
In Search for Peace in Africa: Organization of African Unity and the Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970

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Abstract

A large and diverse body of literature exists on the roles of Organization of African Unity (OAU) in the Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967-1970. This conflict was, and remains, one of the most ethnically and religiously motivated conflicts ever witnessed on the continent of Africa. The literature, to a large extent, concludes that OAU's existence had a limited or insignificant impact on the war. This long-held assertion about the organization, however, is problematic as newly discovered sources and evidence have shown that OAU indeed played significant roles in the conflict, and that its intervention had notable impacts on the outcome of the war. It is therefore, on the importance of these contradictions, that this paper examines the extent and impacts of OAU's intervention on the Nigeria-Biafra War. In so doing, the paper adds fresh perspectives on the literature surrounding OAU's intervention in the conflict.

Introduction

The OAU was a positive force in ensuring a collective voice for member states, and it acted as a moderating influence on quarrelling members.¹

The founding of Organization of African Unity (OAU) on May 25, 1963 was greeted with waves of conflicts and uprisings happening across Africa as of the time. The organization, within few days of its birth, designed and developed conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution strategies, as well as set up committees to combat these challenges, facilitate peace and reconciliation processes across the warring zones. And due to these proactive measures, it could intervene to resolve more than a dozen cases of conflicts within and between African states.² For instance, it intervened to resolve the Congo crisis, the Somali-Ethiopian border dispute, the Moroccan-Algerian border dispute and gave some military assistance to Tanzania at the period amongst others. However, despite its efforts in resolving series of crises plaguing the continent, scholars had criticized and described the organization as a toothless bulldog, and in most cases, bystander in most crisis situations across Africa.³ This general assertion raises questions as it contradicts the details presented by newly discovered archival sources, especially with respect to the organization's intervention in the Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970. This paper, therefore, examines the extent and impacts of OAU's intervention on the Nigerian Civil War. In so doing, I argue that OAU was not incapacitated by its principle of non-interference as claimed by the existing literature, hence, it intervened deeply in the

¹ Jan Smuts House, 'The OAU and African Disunity', *The South African Institute of International Affairs Report*, No. 44 (1982), 2.

² David. B. Meyers, 'Intraregional Conflict Management by the Organization of African Unity', *International Organization*, 28 (1974), 352.

³ For scholars' views on OAU, and details on principle of non-interference, read, Akinremi, Bolaji, *The Politics of Post-War Demobilization and Reintegration in Nigeria* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010); and Akinremi, Bolaji, 'The OAU and the Concept of Non-Interference in Internal Affairs of Member States', in *Third World Attitudes Toward International Law. An Introduction*, eds. F. Snyder and Surakiart Sathinthalai (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, Netherlands, 1987).

Nigeria-Biafra War. Also, contrary to the general belief concerning the terminal date of the war, I argue that the war had ended since November 1969 when Ojukwu fled from the country to seek asylum in Ivory Coast as opposed to the January 1970 declaration of its surrender.

This paper is divided into two detailed sections. The first section presents various steps taken by OAU to resolve the crisis, especially through peace talks which held in different African countries. The second revisits the claim by scholars, presents a fresh perspective and counter argument, as well as draws logical conclusion.

The Oau and Duty to Ensure Stability in Africa

This section examines the interventions of OAU in the Nigerian Civil War through various meetings which aimed at discussing the conflict and possibility of devising strategies that would lead to peaceful mediation and resolution. The conflict was first discussed at the organization's peace talks held at Kinshasa, Congo in 1967. This paper will, for clarity purpose, focus on Kinshasa Peace Talks before turning to the subsequent talks such as Kampala Peace Talks (1968), Niamey Peace Talks (1968), Addis Ababa Peace Talks (1968), Algiers Summit (1968), Monrovia Peace Talks (1969) and Addis Ababa Summit (1969).

The Kinshasa Peace Talks, September 1967

The OAU made efforts to resolve the Nigerian crisis before it degenerated into war.⁴ These efforts, perhaps due to some circumstances beyond the organization, especially the uncompromising stands of the belligerent, did not materialize until the news of this war had travelled beyond the continent and the war itself had 'already become one of Africa's major problems'.⁵ The issues prompting its intervention are not hard to find. They were mainly three (a) to check or prevent the supply of arms and ammunition by the foreign powers such as the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Egypt, French, Portuguese and other undisclosed sources to Biafra and Nigeria; (b) The sudden recognition accorded the Biafrans by some members of the organization such as Tanzania, Zambia, Gabon and Ivory Coast; (c) the popularized issue of genocide in Biafra.⁶ These unfolding events left the organization which had sworn to dedicate itself to the promotion of peace and security across the continent with no option other than to intervene in this conflict. More so, since Nigeria, one of the warring parties, was a key member of OAU, it was believed that whatever happened to her would affect the entire continent. Hence, keeping Nigeria's unity intact was key to convening the peace talks at the time.

The peace talks held from 11 to 14 September 1967 under the host, President of Congo, Joseph Mobutu, who had sent an invitation for a gathering of OAU Assembly at the country's capital earlier in 1966. Mubutu chose to play host to this gathering for two major reasons. First, to express his appreciation of the enormous support which African states had offered his country since inception of the Congo crisis; and second, to boost the image of Congo as a peace-loving nation.⁷ Playing a host to an all-African affair gathering as this served as dream come true for President Mubutu as it opened windows of opportunities for him, for the first time, to parade himself as an emerging African leader. Convening this meeting did not devoid its own complexities. Aside the two major problems confronting the organization --the Arab-

⁴ Sam Amadi, 'Colonial Legacy, Elite Dimension and the Making of Genocide: The Story of Biafra', *SSRC (2007)*, 7. Accessed on February 22, 2013, <http://howgenocidesend.ssrc.org/Amadi/>.

⁵ Zdenek Cervenka, *The Unfinished Quest for Unity: Africa and the OAU* (Julian Friedmann Publishers, 1977), 98.

⁶ Cervenka, *Unfinished Quest*, 97-98.

⁷ R. Nagel and R. Rathbone, 'The OAU at Kinshasa', *World Today*, 23 (1967), 473.

Israeli War and the Nigerian Civil War-- , there were other burning issues that could distract her from holding this peace talks. They included, for instance, ‘the disagreements between Tanzania and Malawi over the Malawi lakes; Guinea-Ivory Coast misunderstanding over citizens’ detention within each other’s border as well as the internal conflicts or political instability within the Congo itself’.⁸ These developments made OAU’s member states to hesitate attending the peace talks amidst the ongoing unrest in Congo, despite accepting Mobutu’s invitation. However, after several deliberations among African leaders, the meeting was declared open at Kinshasa under the chairmanship of the late Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Selassie.

