



Disarmament and Nonproliferation Education in Africa

Christiane Agboton-Johnson, Deputy Director, United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)

The celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) in Monterey offers an exceptional opportunity to review the achievements in this very sensitive area and will therefore lead us to discuss efforts in disarmament and nonproliferation education in Africa.

Depending on the part of the world you're analyzing, these words—disarmament, nonproliferation—ring quite different bells. It's obvious that in Africa they're more related to small arms and light weapons (SALW) than in the Western world where they are generally used to discuss nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. A 2002 UN study on disarmament and education makes clear the terms apply to both categories of weapons: "Disarmament and non-proliferation education should be a generic term covering both weapons of mass destruction and conventional arms."¹ The latter, especially SALW, have plagued the African continent with a devastating impact on all areas of life and development; they have put Africa in the indescribable vulnerability that led Kofi Annan to call them Africa's "weapons of mass destruction."² This is why, in Africa, the most important disarmament and nonproliferation efforts have been made in the field of conventional arms. Some interesting experiences exist and may be used in nuclear nonproliferation education, enabling Africa to play a key role in the efforts of the international community to move toward a world without the fear of nuclear disaster.

Africa at the Crossroads: An Overview of the Status of Nuclear Nonproliferation Efforts in Africa

A short analysis of the situation of Africa regarding nuclear weapons reveals that the continent is really in an ambiguous and fragile situation.

Africa has been the historic producer of the uranium that, extracted from the Shinkolobwe mine (formerly in the Belgian Congo and today the Democratic Republic of Congo), was used for the first bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Four states in Africa still

¹ "Étude de l'Organisation des Nations Unies sur l'éducation en matière de désarmement et de non-prolifération Rapport du Secrétaire général" [United Nations study on disarmament and non-proliferation education, Report of the Secretary-General], A/57/124, 2003.

² United Nations, "Secretary General Says Proposals in his Report on Africa Require New Ways of Thinking, of Acting," UN press release, SG/SM/6524, April 15, 1998.

provide nearly 16 percent of the world's uranium (the Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Namibia, and South Africa), and a significant increase is expected with explorations going on in Algeria, Guinea, Malawi, Morocco, the Central African Republic, and Zambia.³ Increasing demand raises the vulnerability of these mining operations to illicit trafficking, whether by bribing officials or by manipulating non-state actors like terrorists or armed groups.⁴

Eager to remain outside the sphere of nuclear weapon states

As early as the 1960s, Africa showed its willingness to stay away from any non-peaceful use of nuclear energy with the UN General Assembly Resolution 1652(XVI) of November 1961, entitled "Consideration of Africa as a Denuclearized Zone." The Declaration on the Denuclearization of Africa was adopted by the Summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at its first ordinary session, held in Cairo in July 1964.⁵ Except for the development of a nuclear capability by South Africa, whose arsenal was dismantled in 1990 before acceding to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) as a non-nuclear weapon state, and the attempts by a handful of states to acquire nuclear weapons, the African continent has stuck to the decision to be a nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ), formalized by the decision to adopt the Pelindaba Treaty, which was opened for signature in 1996 and came into effect on July 15, 2009.⁶

The Pelindaba Treaty and nonproliferation⁷

Negotiated after the NWFZs of Latin America and the Caribbean, Oceania and Southeast Asia, the Pelindaba Treaty is characterized by stronger and more comprehensive provisions. The treaty is of unlimited duration, and withdrawal requires twelve months' prior notification. In accordance with the first pillar of the NPT—nonproliferation—it seeks to keep Africa free of nuclear weapons by prohibiting the development of nuclear weapons, their production, testing, acquisition, and stationing in any of its member states. Each state decides independently whether the transit of such weapons through its territories is allowed or not.

³ Cédric Poitevin, "Le traité de Pelindaba: l'Afrique face aux défis de la prolifération nucléaire" [The Pelindaba Treaty and the Challenges of Nuclear Proliferation], Group for Research and Information on Peace and Security (GRIP), 2009.

