

**Report on the International Annual Conference on:
Building a Culture of Peace & Dialogue in African
Higher Institutions of Learning:
A Special Focus on
Best Practices, Models and Strategies**

Organizer: Campus for Peace & Dialogue (CAPED) International

Performance Place: Norbert Kenne Memorial Peace House, Yaoundé

Dates: May 28 & July 4, 2007

Introduction

On May 28 and July 4, 2007, the [Campus for Peace & Dialogue \(CAPED\) International](#) organized a conference in Yaoundé on the theme “[Building a Culture of Peace & Dialogue in African Higher Institutions of Learning](#)”, with special focus on best practices, models and strategies. Initially scheduled to run from May 28 to 30, 2007, the date was modified due to unexpected bureaucratic exigencies. A decision was thus taken to devote May 28 to international participants and those who traveled from far to present their papers while others had to wait for a later date pending “clearance” from the administration. Hence, the extended conference of July 4 was a logical follow-up of that decision. The present report highlights the main issues discussed during the conference. It ends with recommendations adopted at the end of the conference.

Context & Rationale

For close to two decades now, African university campuses have been confronted with a labyrinth of conflicts, which have had a calamitous effect on teaching, research and the capacity of the university budding staff. In most African countries, the university has been racked repeatedly by strikes by both students and lecturers seeking improvements in their living conditions. Strike actions especially by students often render universities quite ungovernable. Yet the situation is not getting any better as up till this day, there are still many universities that continue to be hot beds of intolerance and violence. The fact that they are overcrowded with dwindling structural and infrastructural facilities creates room for even stiffer competition amongst students for the limited available space.

The prevalence of conflicts taking the form of savage competition between gangs, frightful fraternities and religious groupings particularly the Pentecostals and Jihadists is a matter of great concern. Other forms of violence namely: physical, structural, psychological, sexual and verbal have disrupted the learning environment and seriously undermined the university’s ability to carry out its mission. Hence, the university system needs to engage in efforts to create a friendly environment for learning.

The decade 2000-2010 has been declared by the UN as the international decade for the culture of peace and non-violence for children of the world. Building peace and dialogue in institutions of learning are, unquestionably, noble goals to be pursued. But for real peace to prevail there must be a permanent and continuous dialogue involving student and teacher representations and the university administration to address potential or explosive problems that negatively affect campus life.

In an effort to link advocacy and research and, in view of promoting the culture of peace and dialogue in our Institutions of Higher Learning, CAPED International organized its First International Annual Conference on May 28 & July 4, 2007 in

Yaoundé, under the theme: Building a Culture of Peace and Dialogue in African Higher Institutions of Learning: Best Practices, Models & Strategies.

Objectives

The principal objective of this undertaking was to bring together scholars and professionals from various backgrounds as well as student leaders to reflect on the dynamics of conflict and violence in tertiary education in Africa. The conference was also meant to enable members of the campus community to renew or review their thinking regarding peace and dialogue. Another aim of the conference was to come out with some recommendations that would help universities confront some of the governance problems they face and thus enable it to fulfil their principal missions of teaching and research, and building of human minds in a peaceful and serene environment.

Day I: Monday, May 28, 2007

Opening Ceremony

During the opening ceremony, the Chair of the Organizing Committee, **Dr Walters Samah**, after acknowledging the presence of participants and thanking them for their great interest in the conference, raised the issue of conflict and increasing unrest in many African universities. He declared that to put an end to the ugly trend, there must be changes in practices and not principles. He also stated that because peace is expensive, its pursuit should not be a dramatic event but a gradual process, which calls for the participation of all.