There were, altogether, seventeen independent African states represented at the peace talks. Also in attendance were some representatives of United Nations, prominent among whom was U Thant.⁹ The meeting opened and several issues affecting both the organization and the member states were discussed. These included mercenaries’ presence in Congo; the conditions of the South West Africans on trial in South Africa; the foreign presence in United Arab Republic; the Kenya-Somali crisis as well as the Nigerian Civil War.¹⁰ Though all these caught the attention of the participants, none was regarded as sensitive and complex as the Nigerian Civil War. In short, the Council of Ministers¹¹ did not include the Nigerian Civil War on its agenda prior to this meeting.¹² The delegates only decided to discuss the crisis for reasons such as protecting the integrity of OAU; the bloodshed involved in the battle as well as the general issue of secession.¹³ These whole reasons for discussing the Nigerian Civil War at this Summit were influenced by humanitarian consideration.¹⁴

The reluctance of the Council of Ministers to include the Nigerian Civil War on its agenda to be discussed by African heads of state at Kinshasa is not far-fetched. This was due to the restraining campaigns by the ‘31-year old General Yakubu Gowon’,¹⁵ on the need for OAU to adhere to its principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. Gowon, at the early stage of the war, did not tolerate any form of intervention on the part of OAU. To him, a slight mention of the Nigerian war at any of its meetings would constitute a breach of its principle. His unwillingness to entertain any form of intervention was made explicit in the speech he made before OAU’s Consultative Mission, headed by General Ankrah of Ghana, sent to visit him in Lagos, Nigeria, after the Kinshasa meeting. He maintained that ‘the OAU has rightly seen our problem as purely domestic affairs and in accordance with the OAU resolution, your mission is not here to mediate’.¹⁶ This uncompromising posture displayed by Gowon could be understood in the light of Nigeria’s foreign policy way long before the civil war in 1967. The right to self-determination did not apply, in Nigeria’s view, to ethnic groups within member states of OAU, but only to insurgents against colonial or White minority rule

⁸ Nagel and Rathbone, ‘The OAU at Kinshasa’, 476-477.

⁹ U Thant was the Secretary General of United Nations from 1961-1971. He succeeded Dag Hammarskold after his accident in September 1961. U Thant was among the prominent individuals at the Kinshasa Conference and he even gave an address on behalf of United Nations.

¹⁰ Resolutions and Declarations Adopted by the Fourth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Governments held in Kinshasa, Congo, from 11 to 14 September 1967. References: AHG/Res. 49 (IV)-AHG/Res. 52 (IV), AHG/st. 1(IV) and AHG/st. 2(IV), 1-10. Accessed on 13 June, 2013 at http://www.africa-union.org/official_documents/Heads_of_states_summits/hog/eHoGAssembly1967pdf.

¹¹ There was an earlier meeting convened by ministers of African states, but this conflict was not discussed by the ministers due to the actions of Nigeria’s head of state, General Yakubu Gowon.

¹² Nagel and Rathbone, ‘The OAU at Kinshasa’, 481

¹³ Nagel and Rathbone, ‘The OAU at Kinshasa’, 481.

¹⁴ Cervenka, *The Organization of African Unity*, 196.

¹⁵ *Daily Times*, 2 August 1966.

¹⁶ *Daily Times*, 24 November 1967.

elsewhere in the region.¹⁷ Hence, she would not condone any form of rebellion against her by any ethnic group in the country. The only form of rebellion that made sense to Nigerian government was the fight against foreign control or presence on the continent. In this, Nigeria was always willing and ready to support Organization of African Unity in achieving its aims.¹⁸ Nigeria was also dedicated to peace and unity in Africa through its consistent refrain from meddling into affairs of other states. According to Stremmlau, 'prior to the outbreak of the 1967-1970 civil war over Biafran secession, Nigeria's leaders were careful never to interfere in the domestic affairs of other African states'. He goes further to add that 'despite the image of Nigeria as the Giant of West Africa, there were no efforts to establish regional hegemony'.¹⁹ Hence, Gowon's obstinacy must have been informed by his understanding of the ethics in Nigeria's foreign policy, and the need to abide by stipulations of OAU's principle of non-interference.

However, despite its awareness that discussing this conflict could strain its relationship with Nigeria, the organization defied its non-interference principle by discussed the conflict at Kinshasa. This was demonstration of OAU's capacity to chart the path to sustainable peace and security in Africa without external interference. It was also a display of the organization's triumph or control over its principle. Additionally, it sets up a Consultative Committee on Nigeria, saddled with the responsibility of handling the Nigerian crisis. The composition of this Committee represented a careful balance of the different attitudes towards the Nigerian conflict.²⁰ Furthermore, a resolution was unanimously reached during the meeting, and it was read by OAU's delegation sent to Gowon in Lagos, Nigeria, November 27, 1967. According to the document, 'as a basis for return to peace and normal conditions in Nigeria, the secessionists should renounce secession', and must be willing to 'accept the present administrative structure of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as laid down by the Federal Military Government of Nigeria in Decree No. 14 of 1967'.²¹ This resolution clearly conveys OAU's stand: the unity of Nigeria was not negotiable. Nigeria's border must be kept intact by not giving Biafra any opportunity to secede. OAU, in addition to the aforementioned reasons for intervention, was concerned about the effects which the success of the Biafrans would have on other minorities within its member states.²² As a result, it became determined to do anything to keep Biafrans within and as part of Nigeria.

This resolution passed by OAU at Kinshasa appeared as a shock to Biafra's head commander, General Odumegwu Ojukwu. Ojukwu, prior to this resolution, had hoped that the decisions that would be taken at the meeting would be in Biafra's favour. This was after sending a delegate, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's first president and a supporter of Biafra, to Emperor

¹⁷ Stremmlau, John S, 'The Fundamentals of Nigerian Foreign Policy', *The Journal of Opinion*, 11(1981), 46.

¹⁸ For instance, Nigeria gave relentless support to OAU in its fight against white domination in Southern Africa, see Genova, Ann Weymouth, *Oil and Nationalism in Nigeria, 1970-1980*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2007.

¹⁹ Stremmlau, 'The Fundamentals of Nigerian Foreign Policy', 46.

²⁰ Cervenka, *The Organization of African Unity*, 196-197.

²¹ For full resolution at the meeting, read: Cervenka, *The Organization of African Unity*, 198; and *Africa Confidential*, no. 20 (Oct. 1967), 3-4.

²² Mr Michael Stewart, House of Commons Debate, 12 December, 1968, Vol. 775, cc590-716. The major aim of the OAU in the war was not to take side; but to avoid any action that would cause further problems or political instability on the continent. And since Biafra's action was a violation of the OAU principle, the organization decided to keep the Biafrans in their place by openly declaring its support for Nigeria. The organization believed that if the Biafrans were allowed to secede, other minorities in Africa would also want secession, and in this way, there would be conflict and uprisings on the continent. This would in the end prevent it from achieving its ultimate goals for African Unity.