⁴ Africa's Development and the Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction, <wmdafricafiles.blogspot.com>.

⁵ Noel Stott, Amelia du Rand, and Jean du Preez, "A Brief Guide to the Pelindaba Treaty: Towards Entry-into-Force of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty," Institute for Security Studies (ISS), October 2008.

⁶ World Council of Churches, <www.oikoumene.org/fr/programmes.html>.

⁷ See Oluyemi Adeniji, "The Treaty of Pelindaba on the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, United Nations Institute for Disarmament," UNIDIR, 2002; Stott, du Rand, and du Preez, "A Brief Guide to the Pelindaba Treaty"; James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, "Africa Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (Pelindaba Treaty) Resources," <cns.miis.edu/treaty_pelindaba/>.

Three protocols calling on the nuclear weapon states not to accumulate, stockpile, proliferate, or assist in the manufacture of sensitive equipment in Africa are attached to the treaty to ensure its respect by non-state parties. The peaceful uses of nuclear energy are encouraged, with appropriate safeguards. Indeed, Africa has established a fruitful cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in the areas of health, agriculture and livestock production, environment, and energy.⁸

The implementation of the treaty will be followed by the establishment of the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCON), as well as conventional mechanisms such as meetings of states parties, reporting, and so forth.

The African Union has made the Pelindaba Treaty “an important part of the overall peace and security architecture of the African Union, indeed one of the building blocks of the Common African Defense and Security Policy (CADSP) as articulated in the Solemn Declaration adopted by the Second Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of Head of States and Government, held in Syrte, Libya, on February 28, 2004.”⁹

Yet, diplomatic provisions will not be sufficient for Africa to play its role in the international arena toward the objective of a more secure environment free of nuclear weapons. There is a strong need for education and information.

Respectful of multilateral commitments

At the international level, almost all African countries have signed the NPT, and some are quite active in multilateral bodies dealing with that issue (such as the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, or the First Committee in New York). African states have also supported UN Security Council Resolutions 1540 and 1887. It is worth noting also the submission, without exception, of all African nuclear facilities to IAEA safeguards as a testimony to this commitment to peace and international security.¹⁰

In 2007, at the Algiers Conference on the Application of Nuclear Energy in Africa, the fifty states present reiterated the value of the “strategic choice” made by the continent “on uses of the atom for peaceful purposes in accordance with the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)” and pledged to strengthen nuclear safety and security measures on a global approach aimed at promoting the safe and responsible use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, using science and nuclear technologies to accelerate socio-economic development and improve the public well-being.¹¹

⁸ IAEA, “Promoting Science & Technology,” <www.iaea.org/OurWork/ST/index.html>.

⁹ Statement by Ethiopia at its 53rd Meeting of the African Union’s Peace and Security Council, May 31, 2006, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹⁰ M. Saâdoune, “L’Afrique et le droit au nucléaire” [Africa and the Right to Nuclear Energy] *Le Quotidien d’Oran*, January 10, 2007.

¹¹ “Les Africains s’engagent à développer un atome pacifique” [Africans are committed to developing the peaceful atom], *El Watan*, January 10, 2007.

Destabilized by conflicts and armed rebellions

This situation regarding nuclear weapons could appear idyllic, had Africa not been destabilized for more than thirty years by conflicts and armed rebellions, fed by the proliferation and illicit sale of SALW. With approximately 30 million weapons in circulation, there is currently no comprehensive, quantitative study, and it is almost impossible to obtain reliable statistics.¹² Africa represents only 7 percent of international conventional arms transfers but remains a prime destination for illicit arms.¹³

The end result is a lot of fragile states, with debate on armaments and defense issues left to the political or military elites, the rise of criminal activities (in particular drug trafficking), endemic poverty, and a tenuous democracy. The availability of these weapons and the stronger links that seem to be developing among networks of non-state actors could promote terrorist activities connected to uranium mining and nuclear technology, potentially facilitating the development of nuclear terrorism.