Presentation of Vital Points

The opening paper was that of **Dr Simon Tata Ngenge** (Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Yaoundé I), titled, '[Facets of Peace on University Campuses](#)'. The speaker commenced by stating that, as an academic milieu that distributes knowledge in various disciplines and promote cultural values, the university is also a venue for breathing revolutions and other bad practices. To maintain and strengthen peace on university campuses, university authorities must make the environment conducive for its tenants. In this light, he recommends that maximum security be mounted on campus by delimiting the territorial jurisdiction of campuses with a fence and mounting security detective equipment that can identify inward and outward movements of people, goods and cars. To the speaker, the tranquillity of universities to a large extent serves as a barometer through which the stability of a state can be measured.

Chris Okerefor is a peace and human rights activist and Programme Director with the Lagos-based Peace & Social Initiatives Center, Nigeria. He presented a poignant paper titled the [Politics of cultism in Nigerian campuses: Implications for conflict management](#), in which he contended that cultism has become so endemic in Nigerian universities that it is capable of crippling the entire generation of the nation's youth. Using his words, 'the activities of these clandestine fraternities in our various institutions have undermined the moral bastion of our youths as the acclaimed leaders of tomorrow'. He maintained that cultism has metamorphosed into a cankerworm eating deep into the fabrics of academic culture at an alarming rate, to the point that 'citadels of learning have been pitifully reduced to citadels of violence'. In proffering curative solutions to this problem, he suggested a complete reform of

the Nigerian university system. He also calls on civil society groups to develop capacities that would permit them to effectively combat the cult menace and brigandage on campuses and so stave off a large scale catastrophe that might aggravate the various forms of inter-state and intra-state conflict in Nigeria.

Rev. Dr. Bertin Kisob is the President of the Bamenda-based Cameroon Association of Human Rights Protectors (CARIP). His paper was on the [Impact of the conflict among religions and civilizations on African university campuses](#). He posed the problem of insecurity on African university campuses caused by imported religions such as Christianity and Islam. He stated that it is an aberration for Africans to be fighting each other because of religions that are alien to their continent. This, he argued, is the consequences of what he terms the spiritual and religious colonization of Africa, which must be fought energetically

Primus Chi is the Country Coordinator of the International Centre for Conflict & Human Rights Analysis (ICCHRA). His paper centred on the recent waves of protest and discontent that plagued Cameroon state universities, with focus on the 'Anglo-Saxon' University of Buea. In analysing the causes and consequences of the strikes, he argued that while strike actions in the other state universities were relatively peaceful, those at the University of Buea were violent, resulting in loss of lives and wanton destruction of property. This, he attributed to the lack of a recognised student body that could negotiate on behalf of students and the refusal of the University authorities to enter into dialogue with the strike leaders. Mr Chi also concerned himself with the lessons that could be learned from the crises. To find a lasting and satisfactory solution to the problems plaguing the University of Buea, he proposed an integrated approach involving the students, university administration and the government.

Dr Ndien Peters lectures at the University of Liberia. His paper explored the problem of [Dress code and sexually transmitted marks syndrome on university campuses](#). He contended that dress, which can be defined as the total arrangement of the body and all the material object added to it, must be treated with caution in our institutions of higher learning. For him, in spite of the fact that indecent dressing has turned our campuses into a market place where all sorts of "commodities" are traded, the university officials do not have absolute authority over their students dressing because students possess fundamental rights which should be respected. Given that clothing is one of the primary outlets for expressing oneself at any age, students must not be confined to the expression of only what the state or university authorities want. He added that while it has been established that the university has the responsibility to promote the good order in which education can take place that must be balanced against reasonable personal liberty.

After this paper, the conference was suspended for reasons mentioned above.

Day II: Wednesday, July 4, 2007

The conference resumed on July 4, 2007, with a word of welcome by **Dr Walters Samah**, the Chair of the Organizing Committee. In a brief welcome address he noted that though the timing of the conference was not quite appropriate, coming just before the end-of-semester examinations in most universities and commencing simultaneously with the marking of the GCE, it was however considered unwise to

push the date of the conference any further. He then informed participants that guest speakers called up for other duties had forwarded their papers which would simply be read to the conference participants. This was followed by the reading of the report on the May 28 Conference by **Charles Linjap**, the *Rapporteur*.

