



## Northeastern Launches 'Global Issues in the 21st Century' Lecture Series

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*On November 7th, Northeastern University held the first lecture of its 'Global Issues in the 21st Century' series. Entitled, 'The Challenges of Governance Provision in Africa, the lecture addressed multifarious issues, from genocide to proliferation of small arms to demobilization and reintegration.*

The 'Global Issues in the 21st Century' lecture series was developed by Professor Denise Garcia, and is in place with help from a collaboration of Northeastern University's Political Science Department and International Affairs Program. The series was created as a method of addressing the challenges that face the global community in today's interconnected environment. The challenges that the series hopes to examine include international energy security, reduction of poverty, halting climate change and preventing the spread of infectious diseases. The Series will focus specifically on the development of innovative solutions to these challenges, the advancement of creative methods of international cooperation and the generation of propositions to enhance the conduct, practice and theory of International Relations [\[1\]](#).

On November 7th, the inaugural lecture of the series, entitled 'The Challenges of Governance Provision in Africa' was held at the John D. O'Bryant African American Institute. Although there are many challenges to governance provision in Africa, one of the most relevant and destructive is intra-country and inter-country conflict. Conflicts throughout the African continent in the past fifteen years have claimed over ten million lives and cost around 300 billion dollars [\[2\]](#). The prevalence of war and conflict in Africa has severely hindered investment and development in the continent and has left it the most impoverished region in the world.

The challenge of pervasive conflict in Africa was addressed by three different speakers, all approaching the issue from different angles. Omar McDoom, a Ph.D. student at the London School of Economics and a fellow at Harvard's International Security Program, dealt with genocide and compared aspects of the Rwandan genocide and the current genocide in Darfur. McDoom presented background information on both conflicts and illustrated the ways in which historic, demographic, and geographic features affect the characteristics of genocidal conflict. He went on to explain the various responses of the international community to both genocides and concluded by presenting recommendations for

methods of resolving the conflict in Darfur through both soft and coercive diplomacy.

The second speaker, Antonio Evora, a political affairs officer and small arms team leader at the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, spoke about the challenges and importance of disarmament and preventing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Evora discussed the overwhelming number of negative impacts small arms have on a country's development as well as the various methods of disarmament used by the United Nations, such as incentive programs and weapons destruction.

The final presentation was given by the World Bank's Bruno Donat. Donat works for the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP), a program based in the Great Lakes region of Africa, which focuses on demobilizing soldiers after they give up their arms, and then providing them with the resources to reintegrate into society. Donat presented 'Buying Time for Peace,' a documentary he created which shows the process of demobilization and reintegration and includes testimony from child soldiers and other successfully reintegrated soldiers. The MDRP has been very successful in the Great Lakes region; nearly 300,000 ex-combatants have been demobilized and over 180,000 have been reintegrated or are in the process of reintegrating [\[3\]](#).

At the IIJD, we believe that the challenges our world faces today require nothing less than a global commitment to overcome them. The traditional mechanisms for debating global issues, while avoiding their underlying causes, have not produced a better nor safer world.

Recognizing and describing "multifarious issues, from genocide to proliferation of small arms to demobilization and reintegration" phenomenon in Africa, while necessary, does little to explain the root causes of the phenomenon. Furthermore, problem definition does not lend itself to action. The same is true of Africa's development crisis. The development crisis in Africa is widely recognized and has garnered a significant amount of international attention, but rarely does the debate move past problem definition to a deeper level of analysis that identifies and seeks to address root causes. The IIJD's conference report, "Priorities for the Future," developed from the findings of the International Conference on the State of Affairs of Africa, asserts that, "Dysfunctional systems of governance, supported by poor leadership and inept economic and political institutions established after colonization are the root causes of Africa's development crisis. The repressive political environment and the systemic barriers to securing civil and political rights imposed by government institutions paralyze the ingenuity of the people of Africa and precipitate the decline of the continent into poverty" [\[4\]](#).

Nonetheless, the ideas presented during the lecture were in line with the resolutions and recommendations of the IIJD. The work that Bruno Donat and the World Bank's MDRP is doing is in line with the 2006 International Conference on the State of Affairs of Africa (ICSAA) resolution to urge international financial institutions to work in collaboration with local non-governmental organizations and experts to

assist Africans in achieving development and economic growth through a paradigm shift that emphasizes a community-based approach, and development of the human capacity for self-reliance [\[5\]](#). The Series' focus on conflict prevention and eradication in Africa is strongly related to the ICSSA recommendation that in order to prevent conflict and civil war, African leaders should stop all discriminatory policies or practices and establish democratic rule.

In terms of the Series' goal to develop innovative ways to eradicate and resolve conflict in Africa, the IIJD believes that in post-conflict areas, leaders should resolve ethnic conflicts through a truth and reconciliation commission that would foster a national dialogue. The work of the MDRP is especially relevant to the recommendation that leaders should implement post-conflict reconstruction assistance programs and affirmative action for disadvantaged groups through scholarships, employment opportunities, social reform, settlement, and reintegration of former rebels [\[6\]](#).

[\[1\] Lecture Series Brochure.](#)

[\[2\] Africa's Missing Billions, Oxfam International.](#)

[\[3\] MDRP Fact Sheet.](#)

[\[4\] ICSSA Resolutions.](#)

[\[5\] ICSSA Recommendations.](#)

[\[6\] ICSSA Recommendations.](#)