ISCA
INTERNATIONAL
SECURITY
CONFERENCE ON
AFRICA

ISCA 2025 REPORT

Background

The International Security Conference on Africa (ISCA), an international non-governmental organization registered in Rwanda, held its inaugural conference(ISCA2025) at the Kigali Convention Centre, Kigali, on 19–20 May 2025. His Excellency President Paul Kagame of the Republic of Rwanda graced the event, which brought together policymakers, security and military chiefs, diplomats and international partners. ISCA 2025 represents the first international security conference of its kind, focused on Africa by Africans and partners. Calls were made during the conference for African ownership, stronger institutions, and purposeful partnerships in security and development.

Opening Ceremony

During the opening ceremonies, the key speakers comprised the Guest of Honour, His Excellency Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda; former African Union Commission Chairperson and currently the ISCA Advisory Council Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat; and the Executive Secretary of ISCA, Amb Lt Gen (Rtd) Frank Mushyo Kamanzi.

In his keynote address, H.E. President Paul KAGAME described the conference as "long overdue" and a pivotal step toward African leadership in its own security. He emphasized that

> **"Africa's future in matters of peace and security cannot be outsourced"**

underscoring the urgent need for the continent to take full ownership of its security agenda.

H.E. Paul Kagame outlined three critical pillars for success: Ownership, emphasizing the need for Africans to take responsibility for their own security and to strengthen key institutions such as the African Union; the Governance–Security nexus, highlighting that good governance and security are mutually reinforcing and that without both, progress and trust cannot be achieved; and Cooperation, underscoring the importance of effective and strategic partnerships among African nations, as no country can address security challenges alone in an interconnected world.

He also called for the production and scaling up of African solutions, the alignment of technical expertise with political will, and the translation of peace and progress into tangible benefits for African citizens.

The ISCA Advisory Council Chairperson and Former African Union Commission Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat described

> **"Kigali as a symbol of resilience and an appropriate setting for launching this "long-awaited" and "dynamic" platform"**

He noted the historic need for a dedicated space for African-led reflection and dialogue on peace and security, tailored to Africa's realities. He called for a platform rooted in the African context, ambition and unity.

H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat
Chairperson of the ISCA advisory council

In his remarks, the Executive Secretary, Amb Lt Gen (Rtd) Frank Mushyo Kamanzi emphasized African agency to homegrown solutions to the continent's unique security challenges. He called for strengthening partnerships and creating opportunities for a prosperous African future.

Amb. Lt Gen (Rtd) Frank Mushyo Kamanzi
ISCA Executive Secretary

Global Conflict Hotspots:
Securing Africa in a Fragmented World

The panel, “Global Conflict Hotspots: Securing Africa in a Fragmented World,” convened diverse voices, including African and international leaders, diplomats, and security practitioners. The session, moderated by Ms. Julie Gichuru (President and CEO, Africa Leadership and Dialogue Institute (ALADI)), explored critical dimensions of Africa’s current and future security within a global context of multiplying conflicts, shifting multilateralism, and rising external pressures.

H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat (former African Union Chair and ISCA Advisory Council Chair) framed Africa’s challenges as historically rooted, observing that while legal and institutional mechanisms exist, implementation and self-reliant solutions remain elusive. The symbolism of the ISCA venue, which also previously hosted the signing of the agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), was emphasized, linking it to pan-African aspirations. For H.E. Faki, the key challenge is African responsibility: reclaiming ownership, reexamining inherited models, and creatively forging peace and development “from within.”

Ambassador Martin Kimani (former Permanent Representative of Kenya to UN and President and CEO, The Africa Center, New York) reinforced this call for African-designed solutions, noting the challenge of dual sources of instability: internal state contradictions and external interventions. Amb Kimani underscored the urgent need for strategic and independent leadership in Africa, lamenting the prevalence of “performative expertise” and advocating for a “revolution in leadership” that is both principled and resilient in the face of immense pressures. He pointed to Rwanda as a case study in successful national transformation and the necessity of fostering a new cadre of resilient, values-driven African leaders.

Victor Zhikai Gao
Vice President, Centre for China and Globalization

Victor Zhikai Gao (Vice President, Centre for China and Globalization) argued forcefully that Africa should reject the binary of choosing between global powers (US or China), instead using "its own brain power" to assess which external actors advance African interests. Citing China's own rapid development, Gao advised Africa to prioritize internal stability, peace with neighbors, and continual development premised on infrastructure and energy. Gao also cautioned on the risk of Africa missing out on the ongoing artificial intelligence (AI) revolution, proposing open-source solutions and continental mobilization to avoid a new form of "digital divide."

Marc Hecker, Deputy Director of IFRI, noted a Eurocentric shift from Africa's post-9/11 centrality in global counterterrorism to a renewed focus on major power rivalries. This "crowding out" of Africa from Western security agendas, compounded by increased multipolarity, demands that African leaders develop diversified partnerships and avoid becoming pawns in larger geostrategic games. Hecker further emphasized the economic "market logic" underpinning security supply and demand, noting a growing reluctance among Western nations to engage in future military operations in Africa.

The panel delivered critiques of the existing multilateral system (UN Security Council), characterizing it as a legacy framework serving the interests of great powers. Both Faki and Kimani cited examples of Libya and Rwanda where international indifference, veto power abuse, or direct intervention produced tragic and destabilizing consequences for Africa. The African Union's exclusion and lack of leverage within these systems were deemed structural flaws.

Marc Hecker,
Deputy Director of IFRI

Kimani and Faki argued that simply insisting on “seats at the table” is insufficient. Instead, Africa must build institutional, economic, and strategic leverage through continental unity and assertiveness in international fora. Kimani likened aspirations for a UN Security Council seat to “going in as a proud peacock and coming out a plucked chicken,” underscoring that real influence lies in power, not position. Faki highlighted that external models often do not suit African realities, challenging Africans to reform political, social, and economic systems for genuine ownership and legitimacy.

Marc Hecker argued for a greater reliance on regional security mechanisms, noting that the global UN-based system is increasingly unstable and often rendered ineffective by the frequent use of veto powers. He suggested that regional arrangements may offer faster, more adaptable, and context-specific responses to security challenges, bypassing the political gridlock that hampers collective action at the UN level.

Audience interventions highlighted Sudan’s humanitarian and security catastrophe, with 13 million displaced, 5 million refugees, and rampant use of drones and mercenaries amid minimal African or international action. The Mali delegate linked Sahel instability to the Libya intervention, citing incoherence among African states, foreign interference, and unreliable partnerships.

Speakers urged rejecting predatory external influence, strengthening sovereignty, and building complementary national capabilities in diplomacy, the economy, and the military. Moussa Faki acknowledged Africa’s “institutional weaknesses” and ongoing external interference, especially in Sudan’s war. He called for urgent, united African action, better governance, and stronger diplomatic capacity.

There was consensus that sustainable security and development on the continent require African agency: self-designed institutions, critical assessment of imported models, and responsible leadership attuned to citizens' needs. The path forward is not asking for inclusion, but generating leverage through unity, institutional strength, and a developmental state. Africa's leaders must avoid the tra of exclusive alignment with any one global power, skillfully diversifying partnerships to serve continental interests. Geopolitics are increasingly transactional; Africa must prioritize clear, enforceable interests in economic, infrastructural, and technological development.

Economic integration (e.g., the African Continental Free Trade Area) is key to both peace and prosperity fusing trade, infrastructure, and security strategies. African peace and security institutions should be revitalized, ensuring decisive, timely, and unified African positions at continental and global levels. Solidarity (Ubuntu, Harambee) is framed as not just cultural, but as strategic practice. The panel called for practical support among African states in times of crisis, with examples such as Rwanda's G5 Sahel 1 million USD contribution in 2019.

It was emphasized that the global multilateral system is unlikely to be positively reformed in Africa's favor without internal African leverage and unity. Africa's destiny lies in its own hands, not in expecting external rescue.

The panel provided a nuanced account of Africa's security dilemmas in a time of global upheaval and fragmentation. Rather than resignation or wishful hope in external solutions, the panelists advocated a pragmatic but ambitious course: building African ownership, unity, and innovation. The closing remarks underscored that Africa's security and future depend on Africans themselves, united in vision, strategic in action, and courageous in leadership.

Strengthening Africa's Bargaining Power

Dr. Nathalie Delapalme, CEO of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation to the left and Her Excellency Louise Mushikiwabo, Secretary General of La Francophonie to the right

The high-level panel “Strengthening Africa’s Bargaining Power, ”brought together African and international leaders to interrogate the continent’s potential and persistent challenges in shaping global decision making. Featuring Her Excellency Louise Mushikiwabo (Secretary General of La Francophonie) and Dr. Nathalie Delapalme (CEO of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation), the discussion examined economic, institutional, and social levers for transforming Africa from a peripheral recipient to a substantive rule-maker in world affairs.