International context

Within Africa, the priority generally attached to nuclear issues is quite low; these issues are less pressing compared to the immediate threats posed by conventional weapons, specifically SALW, landmines, and cluster munitions. Consequently, these weapons garner more attention.

Considering its fragility, openness, and dependence on the rest of the world, as well as internal threats, Africa can be said to be at a crossroads. Despite being a major supplier of uranium, it still has a profound desire to remain out of the nuclear game. If it is to be successful, Africa needs assistance, support, and guarantees to continue its efforts toward nonproliferation. This calls not just for diplomacy and education, but also for more attention by the international community.

Knowledge is the Beginning of Wisdom

With such a long period of armed conflicts, many education and training programs have been developed in Africa regarding peace, security, and disarmament. These are not a consequence of any formal peace and security strategy or of a well-structured disarmament education plan. They are reactions, notably from civil society

¹² GRIP, "Armés mais désœuvrés: Groupes armés, armes légères et sécurité humaine dans la région de la CEDEAO" [Armed but idle: Armed groups, arms, and human security in the ECOWAS region], small arms survey, 2006.

¹³ Mark Bromley et al., "Recent Trends in the Arms Trade," SIPRI Background Paper, April 2009, p. 5.

organizations (religious, human rights, peace activists) shaken by the sustained and deleterious effects of armed conflicts and rebellions, on people, infrastructure, the economy, and development.

In order to highlight some achievements in disarmament education, this paper will now focus on a West African case, a Senegalese experience with a subregional impact, followed by a discussion of some of the projects developed within the framework of the implementation of the 2002 UN study on disarmament education.

The example of the fight against SALW in West Africa

In the 1980s, Africa became plagued with conflicts and rebellions fed by a flow of SALW. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Niger, Mali, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, the Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Nigeria were all more or less shaken or destabilized. There was some initial reaction from a few states, followed by the United Nations and then the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), but most importantly we must acknowledge the early efforts of civil society organizations in Sierra Leone, Mali, and Niger to respond to these crises. This response led, in October 1998, to the ECOWAS Moratorium on SALW.¹⁴

Under the impetus of international and national civil society organizations, information and training programs were developed and implemented in some West African states targeting a variety of stakeholders such as security forces, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), community leaders, youth, and so forth. These efforts, combined with other initiatives (such as lobbying and advocacy during ECOWAS leaders' summits, campaigning for an Arms Trade Treaty, capacity-building programs for youth and women, and outreach), proved to be fruitful enough to bring about, in 2006, the transformation of the moratorium on SALW, a politically binding instrument, into a legally binding convention. Just three years later, in 2009, the convention came into force, which is remarkable for a regional instrument dealing with such a sensitive issue.

Disarmament education in Senegal

Casamance, a southern region of Senegal bordered by Guinea Bissau and Gambia, is still dealing with an armed rebellion that has lasted more than thirty years. Many disarmament education initiatives, such as FALSEN, A Schoolbag for Peace, Young Artisans for Peace, and My Strength is in Peace, have been developed and tested by the Movement Against Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa (MALAO) to contribute to the efforts toward peace in this area.¹⁵

¹⁴ West Africa Action Network on Small Arms; GRIP.

¹⁵ Movement Against Small Arms and Light Weapons in West Africa.

The objective of FALSEN, a training program on SALW developed by MALAO with the support of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung in Germany, was to strengthen the capacities of stakeholders involved in the fight against SALW and turn them into agents of change, within the organizations from which they originated.¹⁶

Thus, people from the security forces (police, gendarmerie, the military, and customs office), Parliament (House of Representatives and Senators), justice, territorial administration (governors and mayors), media, NGOs, and civil society (human rights activists, women and youth associations), as well as opinion leaders were trained together on the issue of SALW, human security, and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), using seminars, thematic meetings, and discussions, workshops, field trips, and formal classes, using tools as diverse as courses and comic books.

