

January 17, 2013

Dear President Obama:

We write to express our alarm at recent reports that your administration may request a new Authorization for Use of Military Force in certain African countries. While we understand that the U.S. maintains deep concern regarding militant extremism in Africa, we – as a diverse group of faith-based, human rights and other organizations – fear that current and future military operations will harm U.S. and African interests and communities. Rather than repeating violent, short-term responses that have proven unsuccessful in ending the spread of militant extremism over the past decade, we urge you to instead emphasize support for African-led efforts to non-violently address root causes of instability and build security through prioritizing justice, peace and civilian safety.

Past U.S. attempts to counter violent extremism through military operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan have led to prolonged war and the deaths of thousands of civilians and U.S. servicemembers. Despite the massive cost in lives and in dollars – with more than \$1.4 trillion already spent on the “Global War on Terror” – these operations have not contained the threat of militant extremism around the world. Authorizing the use of additional force in African countries will put more civilians and U.S. servicemembers at risk, while further militarizing conflict-affected areas could undermine the prospects for peaceful solutions.

We are also concerned by the potential for expanded use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle strikes in targeting militants in African countries. Recent reports – including one from the Stanford Law School and New York University School of Law and another from the Center for Civilians in Conflict and Columbia University’s Human Rights Law Clinic – provide empirical evidence that the cultural and psychological impacts of U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan could irreparably harm U.S. security interests. Strikes already conducted in Somalia may have the same effect, indicating that an extension of this program to additional countries in Africa will result in more, rather than fewer, militants.

Given recent reports of the U.S. Africa Command’s expanding training programs and the nature of current U.S. military activity on the African continent, we recognize that additional operations would likely rely on significant military and counterterror assistance to and cooperation with partner governments and security forces. In Mali and Nigeria, vast human rights abuses have been committed by national security forces. In places such as Uganda and Ethiopia, oppressive governments continue to attack the civil and political rights of citizens. While the U.S. iterates its support for African democratic movements and efforts to achieve long-term stability, direct partnership with security forces and political leaders undermining those initiatives makes such claims ring hollow – and they will only continue to do so as these partnerships increase.

Finally, we question the impact this approach will have on African communities. Efforts to contain al-Shabaab militarily in Somalia have resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Somalis, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation. Kenya’s military intervention in Somalia has since instigated extensive retaliatory attacks on civilians. A number of reports have connected weapons currently being used in Mali to the crisis in Libya, demonstrating how an infusion of arms and violence can exacerbate conflict beyond borders.

The causes and conditions of militant extremism are complex worldwide, and military solutions are as unlikely to address them in Africa as they have been after more than ten years in Afghanistan. Your administration now has an opportunity to shift the policies that have led to

these unconscionable costs, and we urge you to instead emphasize support for Africans working toward non-lethal solutions and long-term stability as you move forward.

Sincerely,

Action LA Network
Africa Action
Africa Faith and Justice Network
American Friends Service Committee
The Association of Concerned Africa Scholars
Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation
Center of Concern
Church of the Brethren
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
Disciples Justice Action Network (Disciples of Christ)
Eritrean Community for Human Rights & Refugee Protection
Foreign Policy in Focus
Franciscan Action Network
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Rights
Just Foreign Policy
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Medical Mission Sisters' Alliance for Justice
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
Missionary Oblates USP
National Immigrant Solidarity Network
Pax Christi International
Peace Action
Peace NO War Network
Presbyterian Church, (USA)
Priority Africa Network
RFK Center for Justice and Human Rights
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Justice Team
STAND
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
United African Organization
U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW)

cc: Hon. Chuck Hagel, Nominee for Secretary of Defense
Hon. John Kerry, Nominee for Secretary of State
General Carter Ham, U.S. AFRICOM Commander
Rajiv Shah, USAID Administrator
Grant Harris, Senior Director for African Affairs at the National Security Council
Senator Robert Menendez, Foreign Relations Committee Chair
Senator Bob Corker, Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member
Senator Chris Coons, Subcommittee on African Affairs Chair (112th Congress)
Representative Ed Royce, Foreign Affairs Committee Chair
Representative Eliot Engel, Foreign Affairs Committee Ranking Member
Representative Chris Smith, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Chair

Representative Karen Bass, Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations Ranking Member

Senator Carl Levin, Armed Services Committee Chair

Senator James Inhofe, Armed Services Committee Ranking Member

Representative Howard McKeon, Armed Services Committee Chair

Representative Adam Smith, Armed Services Committee Ranking Member