of the AU and the G4. It must be remembered that apart from reinforcing the 'Ezulwini Consensus' on UN reform, the 5<sup>th</sup> AU Summit in Sirte Libya (July 2005) tasked a follow-up Committee of 15 with the marketing and mobilization of support for the African framework for reform across the world (Adoba and Nwezeh, 2005). Although interaction with the G4 would have easily fallen within this mandate, it turns out that the Committee of 15's mandate was not to renegotiate Africa's proposed framework with any country or group of countries, including in this case, the G4. What has therefore not been

explained is how the AU Committee (composed of some African ministers of foreign affairs), following meetings in London with the leaders of the G4 on the sidelines of the G8 Summit in Gleneagles Scotland, suddenly announced a compromise deal on the demand for two permanent seats with the veto and five non-permanent seats in the expanded Security Council. What emerged is that some members of the AU committee had in fact departed from their mandate and agreed with the G4 proposal to have the Security Council's membership increased to 25, with six new permanent members without veto power – one each for Brazil, Germany, India and Japan and two for Africa – and four non-permanent seats.

It also turns out that the G4/AU London position was not even a compromise. The AU Committee had not only deviated from the 'Ezulwini Consensus' of demanding veto-wielding permanent seats but had mysteriously dropped the fifth non-permanent seat that the AU had hoped would boost the total membership of the UN Security Council to 26. And, it seems, in exchange for all this, the G4 gave the AU nothing in return. Reports have since emerged that there was no consensus within the follow-up Committee to agree to the G4 position, despite claims to the contrary by some of the members.

What surprised many African scholars and even some members of civil society on the continent is how the so-called compromise was seen as a victory for UN reform in some quarters. Addressing the extra-ordinary AU Summit convened to discuss the 'compromise', the AU Chairman, President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria set off an explosive debate with his speech, which clearly showed Abuja was in favour of the deal with the G4. President Obasanjo made the case for compromise in the following rather cautionary words: 'The main issue before us is to decide either that Africa will join the rest of the world in bringing to conclusion the demand for UN Reform in which our continent has played an important role in the last two decades or if Africa will stand on a non-negotiable position which will certainly frustrate the reform efforts' (Speaking Notes: Assembly of AU, 4 August 2005). He argued further that because of the persistence of African leaders, 2005 was generally considered as Africa's year, resulting in 'a conjuncture of international consciousness that has been more propitious for greater attention to the continent and the conclusion of UN Reform.' Africa, Obasanjo correctly contended, stood 'to benefit the most from UN reform', particularly as the reform agenda goes 'beyond institutional reforms', to embrace critical issues of development, security, conflict resolution, peace

building and human rights. More importantly, he intimated that in UN politics, although Africa's 53 member-voting bloc represented a formidable force in the General Assembly, 'Africans in isolation' from other groups like the equally powerful 54 member-strong Asian bloc could achieve very little. He concluded by arguing: 'we need to negotiate with other groups, unless our objective is to prevent any decision. If that happens, let us be under no illusion, Africa stands to lose more than any other region' (Speaking Notes, Assembly of the AU, 4 August 2005).

Other countries such as South Africa, Ghana and Ethiopia that supported President Obasanjo argued that the G4 deal was the only realistic opportunity Africa had to get into the Security Council. They also tried to argue that while the UN still has an African Secretary General and also while an African country, Gabon, held the presidency of the UN General Assembly, African leaders should 'seize the moment because posterity will hate us for not taking [the opportunity] up.' Ghana's delegate reportedly added: 'the question is, is half a loaf better than none? Let's get in [the Security Council without veto] and fight from within' ([allAfrica.com/stories/2005080800.html](http://allAfrica.com/stories/2005080800.html))

Despite a spirited attempt to defend the G4 compromise, a total of 46 countries with the exception of Swaziland, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Senegal (which did not commit to any option), lambasted the Committee of 15, chaired by the Nigerian Foreign Minister, Mr. Oluyemi Adeniji, for its decision to trade off all of Africa's aspirations to accommodate the G4. The countries opposed to the G4 proposal pointed out that 'Africa should look for justice and equal privileges in the reform of the UN because it had been excluded from the Security Council for the past 60 years, with no permanent members and veto power.'

Benin's representative reminded those present that Africa should not compromise because it also contributed to the victory of the Allies, the Western countries that formed the UN after the Second World War, though Africans were forced to fight in the war against their will. He intimated, 'we have no apologies to make. We are seeking to remedy an injustice and you do not remedy it by compromising.' Reminding delegates of the commitments contained in the Harare Declaration of 2-4 June 1997,<sup>3</sup> Zimbabwe's President

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<sup>3</sup> During the 33<sup>rd</sup> Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the OAU held in Harare in June of 1997, African leaders amongst other decisions adopted a declaration on the reform of the UN Security Council.