Sellasie in Ethiopia to intimate him about the conditions of Biafrans,²³ although the same Nnamdi Azikiwe was among the first set of Biafrans who defected to the Federal side²⁴ in 1968-69, due to ideological differences between him and Ojukwu. Azikiwe was not the only Biafra's supporter that had disagreements with Ojukwu during the crisis. Philip Effiong, who was Ojukwu's Chief of Staff during the war later explained in an interview published in *Tell Magazine* in 2011, that the Biafran General was hard-hearted and would not change his personal decision on the war for any reason and because of this, he (Ojukwu) lost the respect or loyalty of a number of Biafra's supporters.²⁵ Irrespective of this attitude towards Azikiwe, he still continued looking for ways to end the war²⁶ and to ensure the safety of his fellow Biafrans. The constant defection of key Biafrans from Biafra's camp starting from 1968 marked the beginning of its capitulation before Nigeria.

Not only had Biafrans hoped that OAU would mediate and take a decision that would favour them, they also believed that they had the 'legal' right to seek their independence from Nigeria. To this end, they were using the Article III (3) of the OAU Charter which states that member states had 'inalienable right to independence'²⁷ as a point of reference. This was a 'miscalculation' as Biafra was not an independent state as recognized by the organization's charter. Overall, Biafrans felt betrayed by OAU for not declaring in their favour and began to criticize or frustrate its subsequent efforts aimed at resolving the conflict.

The hostility displayed by Biafrans toward OAU throughout the war was as consequence of Kinshasa gathering. According to a source, Biafrans would only attend any peace talks organized by OAU on two conditions. First, if all Gowon's mercenaries were expelled from Biafra; second, if Biafra was accorded the status of a sovereign state.²⁸ Biafra's animosity towards OAU was made known to the entire world through its local radio in the city of Enugu, Eastern Nigeria, on November 24, 1968. Referring to OAU's delegation to Lagos, Ojukwu lamented thus, 'by deciding to consult with only one party to the dispute, the Mission has demonstrated its lack of objectivity and doomed to failure right from the start.'²⁹ At this point, Biafrans had woken up to the reality of the whole events. They had realized that the intention of OAU in the war was mainly to assist Nigeria to protect her territorial integrity. It was also clear to them that they did not have any hope of seceding through OAU's assistance. However, the stands of OAU in this conflict, did not deter the rebels from further search for victory. They, from early 1968, explored the use genocidal claims to attract international attention which they did successfully,³⁰ amongst other war strategies. The Kinshasa meeting was crucial as it shaped the future relations between OAU and the warring parties throughout the conflict. It is also crucial to note that although OAU went further

²³ Cervenka, *The Organization of African Unity*, 196.

²⁴ See: Alfred Obiora Uzokwe, *Surviving in Biafra: The Story of the Nigerian Civil War, Over Two Million Died* (Writer's Advantage, IUniverse, Inc., 2003), 139.

²⁵ *Tell Magazine*, 5 December 2011. Read also, *Morning Post*, 17 August 1968.

²⁶ Lord Brockway, House of Lords Debate, 20 February 1969, Vol. 299, cc 944-93.

²⁷ Jimi Peters, *The Nigerian Military and the State* (London: Tauris Academic Studies/ Tauris Publishers, 1997), 130.

²⁸ For details, read the Biafran Newspaper, *The Mirror*, September 1967.

²⁹ This was a live broadcast on Biafran Radio station in Enugu, November 24, 1968. See Cervenka, *The Organization of African Unity*, 199.

³⁰ Clamour of genocide by Biafra against Nigeria made several international humanitarian organizations, religious organizations and some countries in Africa and Europe to declare support for Biafra. This started in 1968, when the Biafrans were almost losing in every way.

against its principle to play a mediatory role from 1968,³¹ its mission and intention in the conflict remained intact. The Kinshasa resolution on the conflict did not change. In short, this resolution served as a template for subsequent meetings organized by OAU where the Nigerian conflict was discussed.

The Kampala Peace Talks of 1968

Biafra gained the attention of the world through allegations that Nigeria was committing genocide against its citizens especially women and children across Biafra³², and this seemed to be affective as it earned Biafra the backings of some African countries³³ from 1968 onwards. The sudden declaration of support for Biafra by those countries generated reactions from other neutral African states and leaders. To ensure peaceful relations amongst these states, the Kampala Peace Talks was convened. The Talks was arranged by Arnold Smith, the Canadian diplomat and Secretary-General of the Commonwealth³⁴ and George Thomas, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth.³⁵ The peace talks first opened in London before moving to Kampala, Ugandan capital on May 23, 1968.³⁶ That the meeting did not hold under OAU's umbrella should not be seen as a weakness or lack of interest on the part of the organization. It was majorly because of the obstinacy of the Biafran leader, Odumegwu Ojukwu, who affirmed that OAU was not capable of handling the issue,³⁷ hence the need for OAU to step aside. However, this change of location from the UK to Uganda must have been influenced by OAU since the deliberations had to do with African affairs.

This meeting was attended by delegates from both sides of the warring parties. Commissioner for Information, Chief Anthony Enahoro, led the federal delegation; while Biafra's delegation was headed by Sir Louis Mbanefo. Enahoro and Mbanefo presented their proposals before the audience at the peace talks. One thing, however, was clear from these presentations: the parties were uncompromising in their demands.³⁸ Realizing that Biafra had no chance of winning more support which it had hoped for prior to this meeting, Mbanefo announced that 'the Biafran delegation is going home'³⁹ and Biafra's delegation walked out of the peace talks.

Mbanefo's action was not his sole decision. He was implementing a plan drafted by Ojukwu before the meeting. As later revealed by Akpan, a member of the Biafran delegation team to the Kampala conference and Secretary to the secessionist government, 'when eventually the talks started, the Biafran delegation was under strict instruction to be rigid, not to allow the

³¹ Bolaji A. Akinyemi, 'The Organization of African Unity and the Concept of Non-Interference in Internal Affairs of Member States', in *Third World Attitudes Toward International Law. An Introduction*, eds. Frederick E. Snyder and Surakiart Sathirithai (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, Netherlands, 1987), 82.

³² See Doron, Roy, 'Marketing Genocide: Biafran Propaganda Strategies During the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970', *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, 2-3(2014).

³³ From 1968 onward, due to the genocidal claims, and the personal ambitions, African countries starting with Tanzania, Zambia, Gabon, and Ivory Coast, gave recognition to the secessionist group.

³⁴ John de St Jorre, *The Brothers' War: Biafra and Nigeria* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 193.

³⁵ Cervenka, *The Organization of African Unity*, 199.

³⁶ *Nigerian Tribune*, 15 October 2012.

³⁷ After the OAU's resolution at the Kinshasa meeting in 1967, Biafrans began to regard OAU as biased, hence, Biafra's unwilling to entertain any invitation by OAU to resolve the conflict. Biafrans only attended OAU's initiated meetings whenever they sensed that the outcome would favour them.

³⁸ For the content of these proposals, read: Karl Derouen, Jr and UK Heo, *Civil Wars of the World: Major Conflicts Since World War II*, eds. Derouen and Heo (ABC-CLIO, Inc, 2007), 580-81.