After this brief opening ceremony, guest speakers took their turns on the panel to present papers. The first panel provided a comprehensive outline of peace, emphasising the need to always use and consider its extended concept which transcends the mere absence of open violence to include conditions of justice and its fulfillment.

Prof Athanase Bopda is Sub-director in the Cameroon Ministry of Scientific Research & Innovation (MINRESI). His paper centred on '[La paix, les jeunes et les universités](#)' discussed the university environment and its implications for peace. In this paper, the speaker stressed the importance of the environment to education and peace, arguing that they are intricately linked. For him, a conducive physical environment enhances effective teaching and learning. Yet, in spite of this fact, the physical environment in most African universities is in a sorry state and calls for urgent action. What university authorities must do is accept their basic responsibility to provide an enabling environment for learning. The speaker went further by examining some possibilities of moulding students to become builders of peace and not builders of violence. He declared that the university should serve as a strategic milieu for future leadership. As a scientific and philosophical milieu, it should permit pros and cons because contradiction is necessary in order to forge ahead.

Dr ESD Fomin is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Yaoundé. His paper titled '[Environment and Peace on Campus: The case of Cameroon Universities](#)' explored the concept of peace within the framework of the university environment. Defining an ideal environment as the one in which genuine peace reigns through the harmonious interaction of all members of the university, his contention was that most Cameroon universities do not offer a suitable environment capable of generating the peace necessary in the attainment of their set goals. It is therefore not surprising that reading through a UNESCO published list of the top 100 African universities in 2006, the only Cameroonian university occupied the 85th position, and it was the University of Yaoundé 1. It is shown in the paper that the students, lecturers and administration share the responsibility for the absence of the conducive environment. To ensure a clean environment and quality services, Dr Fomin suggested an increase in tuition fee. Given its sensitive nature, the question of raising tuition ignited much controversy and debate. In the discussions that followed, participants wanted to know if in formulating his proposal; the learned speaker had considered the negative implications of raising tuition.

Alawadi Zelao is a political sociologist and senior researcher with the Cameroon Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation. His paper which was titled, '[Le defi de la paix dans les universités d'Etat au Cameroun](#)', provided a succinct and lucid definition of peace. He began his talk by introducing the two major approaches in conceptualizing peace in social sciences. The first is the positivist approach represented by Emile Durkheim and Auguste Comte, which holds that peace is an absolute virtue or value. The second is the pragmatic or realist approach which talks of relative peace, held by Marx, Aron, Freund and Bourdieu. The speaker stated that unfortunately, the Cameroonian authorities have instead adopted the authoritarian logic of absolute peace, which explains why peace in Cameroon universities has been

based on authoritarian governance. However, since the 1990, with the collapse of political monolithism, both students and teachers have developed capacities to impose themselves within the new context. Hence, there is a gradual move from the authoritarian to the 'parliamentary' logic of peace on campus.

Dr Chandel Moneze Ebale is the Acting Head of Psychology Department of University of Yaoundé I. His paper titled "*La psychologie dans l'édification et le maintien de la paix*" gave a psychological explanation to conflict and peace on campus. Being essentially epistemological, the paper looked at the contribution of psychology in the construction of peace on campus. After recalling what psychology is, the speaker presented certain concepts that could help in understanding the behaviour of the individual regarding the question of peace. He maintained that stress could generate aggressive attitudes and frustration amongst people. He regretted that in finding a solution to managing stress, social psychologists are often left out.