Dr. Delapalme opened the discussion by situating Africa’s contemporary bargaining power in a world that has evolved sharply since the post-World War II order was created. The continent, once wrongly seen as dependent, now commands demographic and resource power amid shared global vulnerabilities from pandemics to inequality. Delapalme argued that global challenges now demand global solutions, and Africa is indispensable to such answers.

Dr. Nathalie Delapalme
CEO of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation

H.E. Mushikiwabo stressed that African states must take initiative: “Africa must take its place, the place that is rightfully hers.” Despite increased African visibility in multilateral forums, real progress remains hindered by internal and external factors. Chief among them is the lack of a consistently articulated and unified African interest. Mushikiwabo insisted that while achieving consensus across 54 countries is complex, the few occasions when African unity was achieved—such as the successful bid for the Director General of WHO—demonstrate its effectiveness.

Delapalme pushed the debate further, noting that mere representation (such as new seats in the G20 or the UN) is insufficient unless African actors can sustain a common position and follow through with strategic, organized advocacy. Fragmentation and lack of follow-through dilute Africa’s collective strength on the global stage.

Both panelists critiqued the limitations of the post-war multilateral system, dominated by entrenched powers and systematic vetoes. They emphasized that Africa should diversify its partnerships, engage actively within multilayered forms of multilateralism (BRICS, La Francophonie, ASEAN, etc.), and adapt with agility to the proliferation of shifting international coalitions. Mushikiwabo described the evolution from fixed alliances to “successive coalitions” as both a challenge and an opportunity for a young, dynamic continent.

Examples from the Ebola and Covid-19 crises illustrated how African governments, private sector, and diaspora can rapidly mobilize coalitions, pool expertise, and negotiate effectively with international actors, underscoring that capacity and innovation exist when collective will is present. The need to extend these approaches to broader fields—such as digital regulation and debt relief—was identified as the next frontier.

Her Excellency Louise Mushikiwabo
Secretary General of La Francophonie

The panel underscored that Africa’s path to enhanced bargaining power lies in sustained unity, agile engagement, pragmatic coalition-building, and resolute self-confidence. Rather than waiting for external validation or transformation of global structures, African actors must leverage existing strengths, identify mutual interests, and bring disciplined, methodical follow-through to international advocacy. Echoing the words of the panelists: Africa, with a third of the world’s population and resources by century’s end, must move assertively from observer to architect of the rules that shape a shared future.

Private Military Companies and Foreign Military Bases in Africa:

Implications for African Security and Sovereignty

The panel "Private Military Companies and Foreign Military Bases in Africa: Implications for African Security and Sovereignty" gathered senior military practitioners, policy scholars, and think tank leaders to address one of the continent's most urgent—and contentious—security issues: the proliferation of private military companies (PMCs) and foreign military bases across Africa.

Moderated by David Mpanga, the panel featured Lt Gen (Rtd) Daniel Sidiki Traore (Former Force Commander, MINUSCA), Dr Luka Biong Deng Kuol (Senior Research Fellow, Sudd Institute), Murithi Mutiga (Africa Programme Director, International Crisis Group), and Dr Ashraf Afzal (Lecturer, Loughborough University). Their conversation explored the drivers, risks, and implications of this evolving landscape and charted pathways towards African security sovereignty.

In his introductory remarks, the moderator framed the session in light of remarks by H.E. President Paul Kagame, who had warned against the outsourcing of security, urging that Africa's peace and security "cannot and should not be outsourced." The phenomenon under scrutiny—outsourcing security functions to foreign soldiers, contractors, and facilities—raises urgent questions regarding sovereignty, state capacity, legitimacy, and vulnerability to global power struggles.

Africa, as discussed, currently hosts dozens of foreign military bases (with Djibouti exemplifying the 'hub' model), while PMCs operate across conflict and resource zones providing training, logistics, infrastructure protection, and, increasingly, direct military engagement and influence operations. The panel emphasized that such arrangements are not simply imposed, but often reflect intentional choices by African states—prompting deeper reflection on local and global political economies.

Dr Luka Biong Deng Kuol
Senior Research Fellow, Sudd Institute

Drawing from his military leadership experience, Lt Gen Traore rooted the proliferation of foreign military actors in the legacies of colonial state building, which privileged metropolitan interests and left African countries weakly institutionalized and strategically dependent. He reminded the audience that nation-building post-independence was not an act of benevolence, but rather part of great-power self-interest, a mindset that continues to shape international engagement.

Dr. Luka Biong Deng Kuol further developed this point, situating PMCs and foreign bases within a broader syndrome of governance deficits, limited state capacity, and an inability to control core security domains (land, air, cyber).

The panel agreed that permissive local legal and political environments, often characterized by a lack of oversight and national security strategies, enable the proliferation of unaccountable security actors.

Dr. Afzal posited that PMCs and foreign bases often emerge from perceived or actual gaps in military and security capacity. While these arrangements can address real deficiencies—especially in weak or conflict-affected states—he cautioned against narratives that unduly stress African incapacity, noting historical cases (like Rwanda's) where indigenous military solutions bested powerful foreign forces. For Afzal, the key danger lies in crisis-driven, unregulated, and panic-induced outsourcing without safeguards, which increases dependency and imports new risks.

A critical thread was the linkage between foreign military contractors and business interests, particularly in natural resources. Both Traore and Afzal pointed out that PMCs are frequently compensated in mining concessions or profits, creating a vicious circle in which security outsourcing corrodes state legitimacy and diverts public wealth. Foreign bases were also discussed in the context of "great power" competition

and the search for strategic logistics corridors in Africa's energy- and resource-rich regions.

Murithi Mutiga
Africa Programme Director, International Crisis Group

One of the panel's most significant concerns was the erosion of sovereignty in both formal and substantive terms. Dr. Kuol argued that contracting security for-profit entities creates conflicts of interest, draws experienced security professionals out of public service, and ultimately weakens state institutions. It can also drive up corruption and misalignment with national priorities. Dr. Afzal added a technological dimension, warning that software-controlled weapons and external doctrines embed dependencies that further undermine African autonomy.

Discussions around sovereignty reached a crescendo with Louise Mushikiwabo's intervention from the audience, probing the relevance of sovereignty when states fail to protect—or even actively harm—their citizens. All panelists concurred that true sovereignty must be people-centered, built on good governance, and oriented towards the equitable provision of security.

Mutiga (ICG) insisted on frankness: the spread of PMCs amounts in many cases to "corporate mercenarism"—with the terminology for contractors changing selectively depending on their country of origin. While recognizing that PMCs sometimes provided short-term tactical success (as in Sierra Leone), he and Kuol asserted that long-term reliance saps state capacity and legitimacy, breeds internal mistrust, and increases the risk of foreign actors driving political agendas. He highlighted particularly acute risks where PMCs become embedded in resource-extraction schemes, and where wars (such as in Sudan) migrate from rural peripheries to capitals, devastating educated classes and the institutional heart of the country, making recovery exponentially more difficult.

The panel agreed that much of the sector remains unregulated, operating under business law but not governed by democratic oversight or public accountability. The link between external support and human rights abuses was acknowledged, and ongoing African Union efforts to revise the 1977 convention on mercenaries were cited as important, but incomplete, steps.

The panel was careful to nuance the debate: while most agreed that PMCs and bases should be "tools of last resort" and used temporarily, there were circumstances under which their use was justified—if properly regulated

and linked to an explicit national strategy. However, reliance on external actors should never supplant efforts to build competent, inclusive, and legitimate state security institutions.

The importance of technology and AI as new arenas of competition—and potential vulnerability—was also underscored, with a call for proactive African positions and strategies.

This panel offered a hopeful assessment of Africa's security dilemmas regarding PMCs and foreign bases. Outsourcing is not simply an externally imposed colonial hangover; it is also a reflection of ongoing African choices, rooted in deficits of state capacity, unity, and governance. The costs to sovereignty, legitimacy, and long-term peace are high—and likely to rise as technological and geopolitical competition intensifies.

The panel's call to action: Africa's leaders must craft confident, evidence based security strategies rooted in broad social consultation. The continent should regulate and limit external security actors, invest vigorously in domestic capacity, foster regional solidarity, and leverage both traditional and innovative models of collective self-reliance. Only by doing so can Africa break free from the cycle of dependency and assert genuine agency in a rapidly evolving international order.

David Mpanga (Lawyer at AF Mpanga), Murithi Mutiga (Africa Programme Director, International Crisis Group), Dr Luka Biong Deng Kuol (Senior Research Fellow, Sudd Institute), and Dr Ashraf Afzal (Lecturer, Loughborough University) respectively.

Protecting Critical Infrastructure Against Cyber Threats

With exploding digital transformation, Africa's prosperity is increasingly bound to its digital infrastructure and the data flows that sustain it. The panel on "Protecting Critical Infrastructure Against Cyber Threats" addressed the continent's vulnerabilities and strategies at a time when cyberattacks are escalating in scale and complexity. Panelists included ICT Minister Hon Paula Ingabire (Rwanda), Mr Noordin Haji (Director General, National Intelligence Service, Kenya), Brig Gen (Rtd) MK Hadji Janev Metodi (Military Academy, Macedonia), and moderator Chukwuemeka Fred Agbata (Technology Entrepreneur). The panel examined the technological, legal, policy, and sovereignty challenges facing African nations as they try to protect their social, economic, and security
futures.

