

SPEAKING NOTE FOR JUDY CHENG-HOPKINS,
REGIONAL SEMINAR ON THE PEACEBUILDING
COMMISSION, SANTIAGO, 14 SEPTEMBER 2009

Stop the War, Win the Peace

Inaugural session

[1064 words / 6-7 minutes]

Good morning. I would like to thank the Foreign Minister of Chile, Mariano Fernandez Amunategui, the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, Ms Barcena, and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, Ambassador Munoz, for organizing this seminar and for inviting me to speak.

I am delighted to be here as I embark on my new role as Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding at the United Nations.

Last week, while the results of the election were still being counted in Afghanistan, a colleague told me that as more people take up weapons, the price of Kalashnikovs in northern Afghanistan is rising. As you are aware, a Kalashnikov is a weapon of choice for any self-respecting rebel today. One gun is now worth twelve times what it was a year ago.

This small but alarming statistic illustrates the huge challenges of peacebuilding: to convince ordinary people that their future and their best hopes lie with peace, not violence; to demonstrate that peace can bring them real, lasting benefits; and to offer them an incentive to reject violence and to embrace the cause of building peace.

Let me cite another figure that illustrates what we are up against. It has been estimated that about half of those countries in which a conflict has ended fall back into war within a decade. Low-income countries are especially at risk of relapse. Peacebuilding concentrates on reducing that risk. It does so by enabling and empowering the government and citizens of a country to start rebuilding the structures of government and to start rebuilding their lives.

This is a complex challenge. It is not surprising, then, that peacebuilding should involve so many different parts of the United Nations. Peacebuilding is a collective effort, undertaken by many actors and not just a stage in a simple, linear process. Peacebuilding can comprise conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, humanitarian aid or development assistance. Indeed, the challenge is as much about winning the peace as stopping the war.

Throughout the last twenty years, UN peacekeeping operations have grown and evolved, and though still imperfect, they provide an essential, valuable and I would say indispensable service that no other entity in the world can provide. But what happens when the UN's "blue helmets" leave? The Economist magazine recently asked this question, and gave the answer, "Blue briefcases". They meant that judges and policemen and bureaucrats were needed to help rebuild a country's institutions and lay the foundations of lasting peace.

Here I would like to update The Economist. Nobody carries a briefcase in the Darfurs and the Afghanistans of this world today. I would rather refer to them as the "blue backpacks".

But it is not just about judges and police, creating safety and security and enshrining the rule of law; it is not just about supporting political processes, dialogue and reconciliation. These things are important, but they are not enough, for without basic services like water, health and education, without revitalizing economies destroyed by war, in order to create jobs and start to build a normal life - without all these things we will not have lasting peace.

With an agenda this broad, you can see why successful peacebuilding requires a coherent, co-ordinated effort from the UN and the international community. Yet in his report, In Larger Freedom, the former Secretary-General Kofi Annan observed that there was “a gaping hole in the United Nations institutional machinery. No part of the United Nations system effectively addresses the challenge of helping countries with the transition from war to lasting peace.”

Member states agreed there was a missing link. And they decided that a new and unique body was needed – one where key member states could work together to make a difference; one that would stay the course throughout the long, slow, painstaking process that is peacebuilding; and one supported by a new, innovative fund that would get peacebuilding activities up and running quickly and demonstrate real peace dividends in the lives of ordinary people.

That was the inspiration of what we call the new peacebuilding architecture, which consists of a) the Peacebuilding Commission, b) the Peacebuilding Fund and c) the Peacebuilding Support Office. They work as follows.

First, the Peacebuilding Commission, the institutional linchpin of the architecture, is an inter-governmental body that advises the Security Council and the General Assembly. It brings together in a single forum all major players in each country's peacebuilding process: that is, the UN, international financial institutions, countries contributing troops, major donor countries, neighboring countries, regional organizations, and the permanent members of the Security Council. It advises on integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding; it sustains political and financial support to these forgotten crises, well beyond the evaporation of the "CNN effect"; and it tries to persuade all stakeholders to work together to support an agreed roadmap for peace consolidation. The Commission currently supports peacebuilding in Sierra Leone, Guinea-Bissau, Burundi and the Central African Republic. And I am pleased to note that the Chairperson of the Commission is sitting with us today, Ambassador Munoz, who has moved the work the Commission to even greater relevance today.

The second component of the architecture, the Peacebuilding Fund, is designed to quickly release resources needed to launch peacebuilding activities. Over \$310 million has been pledged to the Fund, well exceeding its initial target of \$250 million. The Fund can provide financing rapidly for urgent peacebuilding needs. So it enables countries, as they emerge from conflict, to seize that early "window of opportunity", to provide an immediate, visible "peace dividend", and thus build people's confidence in the peace process.

The final piece of the architecture is the Peacebuilding Support Office in the UN Secretariat, which I lead. This supports the work of the Commission, manages the Fund and advises the Secretary-General on UN peacebuilding strategies.

We are in the third of the new architecture. Expectations are high, stakeholders are impatient. I realize that we must race against time to start producing real results. In the end the success of this architecture will be measured by the answer to one simple question: have our peacebuilding efforts succeeded in preventing countries from falling back into violent conflict? That, ladies and gentlemen, is the true bottom line.