Robert Mugabe told the summit 'not to forget that Africa does not wish for veto power but wants it abolished because it is undemocratic.' President Mugabe was quoted as saying, 'should other permanent members of the Security Council retain veto power, then Africa should also demand it ... We do not accept the veto as a proper instrument of the UN. We want the veto only on condition others do not give it up.' Likening the G4 deal to a game of football, the Zimbabwean leader questioned how the AU 'despite its numerical advantage with 53 players' could have lost 'four to nil against a team with only four players [G4].' Recalling a saying by one of the heroes of the African liberation struggle, Kwame Nkrumah, and also pointing out that 'the reform of the UN was a process and not an event', President Mugabe warned other African leaders against 'sacrific[ing] principles on the alter of expediency'

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In the Harare Declaration, they committed themselves among others, to make a case for the democratisation of the composition of the Security Council, the expansion of its membership to 26 seats wherein Africa should be allocated no less than two permanent seats, plus five non-permanent seats. The Harare Declaration also stated that new permanent members should be granted the same prerogatives and powers as the current members [including the power of veto]. However, the Harare Declaration in line with Africa's rejection of the undemocratic character of the veto power provision proposed that the exercise of the right of veto should be progressively curtailed until it is eventually abrogated.

([allAfrica.com/stories/2005080800.htm](http://allAfrica.com/stories/2005080800.htm) l). In the end and following the rejection of the G4 compromise, AU leaders finally agreed to set up another Committee of 10 African Heads of State and Government to 'sell' the original African Draft Resolution to world leaders. The Committee of 10 was given the mandate to submit a report to the Extraordinary Session of the General Assembly to be held on the margins of the U.N. General Assembly in September of 2005.

**AU position: Pragmatism or obstructionism**

When the AU rejected the G4 'compromise', its critics were quick to attack. Probably taking their cue from President Obasanjo's opening speech at the AU Assembly meeting in Addis Ababa, some of the critics viciously attacked what they labelled as the AU's 'all or nothing' position on UN reform (Kornegay, 2005).<sup>4</sup> The general criticism was that the AU was making a fatal mistake that would only derail the entire UN reform agenda. Interestingly also, while attributing the outcomes of

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<sup>4</sup> Francis Kornegay's position was re-echoed with greater forcefulness by Drs Eddy Maloka, Chris Landsberg and Adebajo Adekeye, of the Africa Institute of South Africa, the Centre for Policy Studies and the Centre for Conflict Resolution, respectively, in August of 2005 in Cape Town, during their briefing to the South African Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs. This was reported in the BuaNews (Tshwane) of August 28 2005.

the Addis Ababa meeting to the traditional divisive politics at the AU, particularly what has been described as the 'zero-sum coalition' between Zimbabwe, Egypt, Libya and Algeria, the same critics made no effort to interrogate why the AU Committee of 15, *in the space of single meeting with the G4*, simply departed from its mandate and gave away a strategic negotiating position so painstakingly built for almost a decade since the Harare Declaration of 1997 was signed.<sup>5</sup> While the AU Committee of 15's decision to renegotiate African's position should raise suspicions about the motives of some of its members, the AU's critics also fail to acknowledge that accepting the G4 compromise would have reinforced perceptions of a continent perpetually susceptible to externally driven agendas. It has to be pointed out here that such perceptions contrast with the continent's newly found determination to assert its position as an equal partner in global politics. Besides, as the only continent with real consensus on UN reform, Africa should actually be credited for giving Secretary General Kofi Annan's reform agenda real global momentum. An

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<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that the Harare Declaration on the reform of the UN was itself informed by an earlier OAU declaration on the reform of the UN Security Council adopted in Tunis, Tunisia at the 30<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in June of 1994.

acknowledgement of this fact is not akin to imposing Africa's position on the rest of the UN's 191 membership. Furthermore, the AU position was developed in the context that while Africa did not exist in isolation, UN reform itself was a process and not an event. Thus, the expectation was that UN reform should lead to the restructuring of other key bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) where global power still remains concentrated in the hands of a few countries. Hence, there should be no doubt that Africa's interest goes beyond Security Council reform. In this sense, any assumptions that the continent is sacrificing its broader agenda through its so-called 'all or nothing' strategy are misplaced. The truth of the matter is that in reaching an early compromise with the G4, the continent was actually giving away more than it would have gained. Quite why the continental consensus should have given way to a plan by a small and self-serving group of countries, each of which had no regional support of its own, should be the issue of concern to all progressive African scholars. There is no doubt that without any regional backing worth talking about and without the AU consensus, the G4 plan was already a dead duck. Although it is true that no single regional bloc on its own is capable of rallying the two-thirds majority required at the UN General

