

## **MASS MEDIA AND THE MEDIATION ACTIVITIES OF UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION**

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### **Abstract**

*The study examines the roles of Mass Media in the mediation activities of United Nations Organisation. It is important to note that the UN has contributed immensely to preventing war, maintaining global peace and security employing mediation as a strategy to prevent conflicts throughout the world. The paper relied on secondary sources – related literature, journals, Newspapers, Magazines, electronic media networks and other desk study. It however, uses Galtung model of conflict and the Agenda- Setting Theory of the media. While the Galtung theory examines causes for asymmetric and symmetric conflict and the likely mediation approach, the agenda – setting theory emphasize on the sensitizing the authority on the outbreak of impactful event like conflict, epidemics and any event that may have some catastrophic effects on the State. The paper found that conflict will breakout in any society where there is imbalance in resources allocation, political marginalization, ethnic chauvinism, religious bigotry and insecurity. It also found that the UN has been involved in all of the above named conflict across the world.*

### **Methodology**

The study utilizes only the secondary source, that is , the use of relevant literature, Newspapers, Magazines, Journals and other desk study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Galtung model was propounded in the 1960s by Galtung, one of the founding fathers in the field of conflict resolution. The Galtung model is an all inclusive model that comprises asymmetric and symmetric conflicts. Galtung view conflict as a triangle of events he named as (C) Contradiction which is on top of the triangle, (A) Attitude, (B) Behavior at the bottom of the triangle; (Ramsbotham O, Woodhouse T and Miall H:2011:10). Contradiction (C) is the existing

conflict causal situation which is either alleged (imagined) or genuine (authentic) “incompatibility of goals” that exists between the conflictants which is caused by what Chris Mitchell refers to as “mismatch” between social values and social Structures” Ramsbotham et al:10. The contradiction in an asymmetric conflict is defined by the conflictants, their relationship and all the elements of the conflict of interests active in the relationship. Attitude on the other hand encompasses the way conflictants perceived or misperceived each other and themselves. This perception may be positive or negative, most often its negative in violent conflicts. Attitude also involves cognitive, emotive, and conative elements, Ramsbotham O (2011:10). The 3<sup>rd</sup> component of the triangle is the behavior which is the B part of the triangle. This is dual dimensional as “it can involve cooperation and coercion gestures which can signify conciliation or hostility” Ramsbotham et al 2011:11.

The assumption of this model is that conflict occurs as a result of festering contradictions in the society. Whether this contradictions boil down to violent conflict is predicate on the attitude of the aggrieved that see themselves as victims, the oppressed, and those who are not willing to change the status quo.

Another related theory to this study is the media Agenda – Setting Theory which proposes that the facts which people know about public issues tend to be those which the mass media presents to them .Also, the significance which they ascribe to the same issue tend to be proportionate to the amount of the attention given to the same issue in the media. The theory that was propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald, L. Shaw in 1972 and 1973 respectively assumed that the media sets the agenda for our general discussion. The media may not always determine what we think but what we think about. Though, we have a right to think what we want to think but surprisingly, we tend to think most of those things the media highlight as important. The Theorists underscored the following as responsible for agenda-Setting: the number of times an issue is reported, using headline and picture display strategies to play up a report in the media, reports that give room for ‘points and counter points’.

In a nutshell, the activities of the media usually propel the relevant authorities to action on important issues particularly those related to mediation or conflict resolution. This means that the media are the informant that sensitizes the mediators to carry out the mediation assignment through the incessant media reportage of a particular conflict issues. This indicate that the media principally set the agenda for the people in authority and also strife to do follow- up or monitor their activities until an appropriate peaceful resolution is carried out.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Today, the world is bedeviled by multi-furious, multifaceted and endemic conflicts. Globally many states are at war. As against norms in the past, when states engaged in wars with each other, today’s wars are fought by stateless asymmetric forces some engaged in bloody internal conflicts and religious internecine struggles.