Africa stands out for its youthful, rapidly digitizing population. As Minister Ingabire noted, Rwanda's "Smart Rwanda" agenda illustrates the synergistic approach toward national transformation—embedding cyber security strategy at the core of digital development. But the panel agreed: Africa's cyber vulnerabilities are expanding alongside connectivity gains, exposing both public and private infrastructure to a diverse range of "borderless" threats, from ransomware to disinformation campaigns, and raising the stakes for regional stability.

The scale of the challenge is evidenced by Kenya's experience: between January and April of one year alone, Kenya registered over 840 million cyberattacks on both public and private infrastructure. Such numbers are harbingers of a digital domain under continuous assault, one in which threat actors—from criminal syndicates to state proxies—are both sophisticated and opportunistic, leveraging AI-driven technologies that often outpace defensive innovation and legislative response.

Paula Ingabire
Minister of Information and communications technology, Cabinet of Rwanda

Rwanda's approach, as outlined by Hon. Ingabire, demonstrates a holistic cyber defense architecture—from dedicated national cybersecurity agencies and Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs), to a coherent legal foundation for deterring and punishing

cybercrime. The interplay between technological investment, institutional capacity, and legal enforcement provides a template for other African countries seeking to operationalize cyber resilience.

Mr Noordin Haji
Director General, National Intelligence Service, Kenya

The panelists stressed the importance of robust and harmonized cyber legislation. As digital businesses scale pan-African operations, they encounter mismatched regulatory environments—a hurdle that undermines agility, compliance, and rapid defensive action. There was consensus on the value of supranational conventions, such as the African Union's Malabo Convention, as vehicles for convergence on cybersecurity, data protection, and lawful access norms across borders.

Mr Noordin Haji highlighted the importance of intelligence-led approaches, where actionable intelligence is translated into evidence and integrated into the criminal justice chain. Crucially, this means intelligence services must not only gather threats but also understand and navigate relevant legal frameworks—including ensuring due process and balancing surveillance with the protection of individual privacy.

Minister Ingabire further explained that countries are benchmarking their data protection laws on models such as the European Union's GDPR, facilitating easier cross-country data movement and compliance for startups. However, without an African-wide harmonized legal standard, fragmentation will continue to slow innovation and to leave loopholes open for malicious actors.

A focal point of the discussion was the need to cultivate multidisciplinary expertise in Africa's cyber workforce. Brig Gen Metodi warned that the dominant focus on IT skills is insufficient. Given the hybrid nature of cyber threats—incorporating technology, intelligence, policy, legal context, and international rivalry—universities must expand curricula to train professionals who understand security doctrines, risk intelligence, compliance, and cross-border legalities. This capacity-building, he suggested, is foundational to achieving strategic autonomy.

Hon. Ingabire stressed the need for local technological development, especially as foreign-developed AI models and supply chains may not reflect or serve African interests. Early adoption, paired with deliberate capacity building, fosters an ecosystem in which Africans are not merely users but creators—and can thus develop AI-driven cyber defense tools tailored to their unique threat environments.

Discussions on data sovereignty occupied much of the panel and audience. Who owns, controls, and accesses Africa's data? While some participants advocated for every African country to localize critical data, Ingabire observed that practicalities (e.g., investment, power, physical resources) prompt consideration of regional data hubs as possible solutions. Effective data infrastructure requires not only local hosting but sustainable, affordable, and reliable energy—through initiatives like the East African Power Pool, or future investments in nuclear energy.

However, Professor Metodi warned that sovereignty goes beyond data hosting: it encompasses control over digital supply chains, intelligence about technological backdoors, and the power to set—not just follow—norms about data access, privacy, and AI governance.

Both speakers and the audience highlighted the limitations of isolated national action. African nations, negotiating individually with "big tech," face disadvantageous power dynamics, as shown by cases where Facebook, Twitter, or AWS responded dismissively to African government demands. Only through collective action, harmonized regulatory standards, and pooled infrastructural investment, could the continent assert itself in the digital sovereignty debate and develop a true cyber defense posture with bargaining power.

The panel grappled with the tension between effective surveillance for preempting cyber threats and the protection of civil liberties. Kenya's layered approach—requiring warrants and oversight for surveillance, while acknowledging the practical difficulty of timely legal intervention in real-time cyberattacks—reflects the delicate balance to be struck. Both Haji and Metodi agreed that as "order and liberty" must go hand-in-hand, policymakers must better communicate the rationale for controls to the public and ensure that data-driven empowerment does not slide into unchecked state power or social destabilization.

Chukwuemeka Fred Agbata (Technology Entrepreneur and Journalist), Hon Paula Ingabire (Minister), Mr Noordin Haji (Director General, National Intelligence Service) and Brig Gen (Rtd) MK Hadji Janev Metodi (Associate Professor of Law) respectively

The panel pointed to the fast-changing threat landscape—AI-driven deepfake attacks, disinformation campaigns, criminal syndicates, and state proxies exploiting Africa's regulatory gaps. Panelists explained that not only overt cyberattacks, but also digital manipulation of political discourse and social cohesion are forms of "hybrid conflict" that can rise to the level of war, destabilize states, and challenge traditional doctrines of sovereignty and order.

Audience questions emphasized the need for data centers and AI to be not only secure but also climate-smart and energy-efficient, highlighting potential environmental pitfalls of large-scale infrastructure. The potential dangers of being too dependent on foreign-controlled platforms (like Starlink/SpaceX) or cloud environments governed by distant legal regimes were also raised as structural vulnerabilities for African countries seeking digital sovereignty.

Brig Gen (Rtd) MK Hadji Janev Metodi
Associate Professor of Law

The panelists insisted that protecting Africa's critical infrastructure in the cyber era is both a national and continental imperative. Legal, institutional, and technical capacity-building must be matched by pan-African solidarity. Early adoption of technologies, combined with efforts to harmonize laws and policies, develop AI and cybersecurity talent, and assert data sovereignty, are keys to both resilience and agency.

Chukwuemeka Fred Agbata
Technology Entrepreneur and Journalist

Fundamentally, Africans must move beyond dependency, embedding security by design and privacy by design in every phase of digital transformation, and build strategic autonomy that protects both their data and their collective futures—while communicating to their peoples that security, liberty, and development must be pursued together.

Global Media Narratives:
The Cost of Misrepresenting Africa

Ms Ebba Kalondo (Former African Union Commission spokesperson), Ms Moky Makura (Executive Director, Africa No Filter) and Ms Jackie Lumbasi (Media Personality), respectively

Media narratives shape realities. Nowhere is this more consequential or controversial than in coverage of Africa, where international and local media representations have profound implications for investment, political legitimacy, security, and African self-perception. The panel, moderated by media personality Ms Jackie Lumbasi, brought together Ms Ebba Kalondo (former African Union Commission spokesperson) and Ms Moky Makura (Executive Director, Africa No Filter) for a critical discussion on the costs of misrepresentation and the urgent need for Africans to reclaim ownership over their stories.

Moky Makura's presentation was anchored in a striking economic argument. Africa No Filter—her organization promoting narrative change—quantified the price of persistent negative media stereotypes: approximately $4.2 billion annually in excess interest payments on loans across Africa. This figure, grounded in years of research, traces how disproportionate media focus on violence, corruption, and instability in African elections (as compared to global peers) feeds into the "risk premium" charged to African sovereign debt. The underlying message: media narratives are not abstract—they tangibly raise the cost of doing business, limit investment, and slow development. Investor perceptions are shaped at least 10% by media sentiment—demonstrating that stories and headlines play a very real role in international financing.

Ms Ebba Kalondo
Former African Union Commission spokesperson

Ebba Kalondo's intervention situated the current global media landscape in its colonial and imperial origins. International agencies like Reuters and AFP were built not to serve African publics, but to advance the interests of commerce, empire, and Western statecraft through the rapid transmission of commodity prices and, later, the mediation of war and diplomacy.

This legacy is persistent: to this day, global news wires and foreign "correspondents" remain the primary source of African stories for both international and African consumption. Local African journalism often relies on these agencies for cross-border stories, leading to further entrenchment of external frames and priorities.

The legacy also lives on in access, trust, and the language of authority. Kalondo noted that foreign correspondents—historically almost exclusively non-Africans—retained access to powerful sources and credibility, while local African journalists, even seasoned ones, faced barriers to the same stories, questions, and spaces.

Both Makura and Kalondo agreed that journalism—and "news" itself—is undergoing a transformation. Objectivity and fact-centered reporting are being eroded by the rise of opinion-led, outrage-driven storytelling. Media, especially social media, now amplifies what audiences already feel, prioritizing emotion and controversy over depth and truth. The structure of the digital economy—where clicks, likes, and shares drive revenue—favors sensationalism, stereotypes, and anger.

