



**Terms of reference for the
Conference on Parliamentary Democracy and Peace
In the Great Lakes Region
Nairobi, 14-16 April 2005**

Organised by AWEPA, the North-South Centre, and the Amani Forum, in partnership with UNIFEM and UNDP, and supported by the governments of Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden

Background

Prospects for peace are improving in the Great Lakes region, yet its inhabitants are still suffering the serious effects of ongoing conflicts. Unequal access and distribution or mismanagement of the already scarce resources, unequal access to political power and basic human rights have led to economic decline and ethnic tensions. Political stability is undermined and the capacity of political leaders to combat poverty and protect human rights has been weakened.

The region is home to some 5 million of the world's 25 million internally displaced persons. Conflict exacerbates food insecurity and worsens the HIV/AIDS pandemic through increased transmissions. The region's children are the primary victims of the ongoing conflict as many are forced into becoming child soldiers and otherwise disadvantaged. Human rights abuses are rampant, and women and girls are particularly vulnerable to widespread sexual violence. Perpetrators of human rights violations are very rarely brought to justice and the lack of accountability and culture of impunity exacerbates the cycle of violence.

The illicit distribution of small arms and light weapons, and their easy availability and accumulation exacerbates conflict and suffering in the Great Lakes region. Even if the small arms are not being used by rebels, militants or other combatants in war-like situations, they can cause untold harm. The use of weapons or their mere presence, represents a threat which causes fear and hinders economic and human development.

Parliamentarians have the power to help break the cycle of violence and faltering development. As elected representatives they can encourage public debate and ensure that the views and interests of all competing groups of the population are mirrored in their work, while focusing on early warning detection of potential sources of conflict. As legislators and by controlling the budget they can work towards a fair distribution of political, economic and

social powers. Effective legislation will better protect the rights of vulnerable groups and will be an obstacle for large-scale abuse of human rights in conflict situations. Through a system of checks and balances Parliament can control the actions of government and can promote good governance. When Parliament functions as it should, it renders violence as a political method obsolete.

Main themes

‘The role of parliament as an instrument for peace’ is one of the main attention areas of AWEPA, and it has been dealt with in a number of its publications and seminars. In response to the urgent situation in the Great Lakes region, AWEPA has launched a programme of regional and national consultation meetings and seminars in the region, in order to mobilise the role of parliamentarians herein. In this programme, AWEPA strives to liaise as much as possible with other initiatives that also call for urgent political action in the region.

The most important of these initiatives is the ‘International Conference on the Great Lakes’, launched by the United Nations and African Union that urges governments in the region to deal with the regional political, security and developmental issues in a concerted manner. The first Summit took place in November 2004 in Dar es Salaam, which was concluded with a declaration that, among others, called upon political leaders to ‘individually and collectively work towards reconstruction and development of the region and to promote a future of peace, stability and prosperity’ and to build cooperation in the areas of Peace and Security, Democracy and Good Governance, Economic Development and Regional Integration and Humanitarian and Social Issues. The parliamentary conference in Nairobi is a follow-up to this call for political cooperation.

A major step in the struggle against the proliferation of illicit small arms in Africa has been the Small Arms Reduction Programme (SARP) of UNDP. In 2003 AWEPA concluded a partnership with UNDP in order to promote the role of parliamentarians in this programme. Since then, AWEPA and UNDP facilitated several meetings of parliamentarians from the Great Lakes region to elaborate action plans to reduce the spread of small arms in the region. An important component of the action plans is harmonisation of legislation against small arms, which will be one of the agenda items during the parliamentary conference in Nairobi.

Another main theme of the Conference will be the role of women in the promotion of parliamentary democracy and peace in the Great Lakes Region, and in particular the follow up on the Kigali Declaration of the Great Lakes Regional Women’s meeting.

Objective

The principal objectives of the seminar are:

- To raise awareness among parliamentarians from the region on their role in promoting democracy and peace in the Great Lakes region
- To promote a more prominent role of women political leaders in peace building and democratisation
- To give (parliamentary) follow-up on previous initiatives and declarations
- To promote strategic alliances and concerted action among the various stakeholders

Focus of the conference

The seminar will focus on four key thematic areas:

- Parliament as an instrument for peace
- The results of the First Summit of Heads of State and Government, Dar Es Salaam 19-20 November 2004
- The Kigali declaration of the Great Lakes Regional Women's meeting, 9 October 2004
- The Small arms project: follow-up on the UNDP-AWEPA Mombasa Conference, 29 November 2003

Conference Partners and Participants

In order to strengthen the impact and support base of this Conference, AWEPA partnered with the North-South Centre and the AMANI Forum, UNDP, UNIFEM, and the Women's Parliamentary Network of Central Africa (RFPAC).

The conference offers a platform for approximately 80 participants consisting of representatives of:

- Members of Parliaments of the Great Lakes region
- Members of Parliaments of African countries that are related to the peace process in the Great Lakes region
- Members of RFPAC
- Members of European Parliaments
- Representatives of UNDP, UNIFEM, and other organisations working in the field of peace and democracy in the Great Lakes region