Mbaku Clifford Tikum is a Senior Police Superintendent (*Commissaire*) and Associate-Facilitator of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre Canada. He presented a remarkable paper titled: '*Effects and Unintended Consequences of Peacekeeping and Peace Enforcement on University Campuses*'. The paper demonstrated that previous peace operations on campuses have been poorly carried out, leading to unwanted outcomes. As a remedy, the Speaker recommended the application of the new notion of community policing - working in collaboration and in good relationship with the students, teachers and the hierarchy in order to defuse tension and keep peace. To pre-empt conflict, he recommended that security forces should gather information and furnish the authorities. This paper contributed quite strongly in sensitising conference participants about the role the security forces are expected to play during peace operations on campus. Due to the great interest it ignited amongst participants who kept on asking questions, this paper exceptionally lasted an hour. In the end, *Commissaire* Mbaku was highly appreciated for his openness and frankness.

VG Fanso is a Professor in History at the University of Yaoundé I. His paper titled '*Inter-Generation Encounters and Peace on University Campuses*' showed how the creation of Western-inspired universities in Africa has made it possible for people of different generations (age groups) to act and interact in the same place, where dialogue, consensus and common action is the rule. He summed up his major contention in a question: Can Western-inspired African universities constitute models for dialogue and peace for African states striving for nationhood? He argued that such a question is relevant given that African traditional etiquette expects young people to publicly defer to their elders, while possibly criticizing them in private. Hence, to promote inter-generational dialogue, African universities should educate the public through polite discussion and debates on how to argue without fighting and how to "agree to differ". In his view, such discussions and debates constitute a good training in inter-generational dialogue, particularly if participating dons are non-authoritarian and if teaching is the goal.

Dr Jean Koufan Menkene's paper was titled: *Incivility and Menace to Peace in the University Milieu: The Case of the Students of the University of Yaoundé I*. The speaker argued that incivility by students leads to poor teaching of courses hence poor quality results. Incivility also brings about violation of social norms, deviant behaviour, non-conformism and lack of savior-vivre on campus. He gave examples of

how deviant attitudes by students of the University of Yaoundé I have resulted to the manhandling of lecturers. The rising trend of incivility leads to a violent campus for all university actors. He regretted that despite the presence of numerous moralizing slogans posted on the walls of amphitheatres, the situation of incivility has not improved.

Donatus Fai Tangem is Lecturer in the Department of Arts & Archaeology at the University of Yaoundé I. His paper, [Deviant Attitude and Sex Appeal: Anathema](#), revisited issues related to dress codes, sexual harassment and what he describes as the 'notorious practice of sexually acquired marks'. He pointed out that despite the fact that this fast developing 'moral monster' has bedeviled our educational systems in general and universities in particular for a long time, it has not been given adequate attention. He argued that this loathsome practice operates through three avenues: dress codes and its related interpretations, sex appeal and the dreaded culture of 'using what you have to get what you want'. Describing such deviant attitudes as bestial, the speaker used empirical evidence to show the things that sanction their presence on campus. He concluded that such practices not only conflict with morality but also compromise standards and professional conduct.

George Mboe is Teaching and Research Assistant in the Department of Psychology at the University of Yaoundé I. His paper titled, [Période d'Examens terminaux et paix dans les amphis: approche du phénomène à la Faculté des Arts, Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Université de Yaoundé I](#) dwelled on conflict and violence during the writing of semester exams in the University of Yaoundé I. He pointed out that examination halls are always avenues of tension and violence between students and invigilators. He identified cheating during exams as a principal source of conflict and violence.