Algorithmic mediation further complicates matters. Kalondo illustrated how platforms such as Twitter's Grok can rapidly alter digital narratives, sometimes even reflecting the biases or political interests of their owners. This is especially troubling for Africa, where only a small proportion of online content is created by Africans. According to Makura, only about 3% of Wikipedia content covers Africa; even less is written by Africans themselves. The void is filled by external voices and perspectives—meaning that artificial intelligence and global search engines reinforce, replicate, and upscale inherited stereotypes unless Africans themselves actively generate content.

A central theme of the discussion was ownership: Who owns the stories about Africa? Who controls the platforms? Who sets the linguistic and cultural boundaries of online information? Makura argued that for Africans to change the narrative, investment is critical in resilient, trusted African media brands that can compete with global behemoths like the BBC. Without this, even the best and brightest African journalists tend to be pulled in by better-resourced international agencies—further hollowing out local capacity.

Kalondo brought the conversation to another level by stressing the importance of linguistic sovereignty. As large language models (LLMs) and artificial intelligence become the arbiters of meaning online, Africans risk not only losing control of their stories but their languages themselves. The cultural, existential, and security risks are immense: if African languages and content are underrepresented in the datasets driving AI, the continent's ability to shape global narratives and ensure its digital citizenship will be fundamentally undermined.

Strikingly, the panel's research revealed how African media covering other African countries often simply aggregates and amplifies global wire content. Newspapers in Ghana discussing Nigeria (or vice versa) were found to rely overwhelmingly on Reuters, AFP, or similarly foreign-sourced material, reinforcing the narrow, crisis-centric "Africa story" for both foreign and local audiences.

This creates a negative feedback loop: external actors set the agenda, and African outlets reproduce it, either for lack of resources, access, or confidence in their own narratives.

Compounding this is the economic reality: most journalism training, content production, and research on African journalism is funded by non-African agencies. This further shapes editorial priorities, training standards, and even the self-image of African journalists, strengthening the perception that "West is best" and discouraging investment in home-grown, pan-African platforms.

The panel made clear that media narratives have implications far beyond image and reputation—they affect human security, political stability, and national sovereignty. Kalondo warned that language—amplified by media and algorithms—can build armies or incite war, as witnessed in Rwanda's own history with Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM). As young people increasingly form their identities online, the risk is that the only accessible stories are those defined by others—often portraying Africa as dependent, divided, or doomed.

Panelists also recognized change. The rise of "news content creators," YouTubers, and pan-African storytelling platforms has democratized narrative authority, empowering more young people and giving rise to stories of resilience, entrepreneurship, and hope.

Initiatives such as Africa No Filter support these new storytellers, offering resources and mentorship outside traditional newsrooms and attempting to seed the digital world with diverse, locally-generated voices.

The panelists argued that to shape the future of Africa's media and narrative, it is essential to invest in African media capacity by nurturing local brands as trusted, independent sources that can set the agenda and compete for both audiences and talent. Africans should populate the digital sphere with their own perspectives by generating and posting content that reflects the full spectrum of their realities, using multiple languages and platforms.

At the same time, claiming linguistic and AI/data sovereignty is crucial; African nations and institutions must work to ensure that their languages, idioms, and truths are embedded in the algorithms of the future by supporting initiatives to digitize, translate, and model African languages. Supporting media literacy and critical consumption is also vital, as the role of storyteller increasingly falls to every citizen; training should reflect the digital age, helping people navigate misinformation and encouraging critical engagement with content. Ultimately, building a "whole-of-society" approach to narrative is required, as changing the narrative is a shared project involving governments, civil society, security services, youth, and content creators alike—one that cannot be subcontracted or imposed from outside.

The panel powerfully illuminated how the global misrepresentation of Africa is not only a matter of image, but one of economic cost, political legitimacy, cultural sovereignty, and even security. As the digital media landscape transforms, so must Africa's strategy—toward ownership, agency, and a multiplicity of voices that tell the continent's own complex and hopeful stories. The challenge ahead demands capacity, intention, and the courage to put Africa's truths—written, spoken, and visual—back at the center of the global digital narrative.

Critical Raw Materials and Supply Chain Warfare: Africa's Role

The panel "Critical Raw Materials and Supply Chain Warfare: Africa's Role", convened some of Africa's foremost thinkers and practitioners to address one of the continent's most pressing paradoxes: the abundance of critical raw materials in Africa and the persistent socioeconomic challenges that have plagued its development trajectory. The discussion, moderated by journalist Joseph Warungu (Radio One Africa), featured Prof. Kingsley Chiedu Moghalu (Inaugural President, Africa School of Governance), Dr. Zerbo Lassina (Chairman, Rwanda Atomic Energy Board), Dr. Andrey Maslov (Director, Center for African Studies and Coordinator, e-Governance Knowledge Sharing Program, Russia), and Dr. Donald Kaberuka (Chairman and Managing Partner, SouthBridge Group), all of whom explored how Africa could seize the emerging opportunity presented by soaring global demand for critical minerals amid intensifying supply chain competition and geopolitical maneuvering.

Prof. Moghalu invoked the persistent conundrum that has faced Africa for decades: why have its natural resources not translated into broad-based prosperity, as has been the case in countries like Norway or the Gulf States? He argued that part of the answer lies in the pervasive mindset that governs resource management on the continent—one often shaped by a "gatekeeper" mentality that privileges elites and perpetuates corruption at the expense of long-term, people-centered development. Moghalu stressed the need for a fundamental mindset shift and the institutionalization of transparent governance mechanisms. Rather than fixating solely on raw material extraction, Africa must focus on beneficiation and the creation of

Prof. Kingsley Chiedu Moghalu (Inaugural President Africa School of Governance), Dr. Zerbo Lassina (Chairman, Rwanda Atomic Energy Board) and Dr. Andrey Maslov (Director, Center for African Studies and Coordinator, e-Governance Knowledge Sharing Program, Russia) respectively

economic complexity—transforming its role from a passive supplier of raw materials into an engine of value-added, competitive production.

The significance of this transformation is underscored by projections for the global minerals market over the next quarter century. Demand for nickel is expected to double, cobalt to triple, and lithium to increase tenfold with the rise of electric vehicles, battery technologies, clean energy, and digital infrastructure. The IMF estimates trillions of dollars in value will be created, yet currently, only a tiny fraction of Africa's minerals are processed on the continent. Moghalu pointed out that, if Africa can capture even a moderate share of this value through local processing and export of finished or semi-finished goods, it could reverse decades of missed opportunities that characterized Africa's experience with oil and other traditional commodities.

Dr. Zerbo Lassina expanded the debate by emphasizing the strategic—rather than purely economic—importance of critical raw materials. These materials are now foundational to national and continental security, driving not only economic growth but also technological sovereignty and defense capabilities. The COVID-19 pandemic, supply shocks, and geopolitical realignments, such as the war in Ukraine, have laid bare Africa's vulnerabilities: when global supply chains were disrupted, Africa found itself unable to rely on external partners or even its own institutions for essential goods. Lassina called for a shift from being a passive supplier to becoming a strategic actor—proactively engaging with global supply chain dynamics, building local and regional refinery capacity, and fostering education so African leaders can negotiate and manage resources on more equitable and informed terms.

Dr. Zerbo Lassina
Chairman, Rwanda Atomic Energy Board

He highlighted the necessity of local and regional collaboration, such as cross-border investments. These steps, Lassina argued, are essential for retaining value on the continent and securing true sovereignty. Stronger governance, knowledge transfer, and transparent institutions are prerequisites for Africa to escape cycles of externally dictated deals and to leverage initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area for collective bargaining and industrialization.

Dr. Andrey Maslov's intervention shifted the focus further downstream, drawing attention to rapidly evolving patterns of global demand—particularly the consumption of critical minerals by AI and digital infrastructure. He observed that current trends, such as the ever-growing energy demands of AI data centers, pose new challenges and risks. For example, Africa's energy capacity is now subject to global competition, with significant portions being diverted to power data centers and cryptocurrency mining rather than meeting local needs.

Maslov raised a critical question: is free trade always in Africa's interest, especially when global powers are racing to stockpile minerals not for immediate industrial use but to prevent adversaries from accessing them? He warned that unless energy and mineral resources are deliberately channeled towards domestic industrial and social development, Africa could find itself repeating past mistakes—extracting and exporting commodities today, only to become dependent on imports when its own industrial revolution eventually takes off.

The audience pressed on issues of ownership, global justice, and the flawed implementation of past multilateral initiatives like the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region's minerals certification system. Some questioned the premise that African states have an inalienable right to subterranean minerals predating nations themselves and challenged the panel to envision alternative models of ownership and

Dr. Andrey Maslov
Director, Center for African Studies and Coordinator, e-Governance Knowledge Sharing Program, Russia

benefit-sharing. The response from the panel, notaby Dr. Kaberuka, was pragmatic and grounded in economic history. He distinguished between "inherited wealth"—resources bestowed by geography—and "created wealth," which is generated by human innovation, good governance, and the transformation of raw materials into complex products and services. Drawing on comparative experiences, such as the rise of Norway, the Gulf States, and especially Vietnam, panelists argued that resource abundance alone is insufficient; what matters is whether Africa can build the institutions and productive capacity to convert static resource wealth into dynamic, sustainable economic gains.

