2nd Tangaza Annual Conference on Sustainable Peace and Security in Africa (TACSPA 2)

Theme: Religion and Its Contribution to Conflict and Peace Building

23-24 May 2018

Concept paper
1. Background

We are living in a critical time in the history of many countries of sub-Saharan Africa where the discourse of peace and security is continuously being contested. There are trends and phenomena that unravel peace and security globally. The focus within this discourse has, generally, been to search for interventions which are global rather than look for those which are strongly localized and mostly appreciated by the affected communities. Africa has been described as the epicenter of most of the global conflicts. Since 2011 there have been many conflicts in South Sudan, Central African Republic, Sudan, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Mali, Kenya and others.

“Religion is not so much a source of conflict as a source of hope in sub Saharan Africa, where religious leaders and movements are a major force in civil society and a key provider of relief and development for the needy, particularly given the widespread reality of failed states and collapsing” (Pew Research Center, 2010)

The practical experience has been that in times of violent disruption of communities that leads to an emergency situation and a flow of refugees and IDPs, communities, politicians and decision makers look out for the contributions of religious actors to sustainable peace building and security. On the other hand, religious differences, manipulation and extremism are often used to ignite, label and fuel such conflicts.

Since the majority of Africans are strong believers in God, religion needs to be more instrumental in fostering development and peace. Religious actors, including but not limited to religious leaders, institutions, women and youth need to play a leading role in countering and preventing violence in the name of religion and promoting interreligious dialogue and engagement for peace. Therefore, the conference intends to look at the role of religion in achieving security and sustainable peace as well as how religion itself can transform its internal violent potential. It will also look at the values instilled and how they can influence change in the society. Special focus will be given to the fairly new and growing global issue of religiously motivated or labelled insurgencies, recruitment of the youth and how they can be rehabilitated.

2. The significance of the conference

TACSPA 2: Religion and Its Contribution to Conflict and Peace Building is based on the complex conflict reality within the African continent. The need for sustainable peace and security is ever urgent. From history, religious actors have great potential to influence changes in the society.

The conference aims at showcasing and harnessing many practical peace building efforts that are taking place across the continent, and bring them into academic discourse that contributes to the wider transformative approach to religion, peace and security in Africa. The conference will look at different perspectives on religion-related conflicts that trigger insecurity, violence across communities, borders and regions leading to poverty.

Tangaza University College’s role will be to bring together religious actors, practitioners and academics to discuss current major issues in religion, peace and security nexus, and share experiences from the field.
It seeks to create an alliance of good practices for peace in Africa to explore how religion should contribute to successful peace building. The conference also seeks to find answers for;

1. How is religion contributing to conflict and peace?
2. How do religious leaders or faith based actors contribute to conflict and peace?
3. How can these actors and leaders learn from research and experience to become a bigger and more efficient force for positive transformation in Africa?

3. Objectives of the Conference
   
i) To gain deeper understanding of the contributions of religion to conflict and peace building, and to stimulate new approaches to research, engagement and policy.

ii) To explore and adapt appropriate strategies for religious and academic actors to counter and prevent violence in the name of religion and promote interreligious dialogue for peace.

iii) To engage peace practitioners, (inter) religious leaders, civil society, (inter) governmental actors and academia on how religion can be an instrument for peace building initiatives.

iv) To create a network of interreligious practitioners and academicians for successful religious peace practices and research in the African continent.

4. Sub-Themes for the Conference
   
1. Interreligious dialogue and engagement for Peace and Security
   This subtheme includes interreligious preparation and activities for dialogue on all levels. A key aspect in this is the transition from dialogue to engagement (and vice versa) and how interreligious engagement contributes to development and conflict resolution.

2. Decoding Religious insurgence, Violence and Extremism
   This subtheme aims at deconstructing the motivations and underlying issues (possibly religious, coercion, economic concerns, etc.) that lead to radicalization, religious labelled extremism and recruitment of the youth by radical movement.

3. Religion, Governance and political processes
   Special regard will be given to the interweaving of political actors with religion in Africa. How do they influence each other and how do religious leaders use politicians to push their agenda – and vice versa.

4. Religion as a force for peace, justice and reconciliation
   Practical examples of leadership, best practices and failures from Africa will be showcased and examined. Documentation and coordination of such efforts have been identified as major areas of future improvement, how can this be solved and what other issues are benefitting or hindering religious actors in their strive for peace?

Additionally, an introduction to the “Religion – Security – Peace” Nexus will be provided and there will be space to showcase promising research endeavors on the topic.
5. Methodology

The conference will use formal and informal presentation of initiatives by peace actors, interreligious practitioners and academics. An action orientated approach will be adopted for all presentations. The methodology will blend academic presentations, case studies and experiences of religious peace actors with relevance to the role of religion in peace and conflict in Africa.

The conference will host keynote speakers from senior academia, religious leadership and internationally experienced peace practitioners and offer space for researchers and actors to present their contributions in poster sessions.

6. Participants

The conference will draw participants from academia, individual peace practitioners, regional and international organizations, government bodies, national and regional security forces, civil society groups and faith based organizations that are directly involved in peace and security issues in Africa and beyond. Specific regard will be given to a balanced and impactful representation of religious leaders, faith based actors and interreligious experts.

7. Expected results of the conference

The conference will create a forum for the participants to gain a deeper understanding of the contribution of religion to conflict and peace building. To explore strategies for the key players to counter and prevent violence in the name of religion and promote interreligious dialogue for peace. TACSSA 2 will discuss and showcase efforts and perspectives that are made towards achieving sustainable security and peace. The conference will identify new areas of research. More importantly, TACSSA 2 will enable the participants to network and create synergy amongst the mentioned groups.

The conference will create an opportunity for participants to strategize on how to scale up their efforts to contribute through religion to peace initiatives in Africa and harnessing positive experiences of different actors. The papers and statements presented in the conference will be published into a book.