Book review

Peace agreements and durable peace in Africa

Maina, Grace and Erik Melander eds. 2016

Reviewed by Jannie Malan

Previous ACCORD publications on peace agreements have now been followed up by this one, which may be regarded as most relevant and most revealing. For everyone and every organisation committed to conflict resolution, this topic is obviously of great and constant importance. Of special concern to all of us, however, is the prevalent phenomenon that between peace agreements on paper and peace agreements implemented in real life there can be disappointing differences. And that is exactly what this book is about. In the introduction and the conclusion it is emphasised that the volume is focused 'on two specific questions: Why did the particular peace agreements under study fail or succeed? And to what extent do peace agreements contribute to the durability or fragility of peace?' (p. 2, cf. p. 284).

Answers to these questions were expected to lead to 'lessons of both academic and practical relevance' (p. 2), which formed the main objective of the study.

The eight chapters contain case studies from countries in which peace agreements 'were finalised prior to 2010 and therefore allow for a rich analysis of their successes and shortfalls' (p. 2). The case studies are arranged according to the names of the countries in alphabetical sequence: Angola, Burundi, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. The title of each chapter mentions not only the country, but also indicates something about the essence of the peace process concerned:

Peace accords in Angola: Contesting the meaning of success

Peace and peace agreements in Burundi: When the right time comes

Deliberate coexistence of war and peace in Chad: The case of the Tripoli Accord

The long road to peace in Côte d'Ivoire: From civil war over power sharing to international intervention

Analysing the peace process in the Democratic Republic of Congo: From war to uncertain peace

Somali peace processes and agreements: From Djibouti I (1991) to Djibouti IV (2008-09)

Elusive peace in Sudan: The endless episodic journey to stability

Peace without an agreement? An analysis of the failed Juba peace process

In my opinion, the authors of the chapters have succeeded very well in describing and discussing the differences and complexities of the various situations. Without overburdening the reader with detail, they cover the conflict-waging years before the peace process, the challenging years of the process itself, and the better or worse years after the process. They do provide sufficient explanation, however, of the parties and their conflicting interests, views and purposes. In fact, when one opens the book and notices seven pages of about 150 acronyms and abbreviations, you get a good idea

of the numbers of liberation movements, other movements, armed forces, alliances, rallies, missions, commissions, monitoring groups and unions about which you can expect to read. Agreements also appear in the list, of course, but make up less than two percent of the entries. The long list therefore gives a clear indication of the bewildering number of differently oriented groups – let alone individuals. Such thoughts can make us, who are committed to conflict resolution, shudder and wonder. Or they can inspire us to become even more dedicated to our job.

At ACCORD we have indeed taken it seriously to study peace agreements and derive lessons from case studies. There have been, for instance, a Peace Processes Experts Workshop in 2006, a Peace Agreements Experts Forum in 2007, and a Peace Agreements and Durable Peace in Africa Workshop in 2009. Now, in the foreword of this new publication, our Founder and Executive Director has written: 'This book is grounded in the belief that the practice of peacemaking and academic peace research should be closely interlinked fields of activity, and that the two have much to learn from each other' (p. vii).

One of the working documents used during our workshops was one containing the actual texts of a number of peace agreements. That could only serve as a convenient frame of reference, however, for, as already stated above, there often are depressing divergences between the documentation and the implementation of an agreement. This is where this book makes a crucially important contribution to our insight into post-agreement achievements and failures. We read, in or between the lines, about hands that sign signatures, and hands that are symbolically shaken, but also about minds (or hearts?) that seek personal interest, ethnic group interest, or political party interest, and that are inclined to hate, curse or condemn. As we read, we may draw inferences about the motivations of parties that have led to toughness of talks and deviations from agreements.

Each chapter ends with conclusions that may be drawn from the case study concerned, and the book ends with an overarching conclusion in which success factors are highlighted: political power sharing, military power

sharing, inclusiveness of the peace agreement, transitional justice, and the appropriate role of third parties. What is unfortunately not mentioned in the final conclusion, is the failure factor of *unwillingness*. This is however clearly emphasised in the introduction (pp. 5, 10):

> Most of the contributions to this volume discuss the central role of regime character and the issue of political will in the success or failure of peace agreements. The successful implementation of an agreement is largely dependent on the commitment of parties to the said agreement. Most agreements fail as a result of the lack of political will.

> As evidenced in various chapters of this volume, a successful peace agreement depends on the political will of the parties to implement its terms.

The introduction also frankly adds that three of the case studies 'are examples of how one individual can derail a peace process and render a peace agreement unsuccessful' (p. 5). And in the various chapters, the authors emphasise either the assistance arising from willingness (pp. 137, 146, 150, 154) and the hindrances arising from unwillingness (pp. 121, 180), or they provide examples of situations in which the influence and results of willingness or unwillingness are clearly implied.

The issue of political will, or in several cases politico-ethnical will, challenges us as readers and as researchers to explore the scope of such a lack of will, and to see whether we can fathom possible motivations and hidden agendas behind it. When we read this book in a searching mode, we may find clues to the ramifications of this unwillingness – such as the disinclination to understand, to tolerate, to include, to cooperate, to coexist. And we may find pointers to the roots of such a fenced-in mindset: individual self-interest; well-intentioned but narrow-minded political party interest; favouritism, defensiveness or even aggressive assertiveness about own-culture (and/or own-religion). As receptive, but also objective readers, we may find many places where we feel inclined to distinguish between roots that are really deep and others that may merely be shallow or even superficial. As we work our way through all the different convictions

about which the wars were fought, we might often come to points where we cannot help pondering over persistent questions. To what extent are such conflict-causing differences absolutely incompatible? Can there be ways to prod belligerents towards mutual understanding and tolerating?

The last page of the conclusion is about 'Reflections'. It begins by emphasising 'that there are no simple answers to the question of how to end wars and build strong, durable peace' (p. 294). To practitioners it is therefore recommended to make the best use of the case studies when asking what approaches might apply to each particular case. And researchers are challenged to consider the puzzles and contradictions as starting points for further investigation. Many of the sources listed in the introduction and the chapters may be found useful, but, apart from consulting existing literature, ground-breaking creative thinking will obviously be required.

This book, with its introduction by Dr Grace Maina, Manager of ACCORD's Knowledge Production Department at the time of writing, its eight chapters by academics and practitioners, and its conclusion by Prof Erik Melander of Uppsala University's Department of Peace and Conflict Research, can be highly recommended. It is very well organised and presented (with very few minor typographical errors). It clearly communicates the message that the proof of peace lies in the practising thereof. It focuses on the gap between a cease-fire and a cease-enmity. And it prompts us to search for ways in which, indirectly or directly, unwilling parties might be nudged towards willingness to *reach and satisfactorily implement* a coexistential peace agreement.