Assembly to adopt a given position, Africa's alliance with the G4 would not have brought them anywhere near this majority (Africa's 53 votes plus the four votes of the G4 do not add up to a two-thirds majority). On the contrary, if Africa were to ally with the G4 countries, which apparently had no support for their plan from their respective regional constituencies, it is likely that Africa would have lost the sympathy of states that are opposed to the position of the G4. Ironically, these states put together are numerically and strategically more important in comparison to the four states that constitute the G4.<sup>6</sup> These factors explain why in the wake of the Addis Ababa meeting, the G4 ignominiously conceded defeat on UN reform and promptly abandoned all efforts to secure a vote on the UN Security Council two weeks before the start of the Millennium Summit (*Business Day*, 2 September 2005).

Furthermore, before interpreting the AU's position as obstructionist, it needs to be accepted that making too many compromises at the early stages of the

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<sup>6</sup> For example China is opposed to Japan's candidature; Britain, France and the USA are not in support of Germany's candidature; Pakistan and a number of Asian states are not supportive of India's candidature. Therefore, Africa could potentially lose more sympathisers if it supported the G4 proposal than if it rejected it.

reform negotiations would only have weakened the AU's bargaining position. Having dropped its main trump card or condition for two veto-wielding permanent seats, what would the AU have taken into the negotiations? Certainly, an analogy from the world of cutthroat trade union politics amply demonstrates the pitfalls of making compromises before wage negotiations start. Thus, to argue that the AU's insistence on veto-wielding membership amounts to 'zero-sum game' constitutes a misreading of the essence of global power politics at the Security Council level. Even under current conditions, the veto remains the tipping point in the global calculus of power in the Security Council. In fact, this explains why the P-5 (United States, United Kingdom, Russia, China and France) remains so determined to monopolize the veto in the first place! In these circumstances, it is therefore important for the AU to maintain sharp diplomacy, tempered by strategic ambiguity on the issue. Anything less would be self-defeating. The AU has clearly indicated that while the veto is undemocratic, it should be extended to all new permanent members for as long as the other P-5 members have it (Ikome and Samasuwo, 2005). By extension, it makes no strategic sense to drop the veto from the AU framework without sufficient guarantees that UN reform will be accepted in principle, especially by the

P-5 members. Furthermore, if history has correctly recorded that Africans played a decisive role in the Allied war effort to end the scourge of Fascism and Nazism, why should the continent accept 'second class citizenship' in the UN system?

### **Overview of the real obstacles**

Having said the above, has Africa's growing assertiveness in global politics suddenly become a potential obstacle to the whole process of UN reform? If not, then what are the real obstacles to global multilateral democracy and good governance in the UN system? For a start, it would be an exaggeration and a contradiction to assume that Africa has suddenly become so powerful globally to derail a process of multilateral reform, ironically from which process it almost singularly stands to benefit most! The focus of debate should be on the P-5 and their evident unwillingness to move with the times. There is sufficient cause for concern because some P-5 countries have publicly expressed their opposition to the expansion of the Security Council with veto privileges for new permanent members. While some pundits have argued that the P-5 could be more amenable to compromise on permanent membership than they could be over the issue of the veto power, overall they all seem to be more inclined to support only the kinds of reforms that would perpetuate the status quo. As a matter

of fact, the contradictory and nearly irreconcilable postures on the direction and pace of reform held by China and the USA, two of the most important members of the Security Council, are very revealing of the brinkmanship that has been a costly distraction at the recent summit.

For instance, acutely aware of how important the resolution of the veto issue was to the success of the summit, the US has already created the impression that Security Council reform is a bottom-of-the-pile issue on its reform agenda. For example, the US *Report of the Task Force on the United Nations* makes no reference whatsoever to the important issue of Security Council reform (Report of the Task Force, 2005). Instead, the US has set itself on a collision course with developing countries by threatening to scale down on its commitments on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).<sup>7</sup> Even worse, while its sudden announcement of 720 amendments to

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<sup>7</sup> The MDGs, adopted in 2000, are time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions – income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion, - while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability. They also include basic human rights, such as the rights of each person to health, education, shelter and security. It is noteworthy that Africa lags behind the most on the MDGs, more so than any other region in the world.

the draft discussion document two weeks before the Millennium Summit threw the already delicate negotiations into a tailspin, the US's determination to push narrowly specific reforms on human rights, peace-building and terrorism had the so-called 'group of activist' ambassadors from the developing world extremely worried about the global power's real motives. In the absence of an international consensus on the definition of terrorism, human rights and democracy, and also because of the US's self-serving policy on war crimes and the International Criminal Court, many developing countries suspect that the global power reform proposals contain coded language for its 'regime change' agenda (*Financial Times*, 2 September 2005; *New York Times*, 4 September 2005). On the other hand, by constantly taking divergent positions from those of an increasingly influential P-5 member like China, the US is bent on dead locking the reform of the Security Council altogether and pushing its own narrow package of reforms that will ensure the continued maintenance of the status quo. Without cooperation between China and the US, all proposals for reforms were 'dead on arrival' at the Millennium Summit. In the end, observers would also be advised to watch the impact of regional rivalries that have been thrown up by

Secretary General's reform agenda in general.

