

FOREWORD

The author, Laurence Juma, a distinguished scholar and professor of Rhodes University, focuses on the causes and nature of African conflicts, especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, the meaning and nature of the human rights and its value in addressing conflicts in Africa, and the issues of transitional justice, amnesty, truth and reconciliation, the rule of law, the building of human rights institutions, the monitoring of human rights violations and international prosecution of human rights offenders.

The book thoughtfully addresses at both the conceptual and practical levels the interrelationship between the peace and human rights paradigms and between social justice and peace. Is peace simply the absence of violence, and should the end of violence take priority over a social justice agenda?

Juma's standpoint is 'that the imperatives of conflict management and resolution require that human rights and international norms be interpreted in a manner that will reinforce the political as well as the social agenda that have a bearing on peace'. For, ultimately, peace is 'much more than the mere absence of war' and also fundamentally encompasses 'the presence of decent conditions of living and social justice' and the 'quest for economic development, political stability, democracy and human rights'. That is to say, 'peace creation is...not as an end in itself, but... a component of the overall strategy for improving the well-being of humanity'. This in turn necessarily requires a substantive national and international human rights framework that affirms, respects and promotes human dignity and guarantees a range of freedoms that are essential for humans to lead rich, decent, rewarding, and productive lives.

Tragically, in Africa human rights seem to seldom occupy priority in processes of conflict resolution, and human rights issues necessarily continue to loom large in post-conflict situations. As Juma argues 'in many African countries, cessation of hostilities...have not necessarily improved the human rights situation' and that 'such situations have become so pervasive, it is almost impossible to draw any distinction between the conditions of war and those of peace as far as human rights protection is concerned. It is almost as if in Africa, peace begets the erosion of fundamental freedoms and rights'. The causes are 'the narrow interests of the ruling elites, incongruent national identities, systemic international

interference and poor economic conditions among others'. In this context more than democratic political structures are required; also essential are 'the evolution of norms sensitive to international human rights standards and the growth of human rights culture within institutions of society'.

As befitting a scholar, the book does not seek to be 'a manual for peace practitioners' who work in conflict situations. Instead, it is 'a principled approach to issues that generally emerge in conflict situations to which human rights might proffer an answer, but from an academic and ideological perspective'. To the extent that the 'human rights and peace paradigms converge at the ideological level', the challenge is how the two paradigms can also 'converge at the practical level as well, so that the benefits of both are appropriated towards creating a peaceful society'. This raises 'how conflict resolution processes should appropriate international legal principles and the relationships that conflict resolution experts should forge with the normative frameworks within which they pursue their agenda' – a key question that the book engages. In so doing, it makes a welcome and important contribution to advancing a 'rights based approach' to conflict reduction.

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