Another major theme that emerged was the perennial challenge of capital. While industrialization and value addition are universally endorsed as critical goals, Africa often finds itself locked out of affordable, long-term capital due to weak financial systems, inadequate property rights, and dependence on extractive

foreign direct investment. Prof. Moghalu and Dr. Lassina advocated for better domestic resource mobilization—through effective taxation, improved public financial management, and the formation of social contracts that incentivize citizens and businesses to support development efforts. They also suggested that Africa could leverage its mineral endowments through certification and innovative financial instruments—such as tokenizing deposits to secure loans for value-adding industries and infrastructure—and demanded reform of regional development banks to make them more responsive to the sector's contemporary needs, including support for nuclear and green energy projects.

Dr. Kaberuka reinforced the point that global capital is not as scarce as often assumed; rather, the challenge is to create environments that attract investment. With savings surging in advanced economies and investors seeking returns amid low yields at home, Africa has a window of opportunity to secure the financing necessary for industrial transformation—provided it demonstrates policy stability and strategic, collaborative investments. As he noted, no country has prospered without making significant investments in infrastructure and industrial capacity, even if such investments are initially costly and controversial.

Throughout the session, the panel repeatedly returned to the necessity of strategic agency. Past reliance on external goodwill or the hope of a liberal, rules-based order consistently gave way to the imperative that Africa chart its own course, define its strategic interests, and collectively bargain to secure its future. The need for regional and continental collaboration was presented not just as an economic imperative but as a matter of survival in a world where critical resources are increasingly weaponized for geopolitical power.

In sum, the panel concluded that Africa's era of passive participation in global value chains must end if the continent is to claim its rightful place in the next industrial wave. This requires more than resource extraction; it demands value addition, regional integration, institutional innovation, and strategic governance that can both

Dr. Donald Kaberuka
Chairman and Managing Partner,
SouthBridge Group

shield Africa from predatory deals and empower its citizens for generations to come. Africa stands at a crossroads between repeating historical cycles of exploitation and seizing a new era of sovereignty and shared prosperity; the choices and collaborations forged now will determine which path it follows.

Precision Strikes in the Digital Age: Reimagining Offensive and Defensive Capabilities

The roundtable, "Precision Strikes in The Digital Age: Reimagining Offensive and Defensive Capabilities," provided a critical and timely assessment of Africa's strategic encounter with contemporary military technology. Participants from the defense, academic, and policy communities agreed that Africa's operational security landscape has become markedly more complex. The blurring lines between conventional and asymmetrical threats—including terrorism, cyberattacks, and transnational crime—demand not only technological adaptation but, crucially, a transformation in institutional frameworks, human capital, and strategic cultures.

One of the central themes was that no technology, regardless of its sophistication, can by itself ensure deterrence or operational success. Rather, security depends on how technology is integrated into strategy, doctrine, and force structure, as well as on the quality of local expertise and the flexibility of military organizations. The panel noted the rise and utility of precision weapons, drones, and network-centric systems that theoretically enable pinpoint strikes and the neutralization of adversaries with minimal collateral damage. Such innovations, however, achieve their promise only when matched by rigorous training, robust modeling and simulation, and institutional learning.

Without investment in human capital—the engineers, operators, tacticians, and analysts who convert platforms into effective military power—African militaries risk becoming mere consumers of imported gadgetry, with little capacity to shape outcomes or to adapt as technologies and threats evolve.

A recurring point in the discussion was the continent's pervasive "asymmetrical exposure." Most African nations remain dependent on foreign suppliers for strategic technology, making them vulnerable to the shifting priorities and interests of external powers. This dependency is compounded by weak local Research and Development ecosystems and an underdeveloped capacity to innovate, adapt, and maintain high-tech military systems.

The roundtable warned that sovereignty in the digital age is undermined when control over critical systems, software, and supply chains is ceded to external actors. In this setting, even the acquisition of advanced weaponry may serve more to reinforce the strategic objectives of foreign states than African security itself. Achieving a measure of autonomy requires African nations to establish indigenous research and development departments, form partnerships between military, academia, and industry, and set policy frameworks that prioritize long-term technological self-reliance over short-term procurement wins.

The operational value of digital-age weapons is fundamentally linked to the ability of states to institutionalize specialized training. The roundtable emphasized the necessity for ongoing education in targeting, weapons systems operation, cyber defense, and the coordination of joint and multi-domain operations.

Simulation and modeling were highlighted as critical enablers for translating theory into practice—allowing forces to test scenarios, adapt tactics, and rehearse operations prior to actual engagement. Such tools are not only financially prudent, but also essential for fostering a culture of lessons-learned and evidence-based doctrine. Yet, panelists cautioned that technology must be democratized beyond elite special units; for precision to be effective, tactical and strategic competence must be distributed throughout all levels of command.

Interdependence and collective action were identified as both challenges and imperatives for Africa's security future. Transboundary challenges—from cyber incursions to illicit arms flows and regional terrorist networks—cannot be adequately addressed by fragmented national approaches.

The roundtable noted, Africa's security sector has persistently failed to establish robust regional coalitions founded on solidarity, mutual interest, and trust. Divisions among states, sometimes exacerbated by cooperation with external actors at the expense of neighbors, hinder information sharing and the pooling of resources necessary to achieve scale in technology acquisition, training, and doctrine development.

To counter this, participants advocated for continent-wide or at least supranational legal and institutional standards for intelligence, procurement, training, and the management of emerging technologies. Regional centers of excellence, joint research initiatives, and harmonized legal frameworks were recommended to promote efficiency, confidence, and collective deterrence.

A related issue is the fractured nature of Africa's defense industrial and knowledge base. The roundtable lamented the rare presence—and even rarer coordination—of institutions tasked with bridging technological gaps. Often, local production and innovation are stifled by regulatory hurdles, insufficient funding, or a lack of vision, relegating Africa to the position of a market for, rather than a source of, new military technology.

The absence of indigenous nuclear deterrence capabilities was cited as a strategic vulnerability, though panelists stopped short of advocating nuclear proliferation. They instead stressed the need for broader deterrence postures, emphasizing cyber capabilities, robust intelligence, and regionally integrated command and control structures as fitting and more immediately achievable objectives.

The cost of digital security infrastructure was acknowledged as prohibitive, but roundtable members insisted that investment costs must be weighed against the value for money gained from efficient, precision-capable forces. Strategic acquisitions should be guided by careful assessment of operational needs, environmental constraints, and the potential for local adaptation and cost recovery. To ensure the greatest return on investment, intellectual collaboration among African military planners, academic researchers, and private industry was encouraged to foster the indigenous development of scalable, context-appropriate solutions.

The roundtable also recognized the importance of robust situational awareness—enabled by networked sensors, persistent surveillance, and real-time data analysis—as a core pillar of modern deterrence. Advances in digital technology permit a higher tempo of decision-making and the rapid application of force, but only when matched by well-trained personnel and resilient information systems. Because today's threats are fluid, Africa's security sector must remain adaptive, continuously assessing and updating both technologies and tactics through institutionalized feedback loops.

In summary, the session made clear that Africa must reimagine its approach to deterrence, offense, and defense in the digital age. This entails not only acquiring new hardware but, critically, developing the human capital, institutional innovation, and regional partnerships necessary to own, operate, and continuously adapt cutting-edge capabilities.

Strategic autonomy will be realized not through the passive adoption of foreign solutions, but through active collaboration, endogenous Research and Development, and a shared commitment to solidarity and knowledge exchange across the continent. Only then can Africa move from the margins to the center of military and security innovation, ensuring that its resources, talent, and strategic choices serve the interests and aspirations of its own peoples rather than those of external actors.

Countering the Growing Threats of Terrorism in Africa

The ISCA roundtable on "Countering the Growing Threats of Terrorism in Africa", brought together senior security and intelligence leaders to grapple with one of the continent's most urgent and evolving security crises.

The participants recognized the grim reality that Africa has become one of the global centers of terrorist activity, with hotspots such as the Sahel suffering a proliferation of violent groups and tactics, and with even children being actively drawn into militancy. The session examined both persistent and emerging facets of the terrorist threat, the multiplicity of factors underpinning vulnerability, and the evolving palette of responses necessary to safeguard African societies in this context.

While Rwanda, the host of the conference, was highlighted as a success story in fostering effective regional cooperation and in developing innovative, tailored responses to terrorism, the roundtable acknowledged that, continent-wide, policy responses are still catching up to the adaptive and networked nature of terrorist threats.