The world is marginalized, into the poor who are have-nots and the rich who have it all. Consequently there exists ruthless and violent struggle between the poor locals and the elites; especially when the poor challenge the oppressive elites and the former wants to maintain the status-quo of oppressions. Also, industrial technologies and scientific breakthrough easily led to industrialization and its antecedent uncertainty, displacement, skewed distribution of the natural resources and potential catastrophe. Calamities threatening world population and environment otherwise affected the normative goals of economic growth.

As consequences of war, famine, disease, disasters and hunger continued to hunt the globe. Victims of various conflicts; mostly women and children are sentenced to early graves. On the other hand, political parties, politicians continued to jostle to compete (unfairly) and struggle to perpetuate themselves to power disregarding growing disillusionment of their electorates. As a result of the growing disenchantments with the system, the electorate and the poor masses seek alternative solution in form of religious extremism and other form of violence to seek redress. An example of these is the al-Qaida and its various franchises, Boko Haram in Nigeria, Al-shabaab in Sudan, Tamil Tigers- Srilanka, and Taliban etc. These religious nationalists brew religious terrorism.

It was on the aforementioned premise, and in fulfilling one of its cardinal principles of ensuring world peace and security that the United Nations (U.N), the strongest INGO in the world leads the way in war against global terror, and supporting conflict resolution and peace building among world nations. Therefore, whether pursued strategically, through various government interests or through diplomacy by diffuse cultural identities, the United Nations has become a formidable force and inimitable player in mediation, reconciliation and peace-building. Shatima Umar (2010): *Essential Dynamics of International Relations*, Prince-hall.

### **Concept of Conflict**

Conflict is a complex phenomena and it is as old as human existence. It is evidenced that conflict can have a positive or negative effect to the society. Lewis A. Coser (1956), in his book titled *The Function of Social* says that “realistic conflicts arise from frustration of specific demands... and ... are directed at presumed frustrating object” (1956: 49). In his analysis of the 1965 Watts’s Los Angeles riot, Coser further shed some light on conflict “...was (Watts’s riot) an effort of an active minority...to announce their unwillingness to Continue accepting indignity and they were communicating their desperation through violent acts since no other channel seemed open to them”1967: 106.

From the above it is deducible that conflict and the preceding violence that emanate derives from the feelings of helplessness for not being accepted in the society, feeling of being discriminated against and having ones or group of people’s dignity strip away, denial of inclusion in political power and economic calculation. Thus violence in form of riots, looting, killing, destruction of properties is a reaction to the pent up frustration and siege mentality and is geared towards those who have been perceived to have treated the group, community or member of another community in disdainful way.

The realistic proposition is that regardless of the complexity of conflict, it is agreeable among academics that conflicts are re-solvable. If this assertion is true, then the begging question therefore is why is the world replete with various forms of conflicts? Why are people not able to resolve their conflict? The simple or not so simple answer to this question is that even the most aggrieved conflictants or actor in conflicts, whether winner or the vanquished will usually find that they need negotiation. Even where the conflict has degenerated into open war between states or intra state, or between communities with its corresponding destruction, and mayhem, there is always the need for different path for conflict.

As complex as conflict is so are opinions on the inevitability of conflict, violence, and war. Proffering solutions to violent conflicts and war are often difficult. This elusiveness is not unconnected with political interest groups, violent or war profiteers and outright lack of imagination on the part of the conflictants. Some school of thought are of the opinion that violence and wars are desirable and as matter of fact necessary for development, though this school of thought may be

justified as evidenced in situations of unbearable and threat to existence such as ethnic cleansing; however the negative effect of violence and war both in human and material tolls overshadows and negates any gains and does not justify war.

This takes our focus back to the assertion above that conflicts are solvable. Because once conflicts devolve into a war, the only option left open is to resolve it.