³⁹ Cervenka, *The Organization of African Unity*, 203.

talks last too long, but to break up the discussion at the earliest opportunity'. Akpan further adds thus 'our strategy then, was to do more to obtain additional diplomatic recognition than for successful peaceful negotiations. The more diplomatic recognition Biafra had, the surer the possibility of the world's accepting the fact of her international existence.⁴⁰ Biafrans were not present at the meeting to explore ways of ending the conflict. To them, the conflict would only end on one condition: the granting of Biafra's independence. Also, the delegates had expected that after expressing their ordeals and plights before the Kampala audience they would gain more support. But sadly, this did not happen until the end of the talks. It therefore should not be astonishing that Mbanefo walked out of the peace talks without any remorse or regards for the statesmen and diplomats there present.

The Niamey Peace Talks, July 1968

This Niamey gathering was convened despite the 'uncooperating' stance or attitudes exhibited by Biafra's delegation at the Kampala Peace Talks. These mattered less to OAU, but peace, security and stability of Africa. Hence, the need to organize resources and invite African leaders and conflict experts for further deliberations on the ongoing conflict in Nigeria. Niamey Peace Talks was built upon earlier efforts made by Minister of State for Commonwealth Affairs, Lord Shepherd, appealing to the warring parties to sue for peace for the sake of suffering war victims in Biafra.⁴¹ The major issue discussed at Niamey meeting which commenced July 20, 1968 was the need for the warring parties to agree on the terms and channels that would facilitate the supply of relief materials to the suffering victims on both sides, but more on Biafra's end. In response to these, several conditions, recommendations, and demands were made by Biafra and Nigeria, with each arguing in favour of its position at the expense of the other.⁴² However, after much and heated deliberations between the two camps, they reached agreements on some key issues. As contained in the communique issued by OAU Consultative committee on Nigeria, Biafra and Nigeria agreed to '(1) arrangements for a permanent settlement; (2) terms for the cessation of hostilities; and (3) concrete proposals for supplies of food and medicine to the civilian victims of the war.⁴³ These resolutions were to inform the content of the agenda of OAU's peace negotiation gathering that was to hold in Addis Ababa the following months.

Niamey Peace Talks could indeed be regarded as successful compared to the previous meetings at Kinshasa and Kampala. At this conference, both parties, for the first time, agreed on some important and sensitive issues. The OAU Consultative Committee must have been diplomatic enough to make the parties realize the detriment of extending the war on their people. They must also have made the warring parties realize the cost of waging this war as well as its implication for Africa's stability. They indeed, succeeded in appealing to the emotions of both parties at the Niamey gathering, a breakthrough which seemed impossible at the previous meetings. OAU, despite its unwavering support for Nigeria's unity, still felt the need to build on the success of reaching meaning dialogue at Niamey by quickly organizing a follow-up meeting at its headquarters.

The Addis Ababa Peace Talks, August 1968

OAU was deeply concerned about the Nigerian conflict, especially the conditions of the suffering civilian population in the country. For this reason, it became more involved and

⁴⁰ Akpan, N. U, *The Struggle for Secession, 1966-1970: A personal Account of the Nigerian Civil War* (2nd ed., Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1976).

⁴¹ Cervenka, *The Organization of African Unity*, 205.

⁴² Key among the issues of disagreements between Biafra and Nigeria was the means of transporting relief materials and those who should administer the supplies of such materials.

⁴³ Cervenka, *The Organization of African Unity*, 209-210.

determined to explore all avenues that could lead to ceasefire. To achieve this, it fixed another meeting at its headquarter, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The organization had hoped that, by convening this meeting, the conflict would end in 1968 due to the progress made at Niamey weeks before. The same positive feeling was shared in Great Britain, especially in the British parliament.⁴⁴ The warring parties also had high hope in the Addis Ababa meeting, as the last where final solution to the conflict would be agreed upon. According to *TIME Magazine*, 'the Biafran leader, Lieut. Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, hopes to achieve a temporary ceasefire. For Biafra desperately needs a respite in the bitter war.'⁴⁵ Biafra's Ojukwu would agree to any resolution on OAU's platform provided it did not tamper with his secessionist ambitions. The Addis Ababa meeting was convened in August 1968, chaired by Emperor Haile Selassie. Prior to this meeting, OAU had made effort to invite both leaders, Gowon and Ojukwu, to be physically present at the meeting. Ojukwu honoured the invitation and showed up in person, but Gowon refused to honour it. Gowon's boycott of this august gathering was explored by Ojukwu to gather support around himself. Ojukwu, aside from canvassing for more recognition for Biafra, accosted Gowon before the audience at the conference. As confirmed by a source, 'Ojukwu accused the FMG of genocide in a speech to the OAU in Addis Ababa, in a clear attempt to garner diplomatic support'. In addition, He 'alleged that the massacres of eastern Nigerians in 1966 were a genocide and accused Gowon of aspiring to be the Hitler of Africa'.⁴⁶ Gowon's reason for not attending the conference could be construed in this context. If he had showed up, there might be a serious confrontation between Biafran and Nigerian delegation, and this would disrupt OAU's programme. Gowon's reason for not attending the meeting was later published in a regional newspaper, *West Africa* on 24 August 1968. In it, Gowon affirmed that 'I cannot enter discussions on equal terms with a man who, even before he became a rebel, was only one of my military governors'.⁴⁷ Ojukwu was truly one of Gowon's military governors, though evidence shows that they were on the same rank in the military prior to Gowon's assumption of Nigeria's head of state in 1966, and this was one of the developments that made Ojukwu to seek for Biafra's secession from Nigeria. Rank, pride and class informed his boycott of the meeting. Gowon considered it demeaning to sit on negotiating table with a secessionist leader discussing the future of Nigeria. More so, since the Nigeria was winning, Gowon therefore had nothing to lose by not attending.

Furthermore, Ojukwu also seized the opportunity to address other issues including Gowon's allegation that the 'minorities' were coerced or forced to be part of Biafra's struggle against their wishes. To clarify this and for Biafra to further win some points over Nigeria, Ojukwu requested, before OAU's member states, that a plebiscite be organized. According to him, 'the Nigerian Army has occupied some non-Igbo areas of Biafra. But this cannot be regarded as a settlement of 'minority question'.⁴⁸ Ojukwu was totally convinced that the only thing OAU could do to ensure peace was to urge Nigeria's delegation to give room for some transparency, by allowing the conduct of plebiscite amongst 'minorities' in the country. He emphasized further, 'this is why we have suggested plebiscite. Under adequate international

⁴⁴ House of Commons Debate, 22 July, 1968, Vol. 769, cc50-110.

⁴⁵ *TIME Magazine*, 2 August, 1968.

⁴⁶ Karen E. Smith, *Genocide and the Europeans* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 69.

⁴⁷ *West Africa*, 24 August 1968.