Terrorist actors, such as those aligned with ISIS, are often one step ahead, operating seamlessly across borders, exploiting informational, regulatory, and intelligence gaps between states, and leveraging new technologies to recruit, mobilize, and strike. Accordingly, the participants argued that African counter-terrorism (CT) efforts must move beyond state-centric, isolated responses, toward a more integrated, pan-African strategy that leverages regional cooperation, shared resources, and unified standards.

One key recommendation emerging from the roundtable was the immediate need to establish and reinforce regional and sub-regional counterterrorism cooperation. While existing platforms and arrangements have made some progress, new mechanisms and broader coordination are essential, particularly around information sharing, collective threat assessment, and the development of Africa's own sanctions list targeting both domestic and transborder terrorist groups. Recognizing that African countries have the necessary resources and tools but too often fail to share and synergize them, the panel called for a more proactive approach to cross-border intelligence sharing and joint operations.

Much of the discussion focused on the ideological drivers of terrorism and the radicalization processes that underpin recruitment and violence. The panel agreed that alongside more traditional ideological currents, new, digitally-mediated forms of radicalization are proliferating, requiring both a deepening of knowledge—through research—and a broadening of CT interventions beyond law enforcement and military solutions. This includes public awareness campaigns, emphasizing the deglamorization of terrorism through community engagement and denouncement, and empowerment of youth to resist the temptations of recruitment. The importance of involving religious leaders—both Muslim and Christian—as partners in building resilience was stressed, with examples noted of collaborations such as the training of Imams from Jordan to teach their Rwandan counterparts how to counter extremist narratives, and the successful judicial and community strategies Rwanda has used to prevent the spread of radicalization.

Another central point of debate was the technological transformation of both terrorist methods and counterterrorism measures. Terror organizations are increasingly sophisticated in their use of digital platforms, AI, and encrypted communications, demanding that African security services build regulatory, technological, and procedural frameworks for both oversight and engagement with emerging technologies.

Intelligence and security agencies must therefore embrace counterintelligence tools such as drones, cyber capabilities, AI-driven monitoring, and advanced data analytics to remain effective. However, the roundtable warned against adopting new technologies without robust regulatory frameworks, transparent procurement protocols,

and safeguards against the abuse or accidental encouragement of innovation that could be redirected towards terrorism. Only by acting collectively to harmonize regulations, monitor technological transfers, and share best practices can African states maintain an edge over rapidly mutating threat vectors.

Institutional reform emerged as another major theme, with the roundtable identifying the need for intelligence sector reform that prioritizes both community-oriented policing and the professionalism and training of personnel. Enhancing inter-agency cooperation within states—breaking down silos between intelligence, law enforcement, military, and civil society—was widely seen as a force multiplier. Training and capacity development, both within and between African states, was framed as not necessarily resource-intensive, but as requiring commitment to share experiences, lessons learned, and skill sets across borders.

Creating an effective deterrent to terrorism also demands a more profound engagement with root causes—poverty, marginalization, poor governance, and the lack of opportunity for youth. The roundtable advocated not just for military or punitive responses, but for holistic approaches including amnesty, rehabilitation, reintegration, forgiveness, and empowerment. Special attention was called for the education of minority groups, specifically the teaching of true religious doctrine as a shield against manipulation by extremists. Involving technology actors, media, and social platforms in partnership with intelligence and community leaders was recognized as crucial to countering the misuse of the digital space for radicalization and recruitment.

A further dimension explored was the need for national regulatory frameworks for emerging technologies to prevent their weaponization for terror, while not stifling beneficial innovation. Participants agreed that scrutiny in procurement, regulation, and the sharing of threat intelligence must be coordinated among states to avoid “patchwork” vulnerabilities that can be exploited by agile and borderless terror networks. Information and intelligence sharing—backed by trust, legal standards, and mutual accountability—was seen as the backbone of any successful collective CT approach.

The roundtable also reflected on the conference itself as a powerful model for African CT coordination and solidarity, lauding ISCA for bringing together a diverse set of intelligence chiefs and policy practitioners to share experiences, best practices, and actionable strategies.

In conclusion, the roundtable called for Africa to embrace a comprehensive, multi-level, and forward-looking approach to counterterrorism—one that embodies intelligence sector reform, technological readiness, inter-state collaboration, community engagement, and the strategic empowerment of vulnerable populations. Only through solidarity, mutual learning, and ownership of both the narrative and the strategic architecture of CT, can the continent catch up with, and ultimately outpace, the evolving threat posed by terrorist actors. The ISCA conference was recognized as a vital platform for sustaining this conversation, maintaining momentum, and cementing Africa's collective response to an increasingly borderless and technologically driven terrorist threat.

What is the Future of Peacekeeping Missions in Africa?

The panel, titled “What is the Future of Peacekeeping Missions in Africa?”, brought together an esteemed group of practitioners and analysts deeply familiar with the evolution and current crisis of peacekeeping on the continent. The panelists included Gen Patrick Nyamvumba, High Commissioner of Rwanda to Tanzania and a veteran peace operations leader; Dr. Philip Kasaija Apuuli, Associate Professor at Makerere University and a scholar-practitioner in African peace missions; Ms. Clotilde Mbaranga Gasarabwe, former UN Assistant Secretary General for Safety and Security and senior field leader in Mali; and H.E. Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, Board Advisor for the International Peace and Security Institute and a diplomat with broad peace operation experience across West Africa. Moderated by seasoned Journalist Joel Kibazo, the panel drew on decades of engagement with peacekeeping, grappling with issues from funding and strategy to ownership and the changing character of African conflict.

Dr. Philip Kasaija Apuuli traced the origins of peacekeeping, reminding the audience that—contrary to common perception—the term and practice are absent from the original United Nations Charter and arose as an improvised response to the Suez Crisis in 1956. Traditionally, peacekeeping operated on the principles of host nation consent, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defense. In Africa, however, the pattern has changed: not only do most

Gen Patrick Nyamvumba
High Commissioner of Rwanda to Tanzania

Gen Nyamvumba argued that, notwithstanding the great expense and length of United Nations peacekeeping missions in Africa—such as MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which had spent over $25 billion with little measurable success—the continent remained “nowhere” in terms of achieving sustainable peace. He contextualized his critique within the broader shift of global geopolitics: as external actors turn inward and prioritize their own defense and economies, African issues increasingly slip from the global agenda. Thus, there is a growing imperative for Africa to take charge of its conflicts and their resolutions, lest the continent be left, as in the colonial “scramble” of 1885, at the mercy of external interests and rivalries.

Contemporary conflicts defy the classic interstate model (they are intra-state, fragmented, and fueled by politics, economics, and even climate change), but global appetite for intervention under UN mandates is at a low ebb. Of some 75 UN peacekeeping missions since 1956, around 35 have been in Africa, with five ongoing as of 2024. Despite this heavy focus, panelists agreed that peacekeeping on the continent, both in its classical and contemporary forms, is in acute crisis—a tool deployed more as a desperate improvisation than a strategic solution, and as likely to perpetuate international presence as to resolve root causes.

Ms. Clotilde Mbaranga Gasarabwe
Former UN Assistant Secretary General for Safety and Security and Senior Field Leader in Mali

Ms. Gasarabwe, having both shaped and implemented peacekeeping policy at the UN's highest levels, used her experience to dissect the flawed logic linking mission "setting" (deployment) and "exit." The decision to deploy is nearly always political, shaped by member state appeals or Security Council resolutions, and critically dependent on international, not local, consensus. But once deployed, peacekeeping operations are too often presented as short-term fixes with clear benchmarks for exit—a pattern seldom honored in practice, especially when the root causes of crisis are left unaddressed. Gasarabwe contrasted cases like Guinea, where robust dialogue and regional support forestalled a mission, with Mali, in which peacekeeping's massive expense failed to account for context-specific drivers of extremism and collapse. In her assessment, missions work when they are explicitly temporary, when strong national ownership is present or fostered, and when peacekeeping is complemented—instead of substituted—by genuine local and regional security development.

Ambassador Ould-Abdallah, drawing on his extensive mediation experience, forcefully argued that contemporary peacekeeping faces insurmountable challenges as most African conflicts are now internal rebellions, not wars between states. The proliferation of non-state actors—tribal, ethnic, political, or transnational—renders traditional peacekeeping models ineffective. These actors are not unified, often thrive on illicit economies, and may view sustained conflict as profitable, thus resisting the very peace international missions are charged to restore. He suggested that rather than maintaining obsolete peacekeeping approaches, there is a need for adaptive models that prioritize deeper understanding of local dynamics and tailor responses accordingly.

From the panel and audience, several critical challenges and inheritances surfaced. One is the abiding problem of funding: peace operations are expensive, with missions such as MINUSMA in Mali costing upwards of a billion dollars a year, while actual "peace" remains elusive and the interests of both international donors and local populations are often misaligned.

