



Address Delivered by President Nelson Mandela

At the **Kosovo, Africa and Humanitarian Intervention Conference**

hosted by the South African Institute of International Affairs

On 25 August 2000

In his opening address to the General Assembly in September 1999, Secretary-General Kofi Annan made a plea for United Nations (UN) intervention in cases of gross violations of human rights. We know that few states endorsed the remarks of the secretary general, and even fewer supported the Swedish position that 'the collective conscience of mankind demands action'.

The reluctance on the part of states is perhaps understandable due to a wariness of intervention too readily initiated; but we must all admire the determination of Secretary-General Annan and Sweden to end the conflicts which continue to plague so many regions of our world. It is hardly surprising that both had given their support to the Independent International Commission on Kosovo - a commission established to examine the events in Kosovo. Both Swedish Prime Minister Persson and Secretary-General Annan believe that to end conflict we must better understand it.

We must say to Secretary-General Annan that, at a time when the quest for peace demands greater accountability on the parts of states and international organisations for their actions, we are fortunate to have a man like him at the helm of the United Nations organisation. In Africa we take particular pride in him.

The quest for peace has created a need for even more dialogue on the international plane. The report of the Kosovo commission will provide an independent assessment of conflict and intervention that can assist in advancing dialogue amongst all leaders, scholars and interested parties. It is vitally important that we engage in this discourse and discussion. As we start this one, we need to understand the lessons of those conflicts and learn from them for our future.

We find it most fitting that the Kosovo Commission has decided to host its final meeting and seminar here in South Africa. It is equally fitting that it chose as its focus for this seminar the lessons to be learnt from Kosovo for dealing with conflicts in regions like Africa and Asia. While we are not convinced that it is only a lack of schooling on the part of the international community that has made it so reluctant to act

to halt the conflicts in Africa, this disparity of treatment does desperately require attention. And the Kosovo Commission can play an important part in addressing that issue.

It has now become so customary to point to the failure of the international community to intervene and end the genocide in Rwanda that it is almost forgotten that this relative neglect of Africa in these matters is much more general than only the Rwanda case. For example, while NATO prepared itself for action in Kosovo, Sierra Leone seemed a virtually forsaken place from an international perspective. As atrocities were carried out in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, under the aegis of an Ecomog peacekeeping mandate, sent in troops, but the weaponry, funding, communications and intelligence promised by Western powers failed to materialise.

And even in Rwanda itself, once the genocide had ended, there was and is more that the international community could do than merely repent about its failures. The dynamics that ignited the genocide in Rwanda today continue to play a role in the conflicts in neighbouring Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We are not suggesting that these and other African conflicts can be subjected to the same template of conflict resolution or that the actions of Kosovo can simply be transplanted to the conflicts on this continent. We in Africa and Asia must, however, envy the readiness and willingness on the part of the international community to intervene and commit resources to the reconstruction of Kosovar society.

It is therefore particularly encouraging to us to note the interest of the international community in the Burundi peace process to which we have been the facilitator since the beginning of this year, building on the sterling work done by Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. A number of leaders from both Africa and the broader international community have given their time to attend some of the plenary sessions of the peace process held in Arusha. On Monday 28 August 2000, we shall again have such a plenary, this time with the intention to have a peace agreement signed. Once more, a number of heads of states and governments, or their representatives, will be in attendance, signalling a renewed interest of the world in the affairs of Africa.

Even more encouraging has been the indications from Western leaders of their willingness to actively assist in the rebuilding and development of the Burundi economy once a peace agreement has been reached. We shall ourselves, remain actively involved in mobilising the international community for that project. We would wish to see Burundi as a showcase of peace bringing its dividends through the actions of the international community.

We have quite often in the past made comment that in this contemporary world of globalisation, we have indeed again become the keepers of our brother or sister. The global village cannot only be such where it concerns the accessibility and penetrability of markets; it must surely also mean that the ills and woes of one are the shared concern of all.

We speak here today to support the Kosovo Commission as potentially a powerful means of promoting and consolidating that sense of oneness amongst ourselves. As we learn to understand that destructive

part of our human history, we may advance in the knowledge that we share so much- bad or good. Together, and only together, can we make of the world a better place for our children to grow up in.

I wish you well, and thank you for the opportunity of sharing with you. And thank you for thinking specifically of Africa in your deliberations.

***President Nelson Mandela delivered the keynote address at the 'Kosovo, Africa and Humanitarian Intervention' Conference held at the South African Institute of International Affairs, Jan Smuts House, Johannesburg on 25 August 2000. This was the final seminar in a series and formed part of the International Independent Commission on Kosovo.***