### **Origin of Conflict**

The origin of conflict has been well researched, well analyzed and well documented by scholars, and statesmen alike. Leading scholars in the area of western tradition of conflict analyses include Nicolo Machiavelli, and Clausewitz. While Adams Smith and Karl Max analyzed conflict through the prism of competition and dialectic materialism and class analysis. In Asia, sun Tzu and Kautilya have analyzed conflict from classical perspectives. One need to say that conflict transcends economic, class analysis and military strategic approach.

Rather than rely on esoteric theoretical analysis of conflict, a more practical approach posits that conflict is practical. It is an action or behavior (Wallensteen Peter: Understanding Conflict Resolution pg.15). What Wallensteen is saying here is that for a conflict to exist there has to be motivation for conflict. So whether it is industrial actions by the labor union, or war between two states, conflict must exist. However, more than being a behavior, conflict arises as a result of incompatibility of the conflictants. And until the incompatible motivating factor is (are) eliminated conflict may simmer thus giving rise to an atmosphere of negative peace or peace of the grave yard.

A closer perception of conflict is found in Wallensteen analysis that ... deeper understanding of what a conflict is ... contains in a severe disagreement between at least two sides, where their demands cannot be met by the same resources at the same time” Wallensteen 2003: 15. Amplifying further, Wallensteen suggest further that once the parties “adjust their demands so that there is no longer scarcity, the conflict disappears” .

Combining all the various variables of conflict together give us lucid, detail and in-depth definition of conflict as “... a social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resource” Wallensteen 2003: 16 .

### **Mediation**

Historically mediation is an important way of resolving conflict, whether local, interstate, intra state or internal conflicts. Simply defined, mediation is the involvement of an impartial third party in the resolution of a conflict, using central figures such as external agencies, institutions and States in the process. Scholars of conflict resolution have identified two types of mediation namely; Track-1 and track- II. Track-1 mediation involve states and state actors, while track-II involves non-State actors such as the international non-government organizations like the UNO, AU, ECOWAS, European Union, etc and private individuals.

Conflict is dynamics and unpredictable whether local and international, parties in conflicts also exhibits lots of distrust, intolerable animosity thus making the process of establishing the frame work of conflict resolution between the conflictants arduous and impossible. This necessitates the involvement of an impartial 3<sup>rd</sup> party to kick-start conflict resolution process. In what is known as the “provision of good offices”; the mediator provides an enabling environment for the conflictants to resolve the conflicts on their own as the facilitator steps aside. Though, always close-by to monitor the progress of mediation, a mediator may not hesitate to step into the fray to become a negotiator if the condition warrants and provision of good offices become inadequate.

Many conflicts have been resolve through recommendations made by a commissions instituted by the international organizations. Where the recommendations are not binding, it is

known as Conciliation while it is known as Arbitration where the decisions are binding; an example is the ICJ in Hague whose arbitration panel decision is deemed binding.

In contemporary conflict resolution, mediation have become important to the prevention and termination of violent conflict and wars since the 20<sup>th</sup> century and myriad international non-government organization especially the UNO have relied on this for the resolve of conflicts worldwide.

Another significant mechanism of mediation process utilize by the UN is the preventative diplomacy. This means applying diplomatic steps to avert disputes from being metamorphosed into serious conflicts. It is the deployment of diplomatic envoys to trouble areas to facilitate dialogue, compromise and ensure peace where tensions are heightened. For instance, African union (AU) adopted this process in June 2011 after the 2005 UN world summit to douse political and security tension pervading the member countries. The UN secretary-general usually use his amiable office along with diplomatic envoys dispatched to tension areas to avert the spread of hostilities. In a nutshell, preventive diplomacy's functions are within the axis of peace keeping missions.

### **EVOLUTION OF UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION**

The failure of the League of Nations which was formed in 1919 gave birth to the United Nations Organization in 1945 after the Second World War. The nations that participated in the war having experienced the hardship of war, resolved to ensure that world disputes would never be solved through arms, the League of Nations which was established in 1919 had its headquarters in Geneva and its cardinal goal was to promote international co-operation, peace and security. The founders believed that the League can achieve these by settling disputes among member nations instead of resorting to war. However, the failure of the League of Nations to prevent wars led to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. By the time the war came to an end in 1945, world leaders have become more than ever before desirous to maintain world peace. This led to the formation of the United Nations Organization to replace the moribund League of Nations.