⁴⁸ This speech (untitled) by Ojukwu was quoted in Godfrey Mwakikagile, *Nyerere and Africa: End of an Era* (New Africa Press, 2010), chapter 9 'Tanzania Recognizes Biafra'. Accessed on 22 March 2013 at <http://books.google.com/books?id=D4LcR4iOmcYC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

supervision, the people of these areas should be given a chance to choose whether they want to belong to Nigeria or to Biafra'.⁴⁹ Ojukwu was certain of Biafra's victory over Nigeria if the plebiscite could take place. He was confident because some 'sections of the minorities believed in the cause of the Biafrans'.⁵⁰ This must have been realized by federal delegation, hence, its refusal to participate in the proposed plebiscite. Some have seen this as a weakness on the part of Nigeria. They affirmed that 'by refusing to hold a plebiscite, the Nigerian government only lost credibility on the disputed issue of minority rights but strengthened Biafra's case for self-determination'.⁵¹ Contrary to this assertion, it is believed that Nigeria was not concerned about the consequences of its refusal to embrace the proposed plebiscite, but how to crush and silence Ojukwu and his followers.

Alternatively, if Nigeria had subscribed to participating in the plebiscite, Biafra might even lose. This is because during that period some 'non-Ibos objected to secession because they feared being 'second class citizens' in an Ibo-majority Biafra'.⁵² Another reason is that 'the minority tribes, consisting of 5 million people, their land, oil fields, and ports will remain in Nigeria, not because they are forced to do so but because they want to do so'.⁵³ The 'minorities' were afraid of being marginalized by Biafrans if they won the war. The fear was strongest among the people of Rivers State.⁵⁴ For this reason, they considered the Federal Government's declaration of 12 states beneficial, as it would enable them to have their own state and control over their resources. This fear of minority tribes seemed not to have been recognized by the Federal Government at the time. Nigeria's refusal to participate in plebiscite could be due its inability to predict the actions and determine the popular wishes of the minorities, hence, it was better to avoid such exercise. If the Federal Government had allowed the plebiscite to hold, there was a high chance that it could clinch higher votes than Biafra. In addition, Nigeria may have considered the plebiscite as a drawback on the negotiation process. The 'minorities' included Ijaws, Ibibios, and Efik.

Ojukwu left Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, after the delivery of his speech. But the gravity or effect of his speech remained within the conference hall and generated further divisions between the delegates on both sides. Ojukwu's departure from Addis Ababa, however, did not obstruct further deliberations on ceasefire. The Emperor and other members of OAU made further efforts to ensure that the two parties, now represented by delegates, reached some reasonable agreements. Again, the head of delegation on the Federal side was Chief Enahoro, who led Nigerian delegation to the OAU's Heads of State Conference, 1968-74;⁵⁵ while the Biafran delegation was headed by Dr. Eni Njoku. After a while, each delegation was given the floor to present its proposal. The Federal side was first to mount the podium and the proposal was presented by Enahoro. The Federal proposal was filled with several uncompromising stances. The federal position was quite simple: Biafrans must first renounce secession and accept the borders of a reunified Nigeria as existed in October 1963,⁵⁶ before any further issues would be deliberated upon. The federal demand did not appeal to Biafrans. In the proposal presented by Dr. Eni Njoku, Biafra's determination to secede was further reiterated. Eni Njoku stated in a clear statement, amongst other demands, that Biafra's sovereignty should be accepted; and

⁴⁹ Mwakikagile, *Nyerere and Africa*, chapter 9.

⁵⁰ The Lord Bishop of Birmingham, House of Lords Debate, 29 April, 1968, Vol. 291, cc 948-72.

⁵¹ Mwakikagile, *Nyerere and Africa*, chapter 9.

⁵² *The New York Review of Books*, 'An Exchange on Biafra', April 23, 1970.

⁵³ Mr Nigel Fisher, House of Commons Debate, 13 March 1969, Vol. 779, cc1571-636.

⁵⁴ Mr Richard Hornby, House of Commons Debate, 09 December 1969, Vol. 793, cc 249-372.

⁵⁵ *Nigerian Tribune*, 18 January 2011.

⁵⁶ Peters, *The Nigerian Military and the State*, 131.

there should be maximum economic co-operation and common services between Nigeria and Biafra.⁵⁷ None of these requests was possible to be granted by the Federal Government. The first was certainly impossible, as it would confirm Nigeria's inability to keep its border intact. The second was also impossible, because it would mean that Nigeria had lost its control over Biafra. Hence, the relations between them could be likened to Nigeria's relation with other independent African states. This second demand might also be a political statement by Biafrans to secure their independence. There is a possibility that if the independence was granted, Biafra would close its borders to Nigeria and resume economic and political co-operation with other African countries, especially those who gave it recognition earlier.

As a response to Biafra's proposal, Chief Anthony Enahoro made a personal statement to Eni Njoku, who had earlier reiterated Biafra's position. According to Enahoro, 'secession is the basic issue which divides the two sides to the Nigerian conflict and Dr. Njoku's position on this basic question is totally unrealistic...'⁵⁸ Both sides continued to slug it out. Enahoro, shortly after his reaction to Njoku's presentation, left Addis Ababa for Nigeria. His position was filled by Femi Okunnu, the Federal Commissioner for Works, 1967-1974. Femi Okunnu headed the Nigerian delegation at Addis Ababa meeting till the end in September.

After presentations by both sides, it became clear that they were not ready to agree on terms of ceasefire. This stalemate represented the first stage to the failure of this meeting. Its failure was however not due to OAU's negligence or undiplomatic roles; it was due to the uncompromising positions of the warring parties. The organization explored every possible means to ensure that the parties saw reasons for a ceasefire.⁵⁹ And even with the actions and reactions by both parties, it ensured that they were kept within the meeting for further discussions. Haile Selassie and other OAU Committee members, to show how concerned the organization was about the war and the need to rescue the lives of victims of the war, organized more sessions on relief efforts.

At Addis Ababa: A Shift of Discourse to Relief Corridor

This discussion on the corridors where relief should pass into the areas they were needed took about four weeks. Despite the contradictory nature of the proposals presented by both sides on relief corridors, OAU ensured that they reached an agreement. At the meeting, both sides agreed that relief materials such as food and medicine should be supplied to key areas in Biafra, but they disagreed on the route through which the relief would enter into Biafra. The Biafrans wanted the relief to enter Biafra direct, whereas Nigeria wanted a different arrangement. Biafra's refusal to allow food to pass through Nigeria's territory before reaching Biafra was informed by the fear that the Federal Government might poison the food.⁶⁰ On the other hand, Nigeria's refusal to allow relief materials to flow directly into Biafra without passing through checks and screening at Nigerian airport was also informed by suspicion that Biafra could use that avenue to smuggle arms into its territory. In an interview, the Nigerian head delegation at this meeting, Femi Okunnu, gave the Federal Government's reason for non-compliance. According to him, 'experiences showed that some of the flights going to Biafra ostensibly carrying relief materials also carried arms. There were reports of such incidents and so, it was essential that there was an inspection of cargoes'.⁶¹ This was a clever means by the federal side to check the activities of Biafra. It

⁵⁷ Peters, *The Nigerian Military and the State*, 131.

