

UN Security Council Reform in the Decade of Reparations

An article by Latifah Namutebi

A reformed United Nations Security Council needs Africa to become better at peace.

Peace in Africa is sustained through connected forms of conflict prevention that place human dignity, relationships and the prevention of recurring harm at the centre of security. In Wau, South Sudan, the Peace Centre [documents](#) women mediators using kinship, maternal authority, hospitality, artistic practice and community dialogue to prevent retaliatory killings, negotiate across Dinka, Luo, Ndogo, Balanda, Kresh and Bongo communities and restore relationships where formal justice has limited reach. The Peace Centre's research describes the peace they produce in equally practical terms: children returning to school, families cultivating land without fear, women moving freely in markets and communities resolving disputes without violence. In South Africa, the Centre for Mediation in Africa [documents](#) women traditional leaders acting as first points of contact in rural communities, mediating disputes while connecting conflict resolution with social cohesion, access to services and responses to poverty and gender-based violence. In Ethiopia, Yirga Abebe Damtie [locates](#) religious institutions within communities on different sides of conflict and identifies their trust and moral authority as important resources for peacebuilding; across the continent, religious actors have played consequential roles from church mediation between Sudan and southern Sudanese movements to the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone. Collective wellbeing also draws on [indigenous systems](#) of healing that understand security and recovery as communal. Among amaBomvana communities in South Africa's Eastern Cape, research documents wellbeing as connecting people to family, community, ancestors, land and spiritual practice, with indigenous healers working through communal processes. Similar traditions appear across the continent. Among the [Baganda](#) of central Uganda for example, traditional spiritual healers work through ancestral knowledge and ritual, with their practice supported by experienced spiritualists, family and the wider community. At the regional level, the African Union's FemWise-Africa [carries this preventive logic](#) into formal diplomacy: its members have joined AU Track I mediation on the Tanzania-Malawi border dispute, supported implementation of the Central African Republic peace agreement, deployed to Sudan and South Sudan and undertaken preventive diplomacy ahead of Côte d'Ivoire's 2020 elections.

Together, these practices form a connected African approach to security in which women mediators, traditional and religious authorities, communities, states and regional institutions identify tensions, mediate disputes, sustain dialogue and carry political knowledge from communities into formal decision-making. In Uganda, women mediators have channelled community-level conflict indicators through District Peace Committees; in South Sudan the Peace Centre has built women peace mediator networks in Wau and Juba and supported the development of a FemWise-Africa chapter. African peacebuilding produces security knowledge from the grassroots upwards. This knowledge should shape the decisions made at the international level, which is what the security council stands to gain from Africa entering as an equal decision-making authority.

Africa's demand for permanent representation is both a claim to equal decision-making authority and an opportunity to strengthen the practice of international peace and security. The [Common African Position](#), set out in the [2005 Ezulwini Consensus](#) and subsequently reaffirmed through the [Sirte Declaration](#), demands no fewer than two permanent and five non-permanent African seats, with the African Union selecting Africa's representatives. When the United Nations was created in 1945, most of Africa was not represented as sovereign states; the AU itself identifies that historical circumstance as part of the basis for the Common African Position. Today, Africa accounts for 54 of the UN's 193 Member States and remains the only continent without permanent representation on the Council.

The African Union's Decade of Justice for Africans and People of African Descent through Reparations, 2026 to 2036, gives this reform agenda a wider purpose. Africa's contemporary reparatory justice agenda stretches from the [1993 Abuja Proclamation](#), which called for representation of African peoples in the highest political and economic decision-making bodies, to the [2023 Accra Proclamation](#), which explicitly calls for comprehensive reform of multilateral institutions, including the composition and working methods of the Security Council. In 2024, the AU designated reparations a Flagship Issue and Project of the Union and adopted "Justice for Africans and People of African Descent Through Reparations" as its [2025 Theme of the Year](#). Africa's absence from permanent Security Council membership was fixed in 1945, when colonisation denied the continent sovereign representation. That exclusion is part of the injustice reparations exists to repair.

United Nations Security Council reform is therefore one of the tests of Africa's reparations agenda.

What would success look like? Two African permanent members exercising equal authority would correct a fundamental deficit in representation. A reparative Council should go further. It should be better able to hear the warning before the violence, give prevention political weight alongside crisis response, connect Security Council decisions to African regional and continental mechanisms and recognise women peacebuilders as political actors in the production of security. Knowledge generated through land mediation in Wau, community early warning in Uganda or preventive diplomacy by a Regional Economic Community should have pathways into the institutions deciding how international peace and security is maintained. That is the [Feminist Peace Future](#) the Peace Centre seeks: representation that redistributes authority and improves the decisions that authority produces.

[The Veto](#) brings the distribution of that authority into view. [Article 27 of the UN Charter](#) requires substantive Security Council decisions to receive nine affirmative votes, including the concurring votes of the permanent members; consequently, a negative vote by one permanent member can prevent a substantive resolution from being adopted. The Ezulwini Consensus position was that Africa opposes the veto, but maintains that for as long as it exists, it must be available to all permanent members as a matter of common justice.

The reparative question worth asking is this: if reparative reform seeks a fairer distribution of authority, should its destination be more states capable of stopping collective action unilaterally or a Council progressively less dependent on that power? Africa can demand

equality within the present arrangement while continuing to pursue [reform of the veto itself](#). These positions are complementary, one rejects second-tier permanent membership; the other questions whether concentrated authority should remain a defining feature of collective security.

The same scrutiny should apply to relations between the Security Council and African institutions. The AU already has a [Peace and Security Council](#), the [Panel of the Wise](#), [FemWise-Africa](#) and [continental early-warning](#) and preventive diplomacy mechanisms, alongside conflict-prevention arrangements operated by [Regional Economic Communities](#). [Chapter VIII of the UN Charter](#) already provides for regional arrangements in maintaining international peace and security. African institutions should therefore have significant decision-making authority when the Security Council acts on Africa.

The Decade of Reparations provides an opportunity to strengthen Africa's decision-making authority.

In my very African peacebuilding opinion, the African Union should use the Decade of Reparations to take the emerging principle of AU-UN co-decision-making further. [Resolution 2719](#) has already established joint AU-UN processes for the planning and authorisation of AU-led peace-support operations receiving UN assessed contributions. The next step should be an AU-UN African Peace and Security Co-Decision Protocol extending that principle to country-specific Security Council decisions concerning Africa. Before adopting a country-specific resolution, sanctions regime or peace-support mandate concerning an African state, the Security Council should be required to seek the formal position and secure recorded concurrence of the AU Peace and Security Council. That position should itself incorporate formal participation by the relevant Regional Economic Community, FemWise-Africa and women peacebuilders from the country concerned, with women comprising at least half of participating peace actors. Where concurrence cannot be reached, the positions of both councils and the record of their joint consultation should be formally placed before the Security Council prior to a vote.

A binding requirement for AU concurrence would require changes to the present distribution of authority under the UN Charter. That is precisely why it belongs within a reform agenda: the objective is a progression from consultation to co-decision, to meaningful African authority over decisions concerning peace and security on the continent.

Africa has made its case for permanent representation. The Decade of Reparations allows us to define what that representation should accomplish. Repair should change who exercises authority, how that authority is exercised and whose knowledge reaches the decision. A reformed Security Council needs African representation. It also needs Africa to help make it better at peace.