

# Strategies for Reducing Civilian Abuse in Civil Conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa: Policy Memo

**Ngozi Ibe, PhD**

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## 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Civilian abuse in civil conflicts across Sub-Saharan Africa remains a critical issue, contributing to severe humanitarian crises and long-term regional instability. This memo outlines a tailored approach to reducing civilian abuse in Sub-Saharan Africa by addressing the root causes specific to the region, including ethnic and religious divisions, ideological extremism, and weak governance structures. It recommends a combination of diplomatic, military, developmental, and local engagement strategies to protect civilian populations and reduce the incidence of violence.

## 2 BACKGROUND

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Civil conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa are often characterized by high levels of civilian abuse, driven by a complex interplay of factors:

- Ethnic and Religious Divisions:** Many conflicts in the region are fueled by deep-seated ethnic and religious tensions, which are often exploited by armed groups to justify violence against civilians.
- Ideological Extremism:** Groups motivated by extremist ideologies, particularly in regions affected by Islamist insurgencies, often target civilians as part of their broader strategies.
- Weak Governance and Accountability:** The prevalence of weak state institutions and limited rule of law allows perpetrators of civilian abuse to act with relative impunity.
- Economic Marginalization:** Poverty and economic disenfranchisement in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa exacerbate conflicts, as armed groups exploit economic grievances to recruit fighters and justify violence.

## 3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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To effectively reduce civilian abuse in Sub-Saharan Africa's civil conflicts, a comprehensive strategy that addresses the region's specific challenges is essential. The following recommendations should be considered:

### **3.1 STRENGTHENING REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL NORMS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS**

Enhance Regional Enforcement of International Humanitarian Law (IHL): Support initiatives led by the African Union (AU) and regional organizations like ECOWAS and IGAD to strengthen the enforcement of IHL, with a focus on protecting civilians. This includes advocating for stronger regional mechanisms to hold perpetrators accountable.

Support the Expansion of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights: Encourage the expansion and empowerment of the African Court to prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity, including those involving civilian abuse.

### **3.2 DIPLOMATIC ENGAGEMENT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Engage in Regional Preventive Diplomacy: Work with regional bodies and neighboring states to address the underlying causes of conflict, such as cross-border ethnic tensions and resource competition. This includes supporting AU-led peace initiatives and mediation efforts.

Promote Inclusive Peace Processes: Advocate for peace processes that include representation from all affected communities, particularly marginalized ethnic and religious groups. Ensuring broad participation can help address grievances and reduce the likelihood of civilian targeting.

### **3.3 TARGETING IDEOLOGICAL EXTREMISM**

Implement Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) Programs in High-Risk Areas: Focus CVE efforts in regions affected by Islamist insurgencies, such as the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. These programs should aim to reduce radicalization by addressing the social and economic conditions that make extremism appealing.

Foster Interfaith and Interethnic Dialogue: Invest in programs that promote dialogue and reconciliation between different ethnic and religious groups, particularly in areas with a history of intercommunal violence. Such initiatives can help reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies that advocate violence against civilians.

### **3.4 MILITARY AND SECURITY INTERVENTIONS**

Strengthen the Capacity of African Peacekeeping Forces: Support the training and equipping of AU and regional peacekeeping forces to ensure they have the capacity to protect civilians effectively. This includes providing resources for intelligence gathering, rapid response, and the establishment of safe zones.

Promote Community-Based Security Initiatives: Encourage the development of community-based security forces that are accountable to local populations. These forces can help protect civilians while building trust between security providers and the communities they serve.

### **3.5 HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE**

Increase Humanitarian Aid and Support for Displaced Populations: Prioritize funding for humanitarian operations in conflict zones, with a focus on providing food, shelter, healthcare, and education to displaced and vulnerable populations. This also includes support for mental health services for survivors of violence.

Invest in Sustainable Development and Resilience: Address the economic drivers of conflict by supporting development projects that create jobs, improve infrastructure, and enhance food security. Programs that focus on empowering women and youth can be particularly effective in reducing economic grievances that fuel violence.

### **3.6 INFORMATION AND MEDIA STRATEGIES**

Combat Hate Speech and Propaganda: Support initiatives that monitor and counter hate speech and propaganda that incite violence against civilians. This includes funding for independent media outlets that promote accurate reporting and fact-checking in conflict zones.

Leverage Technology for Early Warning Systems: Invest in technology-driven early warning systems that can alert local communities and international actors to impending threats of civilian abuse. Mobile technology and social media platforms can play a crucial role in disseminating information quickly and effectively.

## **4 CONCLUSION**

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Reducing civilian abuse in Sub-Saharan Africa's civil conflicts requires a multi-pronged approach that addresses the unique factors driving violence in the region. By strengthening regional legal frameworks, engaging in preventive diplomacy, countering extremist ideologies, enhancing military protections, and providing humanitarian and developmental support, we can significantly mitigate the risks to civilian populations. These strategies should be implemented in close collaboration with African regional bodies, local governments, and civil society organizations to ensure a sustainable and impactful response.

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