⁵⁸ Cervenka, *The Organization of African Unity*, 214.

⁵⁹ For OAU's effort to bring about ceasefire during the conflict, read the book commemorating the organization's 25th anniversary: R. A. Akindele, *The Organization of African Unity: A Role Analysis and Performance Review*, ed. Akindele (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 1988).

⁶⁰ House of Commons Debate, July 1969, Vol 786, cc1588-712

⁶¹ *The Punch*, 24 November 2012.

was also a winning strategy, because if Biafra did not have any means of getting arms, it would easily surrender. The Federal Government wanted to ensure that anything that would give Biafra an edge of victory was blatantly checked. Giving Biafra the right to get relief supplies directly through its airport would mean that it had 'indirectly' become independent of Nigeria. Hence, any action by federal side that would signal its weakness to Biafra was generally avoided.

As the deliberations progressed, the Federal Government, having realized that Biafrans were still adamant on seceding, decided to take drastic steps. Gowon declared federal siege on another important city within Biafra called Aba, on the 25 August and this led to the fall of Aba on September 9, 1968. This was another bad omen for Biafra. With the news of another major victory for Nigeria, the meeting ended abruptly on same day Aba fell, with no major success on relief supplies debate.

This Addis Ababa gathering cannot be considered as a total failure. Although it was difficult to reach agreement on ceasefire, because of the uncompromising positions of the belligerent, progress was made on relief supplies. The effort of OAU as well as that of the Emperor of Ethiopia to resolve the conflict at this meeting was hailed in the British parliament.⁶² OAU, despite these waves of distractions, speedily organized the Algiers meeting to further discuss the Nigerian situation, within weeks of adjournment at Addis Ababa.

The OAU Summit at Algiers, September 1968

OAU's meeting at Algiers, capital of Algeria, was attended by African heads of state and government. It opened on 4 September 1968 under the chairmanship of the Algerian President, Houari Boumedienne. Boumedienne, in his opening speech, urged African leaders to embrace and protect the territorial integrity of Nigeria. The belligerent, as usual, remained uncompromising at this summit. Having realized this, voting session was organized for African leaders to decide either in support of Nigeria's unity or against it. During the voting '33 African states supported Nigeria; Rwanda and Botswana abstained from voting; and the four countries which recognized Biafra- Tanzania, Zambia, Ivory Coast and Gabon voted against Nigeria'.⁶³ This represented another huge defeat and disappointment to both Biafra and its supporters. Since this was a collective decision by member states OAU, Biafra must have realized, once again, that its claim to self-determination was in jeopardy. This was a clear sign that Biafra's diplomacy had failed again. This massive support for Nigeria's unity also confirms the popular ideology amongst African leaders about maintaining the colonial borders despite being independent. Backing Nigeria was necessary because most African states also had some 'minorities' within their boundaries, hence, Biafra's success could spur those 'minorities' under their control toward agitations for secession. Another rationale for such outstanding display of solidarity for Nigeria was because Biafra's success could set 'off similar conflicts in their own countries, many with similar tribal and ethnic problems, was a powerful influence on the minds of nearly all delegates to the Algiers Summit'.⁶⁴ Therefore, safeguarding Nigeria's boundary and keeping the nation united was a prerequisite to maintaining peace and stability on the continent.⁶⁵ As voting ended, resolution was passed on Nigeria-Biafra conflict. According to the resolution, OAU 'appeals to the secessionist leaders to co-operate with the Federal authorities in order to restore peace and unity in Nigeria....' It further reaffirms OAU's intolerance toward external actors for the avoidance of escalation of

⁶² House of Commons Debate, 27 August 1968, Vol. 769, cc1433-534.

⁶³ Godfrey Mwakikagile, *Africa, 1960-1970: Chronicle and Analysis* (Dar es Salaam: New Africa Press, 2009), 420.

⁶⁴ Cervenka, *The Organization of African Unity*, 217.

⁶⁵ Edward Shackleton, House of Lords Debate, November 5, 1968, Vol. 297, cc125-218.

the conflict, the Summit 'calls upon all member states of the United Nations and the OAU to refrain from any action detrimental to peace, unity and territorial integrity of Nigeria'.⁶⁶ This Algiers Summit gave OAU the opportunity to reiterate before Biafra and its supporters that its position declared at Kinshasa had not changed. In short, this resolution was like Kinshasa's, only for its 'wording and phraseology'.⁶⁷ Maintenance of Nigeria's unity was of utmost concern to the organization. The resolution boosted Nigeria's confidence to continually view the war against Biafra as her internal matter and to use all means at her disposal to suppress the rebellion.⁶⁸ Biafra's supporters must be highly disappointed by OAU's unwavering position as their efforts to convince the gathering on the need for Biafra's independence had proved abortive. Their appeals had failed, and arguably, after this summit, their support for Biafra must gradually have started to wane.

OAU's unchanging position in this conflict becomes clearer at this summit. Biafrans and the world realized that it was willing to pursue its goal to the end, no matter what it costs. The only assistance OAU could offer Biafrans was humanitarian, majorly in the areas of relief supplies as demonstrated at Niamey and Addis Ababa Peace Talks. Political consideration of any form desired by Biafra was not realistic before the organization. This must have been one reason OAU could not compel or persuade Nigeria to accept the proposed plebiscite by Ojukwu during the Addis Ababa meeting in August 1968.

The Algiers Summit was a success. This was because it presented, for the first time, the opportunity for African leaders to declare openly their positions on the conflict through voting. Although Biafra remained unmoved by OAU's declaration at Algiers, the organization's Consultative Committee still organized a meeting at Monrovia where relief and ceasefire were further discussed in 1969.

The Monrovia Peace Talks, April 1969

The OAU Consultative Committee's discussion on how to resolve the Nigerian conflict shifted to Monrovia, Liberia's capital in April 1969. The Consultative Committee, chaired by Haile Selassie, at Monrovia, tried all it could for the warring parties to agree to terms of ceasefire but to no avail. The importance of the Committee's sacrifice, effort and devotion to the Nigerian conflict seemed not to have been recognized by the belligerent. During this conflict, OAU had a lot of other projects that could make it feign oblivion to the Nigerian situation: the biggest of such projects being how to decolonize the African continent. Yet, the Committee still dedicated time, ample of time and resources indeed, to ensure that the conflict was settled amicably and peacefully. Despite the possibility of the Committee getting frustrated due to the uncompromising stands of the belligerent, and the fact that Biafra was near its defeat, deliberations continued for three full days, without any meaningful progress recorded.⁶⁹ This was the extent of the organization's commitment to peace and security in Nigeria and Africa.

The Committee, as the gathering approached its end, issued a resolution in line with Kinshasa and Algiers's. The resolution, though served as a reconfirmation of OAU's support for Nigeria, further revealed the importance of keeping Nigeria's political boundaries intact. The OAU Consultative Committee unanimously agreed that 'the two parties of the Civil War accept, in the supreme interest of Africa, a united Nigeria, which ensures all forms of security to all citizens'.⁷⁰ Hence, compromising Nigeria's political unity was synonymous to

⁶⁶ Mwakikagile, *Africa, 1960-1970*, 421.