The United Nations charter was prepared under the auspices of powerful Allied powers; the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), Soviet Union and France at a conference held at Dumbarton Oaks near Washington DC in 1944. At the meeting of the representatives of fifty nations called in San Francisco in the United States of America from April 28 to June 26, 1945, the draft charter was modified, representatives finally signed the Charter which gave birth to the United Nations Organisation. Poland became the 51<sup>st</sup> member in October that year when the organization formally came into force. Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia and South Africa are four African countries that were among the signatories. Membership of the United Nations Organization is open to all peace loving nations. With the admission of Eritrea in 1993 and the re-admission of South Africa in 1994, membership of the organization rose to 184. Nigeria was admitted into the United Nations Organization as the 99th member.

The goals of the organization among others include the following: to ensure collective security of all members, promoting human rights, providing for humanitarian needs of victims of natural and "un-natural" disasters such as wars, terrorism etc, others are to maintain world peace through the platform of mediation and dialogue, respect for international law, economic development. The organization is bankrolled by member states through voluntary contributions.

The UN has attracted lots of criticism and controversy since its inception from Historian, international affairs scholars and diplomats who held that the organization is a conduit to float a unipolar power. This opinion was more trident coming from the ex-France president, Charles De

Gaulle who declared the body as a “contraption” and never believes in its ideals of maintaining world peace.

The question of the UN as an independent and legitimacy came to an abrupt end when the international court of justice declares:

*“that the organization is an international person, that it is not the same as saying that it is a state which it certainly is not, or that it’s personality and duties are the same as those of a state. What it does mean is that it is a subject of international law, capable of possessing international rights by bringing international claims. The international legitimacy of the UN is evident in its organs which is an embodiment of world politicians, diplomats, military and academic intelligentsia.*

The UN operates through the main organs:

- i. The general assembly
- ii. The security council
- iii. The secretaries
- iv. The trusteeship council
- v. The international court of justice
- vi. The economic and social council

### **United Nations Mediation Activities: An Excursion of Achievements**

The UN is saddled with mediation in international conflicts when a negotiation among the parties in conflict has broken down.

Mediation is pronounced by the court in Hague, today mediation has come to be an imperative to alternative “adjudication and arbitration” in the legal systems.

Typical examples of where mediation successful in fostering peaceful co-existence among conflicting nations is as follows:

One of the most outstanding mediation activities of the UN was the dispute over the Zambezi River that revolves around the question of absolute control of the Zambezi resources among the contesting nations. These nations were able to reach a consensus of jointly managing the resources owing to the United Nations initiated mediation process. The United Nations subtly used the Vatican who played the mediating role and used its tenets of government to influence the agitators and achieve the peaceful agreement.

Another famous mediation feat of the United Nations is the intervention in the dispute between India and Pakistan on the partition of the Indus River in 1947. This incident would have spiraled to total war between the two nations, but for the timely intervention of the Organization which mandated the World Bank in 1952 to act as mediator with the mandate to appeal to the parties. The UN Mediator was able to facilitate negotiation between India and Pakistan over the allocation of water. Thus were able to settle the conflict.

Also, through mediation, the United Nations in collaboration with the Sudan stakeholders were able to coordinate and ensure the successful holding of the independence referendum for southern Sudan in January, 2011. Also, in Guinea, the United Nations West African command worked assiduously and tirelessly to wrest power from the junta and install democratic system of government. Furthermore, the United Nations integrated peace building office (UNIPSL) in 2009 briskly averted the escalation of potential violence due to skirmishes between the governing and opposition parties.

Envoy to the democratic republic of Congo in autumn 2008 in no small measure put a stop to uprisings and tensions between Rwanda and DRC that might juxtaposed to fresh regional blood bath.