H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, chair of ISCA's advisory council and former AU Commission Chairperson, intervened from the audience with a pointed assessment. He declared that the era of traditional peacekeeping in Africa is effectively over. Drawing on personal experience, he detailed the disconnect between field realities—in which troops are hamstrung by restrictive mandates and logistical excess—and the immense UN expenditures that deliver little progress. Faki recounted the failure to equip African regional initiatives, such as the G5 Sahel, with sufficient resources for their anti-terror operations, even as the UN system spent multiples on missions in the same geographic space. He lauded the passage of UN Resolution 2719, allowing 75% of African peacekeeping to be financed by the UN in principle, but lamented its non-implementation due to great power reluctance. According to Faki, the only path forward is for Africans themselves to lead, finance, and design the future security architecture of the continent.

In the closing round, the panelists were united in urging reforms anchored in realism and African agency.

Gen Nyamvumba pointed to the relative effectiveness of African-led interventions—bilateral arrangements like Rwanda's deployment in Mozambique and the model of lightly equipped, technologically supported, rapid reaction forces as models to be scaled up under AU endorsement. He emphasized the need to exploit innovations such as AI, drone surveillance, and early warning mechanisms to overcome the scale and unpredictability of modern threats. All future interventions, he added, must prioritize an understanding of local political and cultural contexts, which were too often neglected by rotating multinational contingents unfamiliar with the terrain and society.

Dr. Philip Kasaija Apuuli
Associate Professor at Makerere University and a Scholar-Practitioner in African Peace Missions

Dr. Apuuli advocated for a strategic shift away from reliance on international peacekeepers. He recommended institutionalizing and strengthening the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which encompasses mediation, early warning, the African Standby Force, the Panel of the Wise, and a revitalized Peace Fund.

Prevention, he argued, should be the priority, as it is both cost-effective and feasible if bolstered by timely intelligence and mediation, and less reliant on expensive foreign troop deployments. Apuuli regarded the trend toward short-term, ad hoc coalitions and support missions—rather than classic, indefinitely extended blue helmet deployments—as inevitable and potentially positive if matched by local legitimacy and robust exit strategies.

Ms. Gasarabwe and Ambassador Ould-Abdallah both underscored the urgent need to diversify funding sources. Gasarabwe called upon African billionaires and the private sector to consider security as both a public good and an investable business, especially in new technologies and the training of African personnel. She emphasized that peace operations can only be effective if matched by transparent governance, credible dialogue, and a deliberate focus on building state capacities so that temporary missions evolve toward sustainable, internal solutions. Ould-Abdallah, too, insisted that Africa must shoulder a larger share of peacekeeping costs to acquire a greater say in decision-making and to earn international respect, reminding the audience that African troops have proven their mettle in global theaters but remain underrepresented and undervalued in funding and command.

The future, the panel concluded, must be grounded in the realities of modern African conflict: internal, complex, and susceptible to exploitation by myriad actors. Peacekeeping must evolve from externally mandated, open-ended missions to African-owned frameworks that privilege prevention, local knowledge, rapid deployment, technological innovation, and diversified funding. Missions must be temporary, context-sensitive, and always designed to support rather than replace the building of sustainable national institutions. Political commitment at all levels—from African governments, the AU, private sector, and international partners alike—will be decisive in creating a peace and security architecture that is adaptive, legitimate, and ultimately successful in meeting Africa's manifold security challenges.

Joel Kibazo , Gen Patrick Nyamvumba, Dr. Philip Kasaija Apuuli and Ms. Clotilde Mbaranga Gasarabwe respectively

Building Trust for Intra-African Investment

The panel on "Building Trust for Intra-African Investment" gathered leading voices to probe one of the continent's most urgent challenges and opportunities: how to foster a climate of trust to accelerate investment and economic integration among African states and peoples. Moderated by Ms. Fatmata Lovetta Sesay, Resident Representative of UNDP Rwanda, and featuring Prof. Atif Mian, Professor of Economics at Princeton University, and Mr. Jean Guy Afrika, CEO of the Rwanda Development Board, the session delved into the structural, institutional, and cultural dimensions of investment, trust, and sustainable prosperity for Africa's rapidly expanding youth population.

Mr. Jean Guy Afrika
CEO of the Rwanda Development Board

Prof. Atif Mian
Professor of Economics at Princeton University

The discussion opened with a recognition of Africa's current demographic and economic reality, where a youth bulge—60% of the continent's population is under 25—presents both extraordinary promise and risk. With only a quarter of the new entrants to the workforce each year able to find employment, and the majority of jobs arising in the informal sector, panelists acknowledged that responsible intra-African investment is not simply a matter of economic opportunity, but a vital pathway to social stability and peace. If unaddressed, high youth unemployment and underemployment are likely to undermine trust in institutions, foster fragility, and create the conditions for extremism. Conversely, successful intra-African investment could serve as a powerful engine for inclusive growth and resilience.

Reflecting on Africa's historical moment, Ms. Sesay emphasized the challenge of sequencing: does investment build trust, or does trust attract investment? She noted that, in practice, the relationship is dynamic and iterative; effective investment helps to deepen trust, while trust itself is a crucial prerequisite for attracting the sort of long-term capital and partnership that underpins sustainable growth. Turning the focus to the informal sector—which accounts for as much as 85% of Africa's employment—the panel confronted the need to reimagine the mechanics and outcomes of investment. Prof. Mian argued that, while informality has long been a feature of developing economies, a core strategy must be to expand the incentives for participation in the formal sector, not by force, but through reforms and services that make formality attractive: systems that enable talent, entrepreneurship, and capital to flourish in regulated, transparent, and growth-oriented environments. Formalization, he suggested, is not merely about revenue for the state, but is intimately linked to the growth of trust—that is, when entrepreneurial activity is transparent and thus visible to lenders, investors, and officials, it becomes possible to build reputational capital and unlock further opportunities for growth.

Mr. Afrika highlighted the need to ground policy on accurate data and nuanced understanding. The informal sector, he noted, is not homogenous: it includes survivalist entrepreneurs and illegitimate actors alike. Governments must invest in modern statistical and data capabilities to distinguish between these groups, to profile and support genuine micro-entrepreneurs, and to create entry points for formalization while tackling illicit activities within proper legal frameworks. Regional examples, such as the introduction of simplified trading regimes for small-scale cross-border traders in East Africa, show how regulatory innovation and targeted reforms can facilitate gradual integration of the informal into the broader economic system, all while offering protection and empowerment rather than imposing punitive measures.

The panel recognized that digital infrastructure—most visibly, mobile money platforms—has dramatically shifted the landscape for informal trade, financial inclusion, and transparency. Africa's experience with mobile money demonstrates how technology can begin to draw informal actors into more formalized relationships, create valuable data, and catalyze new business models without initially incurring the bureaucratic burdens of "full" formalization. However, the panelists also recognized that mobile transactions are often taxed at the telco level and need more deliberate integration into national economic strategies to maximize developmental impacts.

Moving to the macro-level, the session considered why intra-African trade and investment remain limited despite regional ambitions such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Prof. Mian explained that the so-called "gravity model" of trade, in which proximity and economic size drive cross-border exchange, predicts that African intra-trade should be far higher than observed. The persistent underperformance, he argued, results from a combination of tariff and non-tariff barriers, fragmented regulatory environments, weak infrastructure, disparate legal regimes, and, crucially, monetary and macroeconomic fragmentation. He argued that existing currency unions in Africa, especially those tied to Europe, often undermine macroeconomic sovereignty, exposing countries to external shocks and hampering their ability to anchor inflation and policy credibility. The solution, he suggested, lies in building strong, trustworthy central banks, giving them the independence and legitimacy to manage inflation expectations—a critical precondition for long-term investment and trust in the economic environment. Investor confidence is intertwined with macroeconomic stability: credible fiscal and monetary institutions signal that Africa's investment landscape is both stable and future-oriented.

Mr. Afrika elaborated on the transformative potential of successful intra-African investment. Beyond raising productivity and incomes, he stressed that deeper regional value chains, shared infrastructure (such as rail, energy, or digital networks), and harmonized regulatory frameworks can foster mutual dependencies that increase the opportunity cost of conflict and dramatically lower the risks associated with cross-border economic activity.

Drawing lessons from the European Union's formation, he emphasized that material interdependence—whether in coal and steel or modern equivalents—can reshape the calculus of political and economic leaders, creating incentives for peace and stability. He also noted that the African Union's strategy of using regional economic communities (RECs) as building blocks for continental integration is pragmatic, given the vast geographic, legal, and infrastructural diversity of the continent. Realistically, regional integration serves as a preparatory stage for continental

integration, allowing countries and businesses to develop trust, shared systems, and regulatory habits in manageable increments before scaling up to an Africa-wide

Audience interventions deepened the conversation, challenging panelists to connect theory with concrete realities such as the impact of mobile money on formalization, the informal sector's pivotal role in women and youth employment, the demonstration effects of public infrastructure projects, and the trade-offs between national sovereignty and regional integration.

Practical examples, such as road infrastructure catalyzing local trade and reducing criminal activity, illustrated the catalytic—and trust-building—effect of visible public investment. Other interventions pointed to the need for further regulatory harmonization, administrative capacity in public institutions, and a deliberate policy of facilitating people-to-people ties that would transcend artificial colonial borders and entrenched nationalist habits.