Prof. Albert-Pascal Temgoua & Dr Walters Samah both lecture at the History Department in the University of Yaoundé I. Their paper titled, [Promotion du dialogue et de la paix dans les campus universitaire: Le point de vue des étudiants](#) was based on a study undertaken (through questionnaires administered) in all the six Cameroon state universities. It had two objectives: first, to find out what were the causes of frequent students' discontent and second, how they could be addressed. Interestingly, the study revealed that students in all the state universities have identical problems. From the avalanche of problems presented, those highlighted included: poor infrastructure (classrooms & amphitheatres, toilettes), ill-equipped libraries and labs, inadequate and unqualified teaching staff, sexual harassment by lecturers, language problems, poor quality of meal in university restaurants and high rents in student residential areas. Students in science faculties had specific problems like the near absence of the essential instruments and materials in most science labs. This has transformed what is normally supposed to be *Travaux Pratiques* (lab practicals) into what some students now call *Travaux Pratiques théoriques* (theoretical practicals). Also, many science students, notably those of the University of Yaounde I, complained of lecturers extorting money from them in the form of printing and selling *polycopys* (handouts) and test questions. The paper also revealed that 100 percent of the students who filled in the questionnaires asked for the total cancellation of fees and about 50 percent wanted the government to bring back bursaries for students. The paper ended with the contention that in efforts at finding means and ways to pre-empt students' frustrations and strikes and bring about a durable peace on university campus, it is indispensable to listen attentively to the students.

At this point, participants went for lunch which lasted some 30 minutes. Upon resumption, the organisers announced with regret that some guest speakers programmed for the evening session have telephoned to inform conference participants that they would not make it to the conference because the roads linking the Yaoundé Central Town and the conference venue had been blocked to create a free passage for the imminent return of President Paul Biya and his entourage, from the AU summit in Accra. The rest of the evening was then dominated by the student representatives.

As one of the objectives of the conference was to provide an environment in which student leaders could speak about their role in promoting peace on campus, a special session was devoted to them. In their own turn, the three student leaders, **Awal, Onekon** and **Mbesse** tried to show how their efforts to valuably represent students and promote peace are often thwarted by the lack of real dialogue with the administration.

Awal Mohamadou is the President of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Students Union (AEFALSH) and University of Yaoundé I (UYI) Students' Delegate to the University Council. In his paper titled, '[The Place of Students in the Social Dialogue Process](#)', he showed that the 2005 students' uprisings in the UYI were caused by neglect by the university authorities. He informed participants that the strike action was preceded by a memo to the Rector that presented the grievances of the students. Instead of addressing the grievances, the university administration rather 'shelved' the memo claiming it had other priorities. Consequently, the situation degenerated into a general strike which later spilled over to other universities. To prevent such situations, he advocated social dialogue based on consultation of all the different stake-holders. He concluded by stating that the recent wave of students' riots in Cameroon state universities has created the need to reform university governance.

Walter Onekon is a student of political science and the leader of the 2005 Buea University students strike. The paper he presented was titled '[Crisis management in Cameroonian State Universities: The Case of the University of Buea-April 2005](#)'. Like Awal before him, the speaker argued that the 2005 students' riot in Buea that caused the death of two students was due to inappropriate conflict management skills and bad governance. But the situation in Buea, he argued, was aggravated by the intrusion of partisan politics into the campus and the total breakdown of dialogue. Admitting that the strike action which he led was poorly coordinated and excessively violent, he said this was due to the lack of a legitimate student union. He then blamed on the university administration which for twelve years had denied students the right to have one.

François Desire Mbesse was the student leader of the Higher Teachers Training College (ENS) Yaoundé who was one of leaders the 2005 student strike dubbed *La grève des bancs*. His paper was titled, '[Culture du dialogue et de la paix, les universités camerounaises et le défi du siècle: fait-il noir à midi?](#)' Like his two peers, Mr. Mbesse added his voice on the thesis that crises often occur in the university because university authorities neglect students' grievances. He intimated that instead of examining a crisis when it erupts, the university administration rather spends time blaming the striking students and condemning the strike action. He cited the case of the 2005 ENS strike, organised by students to ask for classroom benches. He concluded by saying that to avert strikes and ensure sustainable peace

on campus, there is need for permanent dialogue between all the university stakeholders.

A point that came out clearly from the papers of the three student leaders was that negative behaviour by students is often as a result of the fact that their essential needs are not fulfilled. Consequently, they all insisted on the importance to always address the root causes of students' negative behaviour, such as the spiraling emotions that lead to violence. In that regard, they made a passionate plea calling on university authorities to always try to listen to students' grievances with understanding, compassion and the desire to help them overcome their difficulties.