Moreover, the United Nations Centre for Preventative Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) in conjunction with major governments and regional organizations i.e. the OSCE parleyed to put an end to 2010 inter-ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan and also persuaded them through mediation to step back to constitutional order. UN also ensured peaceful agreement on water resources in the region.

In Iraq, the United Nations political mission (IDNAM) architected peaceful negotiation over Kirkuk and other conflicted internal territories. The UN as well accelerated the elections process in 2009 to 2010.

### **CRITICAL LOOK AT THE UNITED NATIONS MEDIATIONS STRENGTH ON ALMOST AT A WAR LEVEL NATIONS**

The conflict in Northern Ireland between the Catholic and protestant communities which started from the late 1960s through 1990s virtually seems to defile all possible mediating actions until the end of the 1990s. The hostilities which sacrificed over 3,500 people killed in cold blood, had most of the victims as civilians. Fierce and intractable violence attacks and clashes involving security agents and paramilitaries escalated the conflict and hostilities because of the restriction in 2007 which certain political players who had been banished because of their roles over the years in political upheaval. It was as a result of the UN mediation efforts and its outcomes in terms of resolution and reconciliation that predicated the British monarch, Queen Elizabeth II to make her first visit to Dublin that year.

The intervening visit of the Queen had an insurmountable symbolic impact on the nation and people at large. The visit heralded the end of the Northern Ireland peace process and also put an abrupt end to over 800 years of hullabalos between the Great Britain and Ireland.

Despite this move, there were uproars and unrests on various street of Belfast one month later.

However, the handshake of the Queen held with the Ireland president during this visit for the first time in the history of Ireland. Since then, the peace process had been swinging forward and backward. The lessons to be learnt in this case are that in conflict of that magnitude with serious factors of culture and identity, it is usually problematic to resolve.

“there is no one size fit-all approach to what are in effect, difficult problems based on long standing mistrust and deep seated differences which can be based on ethnic and territorial rivalry (Cyprus), religious division (Northern Ireland), or national aspirations (Basque Region)”

Based on the above premise of Yona Shamir and Ran Kutner in their book entitled “The alternative Disputes Approaches”, the mentioned are the factors behind the several failures of the United Nations Organisation mediation team in the conflict, also the inability of the mediator to really identify the pre-conditions necessarily pertaining to each issue before the commencement of the dialogue. Moreover, the ignorance to enshrine the principles on which the peace process can be developed. This is because without well defined pre-conditions for any conflict settlement that will not in several cases be enough common ground to facilitate progress in total settlement.

In a bid to settle the conflict, a principle of “party of esteem” was introduced and established which enables each side to recognize that their opponents have a legitimate right and equal status in the dialogue; moreover there is a significant abode for trust and confidence on the part of the mediators. So, when the rioters have got to the zenith of their agitations and they can see the ugly prospect of

continued conflicts as too distressing, having badly exhausted their hard earned resources in vain, it appears to the erring factions that the status –quo is not a tenable option.

It was on this note, however, that John mayor and Tony Blair, the then Prime Ministers agreed that the most paramount pre- conditions was that of a “cease fire” to promote peace.

However, the United Nation mediation actions played an insurmountable role in facilitating dialogue for political agreement that later resulted to the Good Friday agreement of 1998 which pulled together all the political rivals in a pact for sustainable peaceful relations between the Britain and Ireland till date.

The 10 days war between Israel and Palestine of recent which made the European leaders advocated for cease fire. The prompt intervention of the UN and the USA secretary of state, Hilary Clinton who insisted that the Israel government should stop the booming of guns. The then president of USA, Jimmy Carter applied the same approach when he mediated in the Camp David accords. He later promised the US assistant and reward if agreed with the peaceful proposals. Lindblom, A ;( 2005): Non- Governmental organisations in international law.