### **Conclusions**

**1) The AU position is pragmatic and is by no means obstructionist**

Still, without being necessarily constrained by the wishes of the more powerful countries, the AU must push for equality of treatment in the UN system since Africa stands to benefit most from this process. By extension, if it appears that the African continent stands to lose out again, the AU should not be afraid of a stalemate in the negotiations.

**2) The Harare Declaration of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government on the Security Council Reform remains the most progressive way to democratise the Security Council**

Section 2 (a) of the Declaration says in part, 'Africa [s] .. two permanent seats [should] be allotted to countries by a decision of Africans themselves, in accordance with a system of rotation based on the current established criteria of the [AU] and subsequent elements which might improve upon these criteria.' Section 3 says in part: 'ultimately, the [new] permanent members should also be nominated by their respective regions and elected by the General Assembly. Such a system of the periodic elections of Permanent Members of the Security Council will in

the final analysis ensure that the decisions of the Council are less subject to the strictly national interest of its various members.' More importantly, according to Section 6 (c): 'The exercise of the right of veto should be progressively curtailed until abrogated.' What the above shows is that the Harare Declaration not only guarantees some measure of democracy but also contains safeguards against possible manipulation of future African member states of the Security Council by outside forces, particularly the more powerful countries of the North that continue to have considerable economic and political leverage over many African states. Hopefully, if the AU popularly elects countries that will sit on the Security Council, it follows logically that the latter will assist those members to meet the challenges that come with Security Council membership. What this means is that even small countries can represent and speak for the continent without the risk of them being manipulated (Harare Declaration, 2-4 June 1997).

**3) The AU should market its position to the global South.**

The emphasis should be on how the African position on UN reform reinforces the shared global South's broader development agenda. This makes the work of the Committee of 10 Heads of State appointed in Addis Ababa very



strategic. This should be complimented by efforts to build stronger South-South multilateral groupings.

- 4) **Avoiding the temptation of going it alone.** In the aftermath of the rejection of the G4/AU compromise position, some voices have come across calling for Africa's apparently more powerful states – South Africa and Nigeria - that were supportive of the compromise - to opt out of the AU consensus and act alone. This is a particularly misleading and ill-advised option that would not only split the African Union, but also would see the states that adopt it isolated and therefore unable to achieve their goals. Considering that the AU decision to uphold the 'Ezulwini Consensus' was a majority-based democratic decision, lead states that were supportive of the G4/AU London Consensus must close ranks and work towards popularising the African common position.

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### **Suggested Readings**

- 1) African Union (AU) Executive Council, The Common African Position on the Proposed Reform of the United Nations: "The Ezulwini Consensus" Ex/EX.CL/2 (VII) Addis Ababa March 7-8 2005.
- 2) Declarations and Decisions Adopted by the Thirty-Third Assembly of Heads of State and Government, *Assembly of Heads of State and Government*, AHG/Decl.1 XXXIII, (Harare, Zimbabwe, 2-4 June 1997)
- 3) Speaking Notes, His Excellency, President Olusegun Obasanjo, Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chairman of the African Union at the 4<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union, *Assembly of the African Union, Fourth Extraordinary Session*, (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 4 August 2005).
- 4) 'American Interests and UN Reform,' *Report of the Task Force on the United Nations*, (United States Institute for Peace, Washington, D.C, 2005)

- 5) A. Adekeye, "Security Council Reform: Who represents Africa?" (Centre for Conflict Resolution, Press Articles, 2005).
- 6) F. Kornegay, 'AU in a spin over Africa's UN membership,' *City Press*, 14 August 2005.
- 7) 'UN Reform: African Leaders reject deal,' [allAfrica.com/stories/2005080087.html](http://allAfrica.com/stories/2005080087.html)
- 8) I. Iyefu and K. Nwezeh, 'UN Seat: AU Sets Up Committee on African position,' *This Day*, 1 February 2005.
- 9) F. Ikome and N. Samasuwo, 'UN Reform: Towards a More [In]Secure World?', *Global Insight*, Issue No. 18, April 2005.

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