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**Opening remarks at the DESA
Expert Group Meeting on Conflict prevention, Peace building and Development
By
Mr. Jose Antonio Ocampo
UN Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs**

Colleagues and friends

I would like to welcome you all to this meeting. My special thanks to those who accepted our invitation to speak at this meeting. We appreciate their willingness to join DESA in its endeavors to grapple with the complexities of the issues that surround United Nations' work in the areas of conflict prevention, peace building and development.

Conflict prevention remains the *raison d'être* of the creation of the United Nations. However, over the decades, the nature of conflict has changed. A large number of conflicts today are in the poorest nations of the world where the development imperative is the greatest. This is a matter of serious concern, which the UN Secretary-General has expressed in several of his statements and reports. He has repeatedly emphasized the need to move towards a structural prevention strategy, one that would address the political, social, cultural, economic, institutional, environmental and other structural causes that often underlie the immediate symptoms of armed conflicts.

I would also like to mention that the High level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, set up by the Secretary-General is expected to deliver its report shortly and its recommendations would impact on the way "hard" and "soft" threats and challenges are addressed by the United Nations. I would like to recall what the Secretary-General said while announcing the Panel: *"The United Nations must confront all these threats and challenges – new and old, "hard" and "soft". It must be fully engaged in the struggle for development and poverty eradication, starting with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; in the common struggle to protect our common environment; and in the struggle for human rights, democracy and good governance"*. It is important that we prepare ourselves for the challenge that the Secretary-General has defined so eloquently.

Structural prevention is a fairly complex undertaking. It not only involves decisions about the nature of interventions but also the timing to ensure their effectiveness. There is a growing recognition that interventions should be made at both ends of the conflict continuum. On the front end, development policies in all countries, particularly in conflict-prone countries, should be geared towards managing conflict and preventing it from becoming violent. At the other end are the countries emerging from conflict or in post-

conflict situations, where the need is to develop a development policy framework that is designed to save them from falling back into the conflict trap. Short term measures to curb violence and bring stability are absolutely essential but those alone do not provide a firm foundation for lasting peace. The frightening fragility of peace in countries emerging from conflict warrants even more integrated approach to peace-keeping, peace building and development than the development strategies meant to prevent the eruption of conflict.

The UN system organizations and departments have been working towards the integration of development policies in their efforts to prevent violent conflict and to build sustainable peace. Operational actors on the ground have also been engaging in activities that are designed to achieve these objectives. Several inter-agency processes on conflict prevention and peace building have also been pursuing this approach. The UN Interdepartmental Framework for Co-ordination on Early Warning and Preventive Action ("Framework Team" or "FT") has initiated and coordinated early preventive action in situations that could develop into complex emergencies or break out into violent conflict. The UN has also made efforts to analyze the politico-economic causes of conflict. The Informal Group on the "Political Economy of Armed Conflicts" Chaired by the Department of Political Affairs, is in the process of developing an Action Plan addressing the linkages between economic factors and armed conflict

Increasingly, the inter-governmental bodies within the UN have been exploring the linkages between development issues and peace and security. The Security Council has been looking into peace and security and its implications for human rights, gender, natural resources, small arms and cross-border. Likewise, the General Assembly, as well as the ECOSOC and its Functional Commissions, have started looking at these issues in a more interlinked manner.

DESA has also been undertaking a variety of activities for promoting development measures that could help in preventing violent conflict and promote peace and stability in post conflict situations. The details of these activities have been provided in the background papers and the matrix prepared for this meeting. I would like to mention some of the important ones that include

- substantive support to the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Groups on African Countries Emerging from Conflicts, such as the Group on Guinea-Bissau and Burundi and the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti;
- mainstreaming gender, perspective in peace processes, including support to the Security Council;
- addressing the interrelationship of social integration and peace-building;

- analyzing the impact of conflict on natural resource management and the relationship between natural resource endowments and causes of conflicts;
- mainstreaming conflict prevention in the sphere of governance and institutional development; and
- building partnerships on peace and development.

So far, these activities have been performed by various parts of the Department with their own perspectives and are not guided by a broader departmental thinking and a common framework. Moreover, these areas and themes were generally selected on the basis of supply side strengths rather than in response to the demand or needs of such countries. We realize that there is a need to bring coherence in our work. At the conceptual level, we need to attain greater clarity regarding the complex interlinkage between these areas and how our work can help in preventing conflict and building peace. At the functional level, we need to establish our niche and find ways to complement and add value to the ongoing work by other parts of the system. More specifically, we are trying to grapple with the following questions:

- What areas or themes should DESA focus on and how should it approach those thematic areas?
- How should we (a) deepen the integration of conflict prevention, peace-building and development within DESA, and (b) at the same time, effectively support and add value to the work of the other parts of the UN in this respect?
- What instruments does DESA have to promote further work in this area and how should these be deployed?

To seek answers to these questions, earlier this year, I established a Task Force within DESA. The Task Force has initiated a consultative process to address these issues. This meeting of experts is being held as part of the consultative process. We hope that it will help us in our search for clarity and in identifying DESA's comparative advantages and how those can be used for the benefit of the system as well as in developing strategic framework for DESA's future work.

Based on DESA's own expertise, strengths and institutional challenges that it faces as well as the demands from the Charter bodies that it services, four specific themes have been chosen to guide our discussions.

They are:

First: Structural causes of conflict and the role of sustainable development: conflict prevention and peace-building perspectives, focusing on two specific sub-themes: (a) Socio- economic development policies and conflict prevention; and, (b) Natural resource governance and conflict prevention.

Second: Socio-economic and institutional challenges of post-conflict peace-building and development: a long term perspective.

Third: Partnerships and civil society: roles and capabilities in conflict prevention and peace-building, and

Fourth: Institutional approaches and mechanisms for conflict prevention, peace-building and development.

The Department has also prepared background papers on each of these themes. I would like to emphasize that the ideas and proposals contained in those papers are of exploratory nature. There is nothing prescriptive. We also understand that these are not cutting edge themes in this field. This meeting is meant to focus on the basics that DESA is seeking to clarify for its work and for its integration with other parts of the system. While covering these aspects, you may wish to address those dimensions that are of direct relevance to these issues but are not included in the background papers.

Lastly, before we embark on substantive discussions, I must repeat that this meeting of the Expert Group is but one step in the consultative process. We may not have all the answers in today's meeting. But surely we can come up with ideas, thoughts and approaches that will help develop a framework for DESA's analytical and policy work in blending development into conflict prevention and peace-building; and at adding value to the work of the UN system.

Thank you.