Before the intensification of Syria war, UN implemented mediation processes by sending both the present and past secretary-General to the Syrian president for dialogue and appealed to senior government officials and rebel groups to embrace truce proposals. On October 24, 2012, 15 nations council unanimously called on all parties to plan towards a “sustainable cessation of all violence”. Regrettably, the efforts were unproductive due to the activities of the allies who had strongly interfered into the conflict for selfish economy gains. Russian and China were behind the Syrian leader, Al Assad while the USA was behind the rebels. Today, Syrian hostility still rears its gory head across the globe.

There are other mediation achievements of UN such as annexation of Kuwait by Iraq was quickly contained by the major powers by collectively expelling Iraq from Kuwait. The case involving Libya and Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon were also legally settled through the adjudication of the world court in Hague. Also, in the area of peace keeping, the United Nations has been sending peace keeping force in areas of conflict worldwide for example Somalia, Yugoslavia, Lebanon, Bosnia, Liberia, Sierra lone, to mention but a few.

### **The UN and the Media**

There is a symbiotic link between communication and development. A society is an admixture of elements that works together like a complex machine. This machine is lubricated by series of processes. Part of the process is the media. The interdependent nature of the elements and the interactions of the processes in a system constitute the dynamism of society. Various institutions are connected to form a system which in what is known as the society. Again one of such institutions is the mass media.

In every society, the mass media performs exclusive responsibilities and roles that make it almost indispensable. While it would be difficult for the mass media to thrive without the society, it would be unimaginable the level of isolation, myopicism and backwardness that human race would suffer without the mass media. On the other hand while the mass media make use of the people in the society for the day to day running activities, the society also, rely on the mass media to provide information that douse looming tension [Goke.R.2010].

Indeed it is an axiom that conflict and crises constitute integral part of the society, and a major feature in our developmental process. However the spate of conflicts and crises around the world may continue to be high as long as actors in international politics continue to demonstrate wanton disregard for the rule of law, and refused to recognize that the rule of law exists for the preservation of human dignity.

The media is like a double edged sword. Put differently, the media is a system capable of oiling the wheels of conflict resolution through mediation, and also can be employed to maintain social equilibrium, facilitate change and seek radical alternative to conflict [Egbon, 1953].

All the peace keeping process, conflict resolution and mediation efforts of the United Nations organization have been made possible through medial expose and intellectual lens of incisive information dissemination, and sensitizing authorities on any looming conflict. The media in its capacity as the fourth estate usually bring to the focus of the powers- that- be situations that may degenerate into crises or outright wars, for immediate actions. Research has shown that most of the crises which were averted the world over were predicated upon good investigative reporting of the media.

In summation, it is our candid opinion that mass media should be development driven, proactive and balance in their news content and especially ones that involve conflict and the resolution of such conflict.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The United Nations Organization is a universal body that brings every autonomous nation together irrespective of geographical location, ideology, race, culture, color and identity. Part of its statutory functions as earlier underscored is to settles matters that has to do with the world peace and security , it also seeks to peoples equal rights particularly the member states, It protects and upholds justice , has respect for international law and diplomacy to prevent war and also encourage international co-operations among member states.

Despite the autonomy or liberty which each nation of the world has, no country can sustain or exist without interactions with one another since naturally no nation is an island of all needs. This so-called interaction may come in the areas of economy, politics, territorial integrity to mention but a few.

To this end, the United Nations had creditably facilitated global co-operations which simply mean the totality of all relations or interactions among countries of the world. This encompasses co-operation in the areas of social, sports, politics, economy, science and technology military and other spheres of human endeavors.

Based on this premise, this paper has carefully done an academic x-ray on the peace oracle mediation activities in a broader perspective that is likely to earn the body “an immeasurable kudos” from the international analysts and commentators.

Though the United Nations Organization as a world conflict mediator has carved a niche, yet, there is a dire need to step up its efforts with the supports of notable and world acclaimed non-governmental organizations to expedite the global mediation efforts of the united Nations for more speedy achievements since it could be supported in kind and in cash.

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