On the question of integration, both panelists cautioned against false dichotomies. Africa's path to economic unity is necessarily incremental, rooted in strong RECs that serve as platforms for pan-African strategies. Success stories in Botswana and Rwanda indicate that size is less important than regulatory quality, policy coherence, rule of law, and an investment-friendly business climate. The Rwanda Development Board's "one-stop shop" for investors, with integrated agency services, has been particularly effective in building a predictable, trustworthy environment and making Rwanda a regional hub for both domestic and inbound investment.

In concluding reflections, Prof. Mian urged that trust and true integration cannot be engineered solely by elites or through formal economic arrangements, but require forging genuine connections between Africa's peoples. He advocated for policies that increase cross-border educational exchanges, facilitate student mobility, and foster pan-African social networks that can sustain the long-term cultural and relational fabric on which trust and economic resilience ultimately rest.

The panel made clear that building trust for intra-African investment is a multi-dimensional endeavor, requiring reforms in formalization, data, digitalization, institutional quality, and regional coordination, as well as bolder efforts to build a pan-African narrative of solidarity and common purpose. Above all, the empowerment of Africa's young and dynamic population is central, not as an afterthought or charity, but as a necessary driver of investment, innovation, and the continent's ability to thrive in a complex global economy. Initiatives such as the UNDP's Timbuktu innovation hubs exemplify the energy, vision, and inclusive approaches necessary to anchor trust, investment, and sustainable transformation in Africa's next chapter.

Borderlands in Crisis: Security, Identity, and Marginalisation in Africa

Dr. Wafula Okumu (Executive Director of the Borders Institute), Dr. Bojana Coulibaly (Scholar of Conflict Discourse) and H.E. Adama Dieng (Former UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide)

The panel discussion titled "Borderlands in Crisis: Security, Identity, and Marginalisation in Africa," offered a deep and multidimensional exploration into the layered realities of African borderlands and the urgent need for rethinking narratives, policy frameworks, and sites of agency. Moderated by Sylvanus Wekesa of King's College London and featuring Dr. Wafula Okumu, Executive Director of the Borders Institute; H.E. Adama Dieng, former UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide; Dr. Bojana Coulibaly, a scholar of conflict discourse; and Andrew Mwenda, founder of The Independent, the panel brought together experiential knowledge, institutional insights, and historical reflection to probe the structural and everyday crises embedded in Africa's borderlands.

The discussion opened by reviewing the evolution of Africa's borders from the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, through the messy completion of boundary demarcation by the 1920s, and into the post-colonial era where the peripheries of the state carried layers of contestation, fluid identities, and insecurity.

Dr. Okumu argued that African borders—often misunderstood as static, linear demarcations—embody complex histories and shifting narratives, with each segment reflecting a unique mix of social, ecological, and historical forces. The arbitrary and shifting nature of these colonial boundaries, he asserted, continues to generate far-reaching consequences for migration, integration, and, most acutely, security. Indeed, the lack of reliable African-generated data on borderland movement and the

excessive reliance on European paradigms not only hinders African agency but has enabled African migration to be "weaponized" in contemporary European politics. Okumu cautioned against the uncritical adoption of foreign vocabularies and conceptual confusion—terms like "intangible borders," "ungoverned spaces," and "security zones"—which, he argued, produce both analytical paralysis and policy disempowerment. He highlighted the persistent failure to "Africanize" either the legal management or the imaginative register of boundaries, noting that, six decades post-independence, many boundaries retain the Euro-colonial meanings for which they were originally designed.

Building on this, Dr. Coulibaly examined how externally imposed borders have catalyzed the fabrication and weaponization of ethnic identities, producing regional fascisms and cycles of marginalization and violence. The legacy of colonial manipulation, she noted, is not just a series of technical

H.E. Adama Dieng

cartographic problems but a set of exclusionary narratives that strip communities of belonging and foster nativist antagonisms. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for instance, Tutsi communities have been forced into the impossible position of being "forever foreign," perpetuating exclusion, forced displacement, and intractable violence. This situation becomes more complicated when international actors—whether through peacekeeping missions, humanitarian interventions, or the political economy of refugee crises—reinforce local power dynamics in ways that obscure root causes. Coulibaly stressed that the shifting of narrative roles, such that victims are named perpetrators and local solutions are delegitimized, is a central driver of conflict and inertia. The core, she argued, is the lack of African ownership in framing and addressing such problems, necessitating a deliberate taking-back of discourse and agency.

H.E. Adama Dieng provided a sobering analysis of the feedback loops among insecurity, identity crises, and marginalisation in African borderlands. He highlighted that security is not a discrete technical challenge but is fundamentally intertwined with social recognition, access to resources, and legitimacy. Marginalization of ethnic minorities and borderland populations—often deprived of education, infrastructure, and healthcare—creates the conditions for identity-based conflict and fuels instability far beyond the margins themselves. Dieng called for precisely the kind of holistic and courageous

rethinking that had shaped the ISCA conference: one capable of revisiting not just boundaries but also the paradigms of national sovereignty, identity, and the meaning of security itself. He lamented that, while Africa is often described as "the richest continent," political fragmentation and elite indifference perpetuate division and immobilism. For Dieng, integration projects risk failure if they overlook the lived experiences and aspirations of marginalized communities in border zones.

Andrew Mwenda
Founder of The Independent

Andrew Mwenda advanced the discussion by challenging the idea that African borders are simply artificial in the same sense as other borders worldwide. Unlike Europe or Asia, he argued, Africa's borders lack the legitimizing history of wars, negotiations, and state-formation from the inside out. Instead, they remain foreign constructs, maintained by international law rather than organic social contracts. Africa's states, he noted, did not arise from internal bargains or shared military struggle; as a consequence, the institutions of governance, law, and sovereignty themselves often feel extraneous, suspended above society and unmoored from the aspirations or consent of populations. The crisis of legitimacy, for Mwenda, is thus not just about boundaries on a map, but about the ontological question of statehood—whose interests are served, whose voices are heard, and who gets to define the national "we." Echoing the critique of ideological hegemony, Mwenda observed that African leadership, law, governance models, and even the language of rights and development remain captive to imported ideas, inhibiting genuine endogenous political and social evolution.

In their interaction with audience questions and further interventions, the panelists identified multiple obstacles and opportunities. On the institutional front, Dr. Okumu detailed both the promise and frustration of the African Union Border Programme, which aspired to transform borders from "barriers to bridges" by demarcating and rationalizing boundaries, promoting cross-border cooperation, and serving African, not external, agendas. While progress was made, especially through the drafting of the AU convention on cross-border cooperation, political commitment waned, and foreign partners stepped in to fill the gap, further distancing African ownership from African realities. Okumu lamented that not only do African states rely on outsiders for re-demarcation and management of boundaries, but, in many cases, AU

conventions remain unratified and unfunded, rendering institutional frameworks ineffective.

When considering solutions, Coulibaly, Dieng, and Okumu agreed that real progress lies in ownership—of narratives, of problems, and of solutions. Reconceptualizing identity from a fixed or ethnicized marker to a more fluid and inclusive register, as postulated for pan-Africanism and Ubuntu, offers a basis for reframing citizenship and belonging. Language remains a powerful tool: the revalorization of indigenous languages like Swahili, Fulani, and Wolof, alongside efforts to reform the role of colonial languages in education and governance, was presented as both a practical and symbolic step toward decolonizing African minds and institutions. Leadership, many panelists agreed, is critical. Political elites and intellectuals must avoid the temptation to instrumentalize ethnic or borderland identities for short-term gain and should instead cultivate inclusive national narratives, encourage participatory approaches to policy, and be willing to rethink boundaries when justified by population realities and aspirations.

Audience interventions highlighted the ongoing struggle for legitimacy and the challenge of building a sense of statehood and citizenship in territories and communities that have long experienced exclusion, suspicion, or outright violence from the state. The call for a shift from sovereignty imposed from above to sovereignty experienced and constructed from below resonated strongly, as did suggestions to leverage new technological and educational infrastructures to overcome practical impediments to mobility, integration, and local economic development.

In concluding remarks, the panel called for several concrete steps: an urgent restoration of the AU Border Programme within AU structures, expedited ratification and implementation of the cross-border cooperation convention, regular ministerial meetings to drive continental ownership, and a deliberate Africanization of border management protocols and narratives. They urged scholars, practitioners, and policymakers alike to engage in critical self-reflection, abandon self-disempowering paradigms, and cultivate an ethos of innovation, mutual respect, and pan-African solidarity. The capacity for peaceful boundary adjustment, regional economic partnerships, and flexible integration models—when led by Africans for Africans—was presented as not only possible but historically necessary. Above all, panelists insisted that Africa's borderlands, far from being spaces of perpetual crisis and marginalisation, offer rich laboratories for reimagining the future of the continent—a future founded on dignity, mutual recognition, and collective sovereignty.

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