⁶⁷ Akpan, *The Struggle for Secession, 1967-1970*, 140-141.

⁶⁸ Cervenka, *The Organization of African Unity*, 220.

⁶⁹ Akpan, *The Struggle for Secession, 1967-1970*, 144.

⁷⁰ Cervenka, *The Unfinished Quest*, 105.

compromising African Unity. This declaration, as expected, favoured Nigeria at Biafra's expense. The consistency of OAU Consultative Committee throughout the meetings held showed that the organization had direction, vision, credibility and was dependable. It was also a demonstration of its commitment to the pursuance of peace and security in the interest of Africa.

The Monrovia deliberations ended without any positive outcome. It failed, not because of the organization's inability to co-ordinate the parties in conflict, but due to the 'egos' incessantly displayed by the parties against each other. OAU did all any organization would do, but unfortunately, its constant appeal could not prevent further attacks by the parties against each other. Again, for the love of peace, and commitment to Africa's security, it called for another meeting on Nigeria-Biafra conflict in Addis Ababa in 1969.

The OAU Summit of September 1969 and the End of Biafra

This was the last session convened by OAU to discuss the Nigeria-Biafra conflict in 1969. Organized for all African heads of state to attend, but the four African countries that had declared support for Biafra and Sierra Leone⁷¹ shunned this gathering. The absence of the African countries (Gabon, Ivory Coast, Zambia, and Tanzania) must have been informed by their collective belief that their presence at the gathering would not change the minds of OAU and other African leaders to take decisions that would favour Biafra at the expense of Nigeria. As for Sierra Leone, there might be some reasons for its absence understandable to the heads of state there present. Even if this was the case, the Sierra Leonean government was supposed to send at least a delegate to represent the country as demonstration of its commitment to peace and security in Africa. Their absence, however, did not prevent the participants from discussing the conflict and making further recommendations. OAU advised all governments, international organizations, humanitarian institutions as well as political, moral or religious bodies in the world⁷² to desist from any action that could frustrate its efforts toward finding lasting solution to the Nigerian crisis. Further, to demonstrate its commitment to a united Nigeria, it appealed to the warring parties to preserve, in the overriding interest of Africa, the unity of Nigeria and accept immediate suspension of hostilities.⁷³ This was, again, proof of the organization's dedication to ensure ceasefire in the conflict as soon as possible.

The aim of the above declaration was to serve as reminder to Biafrans that the organization's position had not changed. This message was well received by Biafrans and further led to severance of their relationship with OAU. Biafrans took to instant display of their distrust for OAU through open declaration of Biafra's readiness to boycott any form of negotiation or peace talks under its auspices. For instance, Ojukwu, in his address to the Biafran Consultative Assembly on 1 November 1969, reiterated his preparedness to meet the federal representatives in any place and at any time to discuss the conflict without OAU's presence.⁷⁴ Furthermore, even when the organization, through the effort of Emperor Selassie, invited both parties to Addis Ababa towards end of 1969, Biafra refused to attend. Ojukwu's November 1969 speech points to five possibilities. First, it was a sign that Biafra was weary and could no longer continue fighting. Second, a sign that Biafra had become short of both military personnel and weapons with which to further engage the federal military armed with

⁷¹ Cervenka, *The Unfinished Quest*, 105.

⁷² The OAU Resolution at the Sixth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of States and Government held at Addis Ababa from 6 to 10 September 1969. Reference: 'Resolution on Nigeria (AHG/Res.58/Rev. 1 (VI), 6. http://www.au.int/en/sites/default/files/ASSEMBLY_EN_6_10_SEPTEMBER_1969_ASSEMBLY_HEADS_STATE_GOVERNMENT_SIXTH_ORDINARY_SESSION.pdf.

⁷³ The OAU Resolution at the Sixth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, 6.

⁷⁴ Cervenka, *The Unfinished Quest*, 106.

destructive weapons supplied by Great Britain and Soviet Union. Third, a sign that Biafrans had lost hope in their demands, hence, they were ready to renounce their rights to 'self-determination'. Fourth, a sign that Biafrans no longer enjoyed the kind of moral and financial support they were getting from their supporters. Lastly, a proof that Biafrans had failed in all their efforts to outsmart Nigeria, hence, the need to surrender their arms and seek peace for the avoidance of more deaths. Overall, Biafra could be said to have collapsed by 1969. If this was not the case, Ojukwu, in his consciousness, would not have willingly announced his readiness to meet with the Federal Government whom he considered as enemies.

Following this declaration, on Thursday 8 January 1970, Ojukwu secretly deserted Biafra and fled to Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in the company of Dr. Michael Okpara and Mr Akpan.⁷⁵ His stated reason for leaving was to go and search for peace and military requirements after it had become obvious to him that Biafran Republic was never a reality. This reason, according to one his closest associates, Philip Effiong, was false. In Effiong's word, Ojukwu was 'running away'⁷⁶ from the country into hiding. Ojukwu's departure lends credence to the fact that his earlier statement in November 1969 served as gesture of Biafra's surrender as well as marked the fall of Biafran Republic. Similar observation was made by *TIME World* magazine, 'By 1969, Biafra was on its knees. Sensing defeat, Ojukwu fled into exile in the Ivory Coast days before Biafra surrendered in January 1970'.⁷⁷ From all indications, it is obvious that the November 1, 1969 declaration served as Ojukwu's 'indirect' way of informing the world about Biafra's surrender. This, though arguably, serves as the first major declaration of Biafra's collapse. A day after his departure, on January 9, 1970, another Biafran city, or to say the obvious, the last, fell. This was Owerri.

Prior to Ojukwu's departure from Nigeria, he authorized Colonel Philip Effiong, who was his Chief of Staff, to take over his position as Biafran Commander. Again, Ojukwu, as described by his closest associates (i.e Azikiwe and Akpan above), was 'greedy' with power. Hence, if it was not clear to him that Biafra had fallen by 1969, he would not have handed over his position of authority as Biafra's Commander in Chief to Philip Effiong. On January 12, 1970, Colonel Philip Effiong declared Biafra's readiness to surrender and three days later, Biafrans finally gave up their struggle for secession. This declaration 'officially' ended the Nigeria-Biafra conflict. Nigeria's peace and unity was preserved. Though the war did not end under the auspices of OAU as expected, it ended through its relentless interventions and dedicated support to Nigeria.

AFRICA'S STABILITY AND OAU'S INTERVENTION IN THE NIGERIA-BIAFRA CONFLICT: A RE-ASSESSMENT

OAU's involvement in the Nigerian Civil War was deep and highly sustained one.⁷⁸ This was evident in the organization's interventions starting from the outbreak of the conflict. In 1967, OAU dedicated its time, energy and resources to organize and co-ordinate a meeting held at Kinshasa where, despite its principle of non-interference, it went ahead and discussed the Nigeria-Biafra war in great detail. In addition, the Consultative Committee also passed a resolution on the conflict despite clamour by Gowon that the conflict was a domestic one, hence, any attempt to deliberate on it by OAU would be termed as an infringement on its own principle as well as interference in Nigeria's internal affairs.