The final conference paper was presented by **Albert Samah Apum**, a post graduate student who is working on Pentecostalism in Cameroon. In a paper titled [University-Based Christian Fellowship and Inter-Faith Dialogue on Campus: The Case of the University of Yaoundé I](#), he drew from the experiences of a number of inter-denominational University-based Christian fellowships to point out that the kind of inter-church dialogue exhibited within inter-denominational group fellowships permits individuals to feel comfortable to practice religion. Hence, such groups can serve as a premise for a larger interdenominational dialogue of the mainstream churches. At the end of his paper, participants raised the fear that allowing religious activities on campus could instead be a generator of conflict and cultism. It was agreed that it is difficult for students to easily distinguish between religious groups and cults.

The conference was concluded with the reading of the conference report and recommendations by the *Rapporteur*, **Charles Linjap**.

Recommendations

- Viewing the frequency of campus conflict and violence, the conference recommends deeper research on campus conflicts in order to come out with more concrete proposals geared towards mitigating them.
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- To move from good rhetoric to good actions, university authorities should prioritize and mainstream peace on their agenda. This must start by always using and considering the extended concept of peace, which transcends the mere absence of violent conflict (physical violence) to encompass conditions of justice, satisfaction, fulfillment and happiness
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- Community policing should be institutionalised as a way of identifying and defusing situations of tension and conflict. However, when conflicts/crises do erupt, they should be given recognition and addressed promptly. In this light, a mediation structure made up of competent personalities should be created within the university to help resolve conflict
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- The University campus should be free of partisan politics, a factor that breeds conflict, favouritism, tribalism and victimisation.
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- Considering the importance of dialogue in mitigating tension, promoting understanding and re-enforcing peace, the conference strongly recommends frank and direct dialogue among members of the university community.
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- Student unionism should be institutionalised in all universities.

- University authorities should use the preventive approach rather the reactionary approach in dealing with campus problems. More conciliatory methods should be used in dealing with students.
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- Live ammunitions should not be used against protesting students. Given the deep mistrust and misunderstanding that often exist between students and security officers, a special security brigade should be trained on how to interact with students and intervene during disturbances on campus.
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- Considering that most of our universities suffer from self-inflicted crisis of mismanagement and neglect, and that most conflicts on campus are due to the inherent structural weaknesses, there is urgent need to modernise and democratise university governance. For instance, an electoral college of lecturers should be in charge of voting university managers rather than they being appointees of politicians. By so doing, campus life would be depoliticised.
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- Cleanliness and good hygienic environment, proper infrastructure is a prerequisite for peace-building and quality results. An intra-university committee should be created to be in charge of cleanliness and setting standards
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- The activities of unauthorised religious sects on campus or in student residential areas should be proscribed as they are a cause of conflict and a channel for the spread of cultism

Conclusion

As we conclude this report, we recognize the fact that the potential for conflict and violence is still rife in many African universities. Given that most of the problems in the university are linked to poor administration, ensuring durable peace on campus requires that universities must be well-run. Progress and durable peace in our universities also depends on improving conditions for students and lecturers. That is why we have come out with the policy guidelines and recommendations. It is now left to the decision-makers to make use of them towards a harmonious co-existence among the various stake holders of the university. We are grateful that conference participants returned home with a lot satisfaction in spite of the numerous set-backs the conference suffered. They all expressed the wish to have more conferences of this nature in future. The appointment was thus taken for the 2nd Annual conference billed for 2008.

Quotable Quote

'A peace reigning university campus must not be measured by the absence of violence but by the quality of the achievements of its students, teachers and the administration'.

Dr ESD Fomin

This Report was prepared by Dr Walters Samah with kind assistance from Charles Linjap (conference *Rapporteur*) & Dr Matthias Livinus Niba (Conference Evaluator)