The end result was to raise significantly the awareness on the risks and impact of SALW on all aspects of life in Casamance and more generally in Senegal and the West African subregion. Moreover, the participants learned to see the role they should play to reverse the trend and build a secure environment—a precondition for development.

Among the lessons learned from the FALSEN experience:

- Identify themes that are of interest to the stakeholders and based on the principle of proximity and ownership of certain concepts. Methodology and messages must be adapted to allow the stakeholder to identify with the themes developed using cultural heritage, local language, etc., as appropriate.
- Be as inclusive as possible and do not hesitate to bring together actors from different origins and backgrounds. There are many benefits in associating various actors with proven skills on the subject matter at different level (diplomats, security forces, civil society organizations, women, youth).
- Use formal education methodologies associated with informal tools.

The synergy produced by the contact of these various actors, the mixture of approaches and methodologies, leads to innovative solutions and helps maximize the chances to reach the targeted audience and achieve results, creating a change paradigm such as the one represented by slogan “My strength is in peace.”

The most important thing is to bring individuals to the forefront of any process related to peace and security. This means adopting a “human security-oriented approach” rather than the “strictly speaking” security one, which while being too narrow also excludes a whole set of actors who are true agents of change.

Other programs have been developed in Africa for implementing the 2002 UN recommendations on disarmament education and nonproliferation, as well as of the “international decade for the promotion of a culture of non-violence and peace for the

¹⁶ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, www.kas.de/senegal.

benefit of children of the world,” launched in 2000.¹⁷ In fact, several UN organizations have contributed, in Africa, to the implementation of the recommendations from the UN study on disarmament and nonproliferation education, for example:¹⁸

UN Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC). This regional branch of the office of disarmament based in Lomé, Togo, has implemented various activities covering Recommendations 7, 14, 17, 19, and 26 from the UN report, by organizing readings on the challenges to disarmament in Africa, retreats for young political leaders and journalists from public and private media agencies, capacity-building activities in the areas of conventional arms, and weapons of mass destruction, and about UN Security Council Resolution 1540.

UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO deals primarily with questions of education, particularly regarding the culture of peace. The International Bureau of Education has developed many programs aimed mainly at education for peace, democracy, and human rights in connection with the ministries of national education and NGOs specialized in the field of education. There are very few curricula directly taking into account issues of conventional arms, and even fewer for WMD.¹⁹

UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF). UNICEF runs programs to familiarize children with issues related to peace and plays a significant role in early disarmament education. These activities have been implemented in the framework of “the international decade for a culture of nonviolence and peace for the benefit of the children of the world.” UNICEF develops more of its education program toward children in post-conflict zones and refugee camps.

International Labor Organization (ILO). The ILO has developed programs for child soldiers and considers their conscription as one of the worst forms of labor.²⁰

Many international and local NGOs and church organizations consider education to be important in post-conflict situations, yet they often do not make it a priority. In addition, very few of them deal with weapons issues or disarmament. They are more active in reintegration activities. In Africa, some organizations, such as Save the Children, have education programs for security forces, leading them not only to respect the rights of children in conflict and post-conflict, but also to defend those rights.²¹

Education on nuclear disarmament is specifically the preserve of political science and international law students, and some senior military officers and senior diplomats active in the international arena. The Institute for Security Studies, the Group for

¹⁷ UNESCO, International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World, www.unac.org/peacecp/decade/background.html.

¹⁸ Report of the UN Secretary General on Disarmament Education and Nonproliferation, A/63/279, July 2008.

¹⁹ UNESCO, www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/.

²⁰ ILO, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labor, www.ilo.org/ipec/lang--en/index.htm.

²¹ Save the Children, www.savethechildren.org.