⁷⁵ *Tell Magazine*, 5 December, 2011.

⁷⁶ *Tell Magazine*, 5 December, 2011.

⁷⁷ *TIME World*, 2 December, 2011.

⁷⁸ Christopher O. Quaye, *Liberation Struggles in International Law* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 226.

More so, in 1968 alone, OAU, apart from the Kampala meeting organized by the Commonwealth Office, which anyone would be convinced that the organization was also instrumental to its arrangement since the agenda had to do with Africa, organized under its umbrella, three important meetings at different locations: Niamey, Addis Ababa, and Algiers, where the Nigerian conflict was given special attention and further resolutions were pronounced. These actions demonstrate and confirm how deeply concerned the organization was about the ongoing conflict in Nigeria as of the time. Any organization which chose to be bystander would not dedicate its resources to convening three meetings in one year deliberating on the Nigeria-Biafra conflict.

Furthermore, OAU's involvement in the Nigerian Civil War continued despite the hostilities and unguarded statements made by the belligerent toward its Consultative Committee at different times. In 1969, it called for more meetings on the Nigerian conflict. On the agenda of these meetings, mostly ceasefire and relief supplies were featured. The organization took these giant strides effortlessly and relentlessly. Even with the financial difficulty which it was experiencing at the time, owing to non-payment of dues by some member states towards its budget, the organization ensured that the Monrovia and Addis Ababa meetings held in September and discussions took place under normal conference conditions. It also made an 'energetic attempt'⁷⁹ to organize another one in December 1969, but Biafra's delegation refused to attend.

That the conflict was not resolved under OAU's banner does not necessarily mean that the organization's war aims were frustrated or it was prevented from intervening deeply in the conflict. In a war situation as the Nigerian conflict, resolutions are made gradually and diplomatically. The two parties in conflict had their demands which they were not willing to abdicate for whatever reasons. This obstinacy on the part of the parties rather made things complex for OAU. The only thing an organization like OAU could do was to ensure that the warring parties were called to a negotiation table and urged to agree on terms that could lead to ceasefire. This, through its meetings, OAU did generously. But as the saying goes that '*you can take a horse to water, you cannot make it drink*', the organization found itself in a fix. The parties in conflict, as demonstrated above, were bent on achieving their war aims before they would agree to cessation of hostilities. While the federal delegations, through their proposals presented at various meetings, emphasized on the need for Biafra to renounce secession and accept the Twelve-States federal structure before ceasefire, Biafra kept clamouring and pushing for secession. In a situation as this, whereby the warring parties were adamant about their demands, it would be difficult for OAU to compel any of these parties to give up its demands at once, considering that each had sponsors, backings, and allies from within and outside Africa. In short, the external support which the parties, especially Biafrans,⁸⁰ were receiving made peaceful settlement by OAU unachievable.

For any continental organization as OAU, peacekeeping or conflict resolution is possible, but hard to achieve, especially when the issue revolves around the rights to self-determination. Both intra and interstate conflicts constitute a lot of problems to continental or regional bodies anywhere in the world. Similar challenges as the ones faced by OAU was experienced by European Union (EU), when its member states, especially United Kingdom,⁸¹ criticized and opposed its economic, monetary, and political integration policies, until it eventually

⁷⁹ Mr Richard Wood, House of Commons Debate, 13 March, 1969, Vol 779, cc1636-96.

⁸⁰ Mr Michael Stewart, House of Commons Debate, 09 December 1968, Vol. 793, cc 249-372.

⁸¹ *Sky News*, 'EU Referendum: PM Risks Commons Vote Revolt', May 12, 2013.

pulled itself out of the Union in 2015.⁸² Additionally, at present, some EU member states are experiencing internal political tensions which have defied solutions by the Union. As such, it would be unfair for anyone to conclude that EU is not concerned about the challenges of its member states or that it had failed in its responsibilities toward ensuring stability and well-being of states under its umbrella.

Furthermore, the world organization, United Nations (UN), is also not exonerated from this similar plight. Since the Syrian crisis broke out in March 2011, United Nations, despite its efforts to pass a resolution on the Syrian government to cease killings of innocent civilian population⁸³ and allow peace to return to the country, has not been able to achieve this goal till today. Yet, the Syrian crisis continues. More innocent civilians are being killed daily. More infrastructural facilities are being destroyed. The political machinery is weakened. The economy of Syria has gone into shambles. Despite the heart rending pictures of dying children and women across Syrian, United Nations has not been able to end the conflict. In this light, would it be justifiable to regard United Nations as a toothless bulldog because of its inability to prevent further killings and end the conflict in Syria? The obvious answer is NO. This is because the Syrian rebels and the government have their demands and are determined to pursue them until they are actualized. All that UN needed to do, which it had done (and still doing) was to set up committees on the Syrian crisis to discuss the war and ensure that the conflict did not escalate. It took the action, set up committee of experts and sent envoys to Syria to negotiate for peace and ceasefire. Famous amongst the envoys was Kofi Annan who was sent to Syria some years ago but could not achieve any resolution. Again, UN-Arab League envoy to Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi was also sent, but within a short while, Lakhdar, due to the uncompromising positions of the belligerent, announced his intention to resign. Hence, if UN or the Arab League (which Syria belongs) could not end the Syrian conflict once and for all, how could OAU (which was barely 4-year old in 1967) be expected to resolve the delicate Nigerian crisis within a short time? Negotiation is a continuous process in any conflict. Diplomacy and dialoguing are also key to peaceful resolutions. It is important to note that as the Syrian crisis has been politicized by members of United Nations Security Council, the Nigerian crisis was also politicized by the foreign powers because of the Cold War politics on the continent. Hence, the comparison or analogy.

The current analyses have shown that in any conflict, such as the Nigerian Civil War, 'involvement' should be separated from 'outcome' to make a fair judgement. Hence, OAU, no doubt, was deeply involved in the Nigerian Civil War, even more than it had done in the previous African conflicts, especially the Congo crisis of early 1960s. More so, contrary to the arguments by some scholars, the OAU's intervention in the Nigerian Civil War was hardly prevented by its principle. This was demonstrated through several meetings it convened to discuss the Nigeria-Biafra conflict as shown in this work. Lastly, OAU's intervention in the conflict was to prevent Biafra from breaking away from Nigeria; this mission was accomplished as Nigeria became victorious after Biafra's surrender in 1970 and remained intact afterwards. To this end, OAU played important roles toward maintenance of peace and stability across Africa despite its several challenges.

⁸² See Hunt, Alex, and Brian Wheeler, 'Brexit: All you need to know about the UK leaving the EU', *BBC*, June 27, 2017.

⁸³ Human Rights Watch, *Syria : Events of 2015* (World Report, 2016).