Research and Information on Peace and Security, the UN Institute for Disarmament Research, and other organizations such as the World Council of Churches have also initiated some research.²² In the more specific field of disarmament education, training activities are being developed by the IAEA and the European Union.²³ It is also worth noting the activities initiated by UNREC to support Resolution 1540.²⁴

There do not appear to be any formal disarmament education programs in Africa at the continental or subregional levels, apart from the programs developed by the Office of Disarmament Affairs, such as the fellowship program for young diplomats, and the courses available through CNS.

From the Old Rope Let Us Weave a New One

An education on disarmament and nonproliferation is essential, not only in post-conflict areas and within the framework of DDR programs. Even if the focus remains on conventional weapons and specifically on SALW, it is necessary to make an opening in the nuclear field, keeping in mind that “the general vocation of education and training is to help individuals acquire the knowledge and know how necessary to contribute, as citizens of their country and of the planet, to the efforts leading to a general disarmament, under effective international control.”²⁵

Africa cannot remain isolated from a potential nuclear renaissance. This is obvious, but what tracks can be used for an education on nuclear nonproliferation in Africa? It would be extremely difficult to simply transpose these lessons learned in the fight against SALW to nuclear weapons, as it still raises legitimate questions. Perhaps the biggest obstacle is in the lack of “reality” associated with this threat. For the majority of Africans, the nuclear risk is too remote or too unreal to be a priority or to dedicate skilled human resources needed elsewhere.

But the increasing demand for uranium may create security and technological challenges for which Africans may need to find solutions very quickly. And strengthening the Pelindaba Treaty and preventing the indigenous development of nuclear weapons is in the interest of all Africans.

Who (and what) is needed to implement disarmament and nonproliferation education?

- *Diplomats*, so that Africa can contribute to international processes aiming to reinforce instruments like the NPT and the CTBT. The unified support of fifty-two countries for the objectives of the NPT, NWFZs, and other

²² World Council of Churches, <www.oikoumene.org/programmes.html>.

²³ Site AIEA : déjà citéIAEA.

²⁴ UNRC, <unrec.org/index/>.

²⁵ UN Study on Disarmament and Nonproliferation Education.

initiatives may prove important in future international discussions and negotiations of such issues.

- *Political leaders*, so that they can perceive the stakes clearly and cut short any inclination to engage in nuclear trafficking, acquisition, and even the manufacture of dirty bombs.
- *Security forces* in an environment that should better deal with the security sector reform issue to more effectively take into account the “responsibility to protect.”
- *Civil society organizations and the news media*, with sufficient training and support to allow them to be effective messengers and watchdogs.
- *Women- and youth-targeted programs*, especially programs tailored to the realities on the ground in Africa.
- *Focus on issues related to peace and security*, because installations on the continent are directed toward the peaceful use of the nuclear energy, but there is a clear need to broaden their focus.

Important questions remain, but in designing a framework for disarmament education on nuclear issues in Africa the experience gained in the design and the implementation of instruments—such as the UN Program of Action on SALW and the Convention on Cluster Munitions—could be useful.

As suggested in the report from the UN Group of Governmental Experts, disarmament and nonproliferation education reinforces the links between world peace, global security, and durable development in an increasingly interdependent world.

Conclusion: *Nit mooy garabou nit* (“A Human Being Is the Cure for Human Beings”)

Disarmament education in the nuclear field is a need for Africa because humanity cannot continue to evolve with a sizable percentage of the world population unaware of the risks incurred by the possession and potential use of nuclear weapons.

Africa should not be only a supplier of uranium or a place to dispose of nuclear waste. African states deserve to be equal partners with the rest of the world, engaged in constructive dialogue with the nuclear powers and others.

Africa has strongly contributed to the important, albeit insufficient, advances in the fight against conventional weapons, initiating promising programs on disarmament and nonproliferation education in the field of conventional weapons. These initiatives should continue to be supported. Indeed for most Africans, and most people living on the planet, conventional arms are the true weapons of mass destruction.

Ultimately, our goal should be to nurture future generations who will be responsible for the security and safety of the planet. It is time to put the diversity of humanity at the service of the ideals of disarmament, nonproliferation, and peace.