Promotion of the Role of Mediation as a Tool for Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa: The Role of the United Nations and of the Security Council

ADDRESS

by

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at

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1. Introduction

Mr. Chairman
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to congratulate the Ad-hoc Working Group of the Security Council, the International Peace Academy and the New York University Center on International Cooperation on their initiative to organize this Policy Forum on the topic: ‘Enhancing the United Nation’s Capacity for Conflict Prevention in Africa: The role of the Security Council’. This topic is indeed very important and timely. As you may be aware, the UN Secretary-General has long made conflict prevention and resolution the cornerstones of the organization’s quest to promote a more peaceful, equitable and prosperous world. Indeed, his view is that, for the United Nations, there is no higher goal, no deeper commitment and no greater ambition than preventing armed conflict.

The topic of my presentation today is: “Promotion of the role of mediation as a tool for Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa: the role of the United Nations and the Security Council”. It is important to note from the onset that conflict itself is part of normal human behavior, and if dealt with peacefully, often a useful one. It is in fact through non-violent conflict that societies grow and transform themselves. Hence, the objective of conflict prevention should be to help resolve a conflict through appropriate institutions and mechanisms, so that it does not become destructive and deadly. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that the UN has registered more success in conflict management and conflict resolution efforts than in conflict prevention. There are four main reasons for this:

First, there is resistance on the part of Member States to the kind of intrusive activities which could assist the UN to have more accurate early warnings which are necessary for conflict prevention. Second, even when there are early warnings, the political will on the part of Member States and especially of the Security Council members to take early preventive actions is not always there. Third, successful prevention requires the cooperation of multiple
stake-holders within and between countries and international organizations. Fourth, and this is critical for the prevention of a relapse to conflict by those countries emerging from one, is the issue of adequate and predictable resources for peace-building.

2. **What is to be done?**

In general, there is the need for the UN and its principal organs to develop appropriate tools and mechanisms and to marshal the political will and the necessary resources for conflict prevention and resolution. There are two dimensions to this: one is to intensify current efforts and the second lies in the relevant aspects of the proposals for reform in the Secretary-General’s Report *In Larger Freedom*.

a) **Towards a More Proactive Approach by the UN**

The Secretary-General has initiated a broad ranging discussion on prevention on armed conflict which has sensitized the United Nations Member States and is starting to yield consensus for specific preventive activities which involve the active United Nations system such as a new mechanism for structural prevention (addressing the socio-economic conditions which could lead to conflict); frequent use of good offices of the Secretary-General and his Special Representatives; special procedures in the field of human rights; the International Tribunals (ICTY, ICTR, ICC, Sierra Leone and Cambodia Tribunals) have created a cumulative effect, with the standards of legal accountability being strengthened.

Furthermore, the Secretary-General has highlighted the need to build national, sub-regional and regional, as well as international capacity for conflict prevention and resolution. In this regard, he has put forward a number of guiding principles including:

i. Conflict prevention must have national ownership. International efforts in conflict prevention should therefore focus on assisting in building national capacity in this field.
ii. Conflict prevention and sustainable and equitable development should be seen as mutually reinforcing activities. An investment in national and international efforts for conflict prevention must be seen as a simultaneous investment in development since the latter can best take place in an environment of sustainable peace.

iii. A successful preventive strategy depends upon the cooperation of many United Nations actors, including the Secretary-General, the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the International Court of Justice and United Nations agencies, offices, funds and programmes, as well as the Bretton Woods institutions. However, the United Nations is not the only actor in prevention and may often not be the actor best placed to take the lead. Therefore, Member States, international, regional and sub-regional organizations, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and other civil society actors also have very important roles to play in this field. Over the past years, the United Nations has aimed at developing close working relationships with these actors.

b) New Proposals with Potentialities for Enhancing Conflict Prevention

The report of the Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change and the Secretary-General’s own report, In Larger Freedom are generating new momentum for the reform of the United Nations in general and of the Security Council in particular. The reports address issues that may arise before, during and after violent conflicts, including the capacities needed for prevention, peace enforcement, peacekeeping, peace-building and the protection of civilians. In addition to the proposal for the creation of a Peace-Building Commission, there are issues relating to the use of force, protection of human rights and strengthened peace-keeping operations. With respect to the Peace-Building Commission, the new UN body would identify countries at risk of violent conflict, organize prevention efforts, and “marshal and sustain the efforts of the international community in post-conflict peace-building”. This recommendation would involve the Security Council, ECOSOC, donors and
national authorities in filling a crucial gap by giving the necessary attention to countries emerging from conflict.

3. **Conclusions:**

With respect to conflict prevention in Africa, the main challenge for the UN and the Security Council is to ensure sustained engagement by Member States to commit the necessary political will and resources to strengthen local, national, regional as well as international capacity for conflict prevention and to develop comprehensive conflict prevention strategies tailored to the needs of the countries and regions concerned.

As the Secretary-General has rightly stressed, this promise will not be realized easily unless it is pursued with singular determination by Africa’s leaders. The effort will undoubtedly require leadership, courage and willingness to depart from the ways of the past. Africa should put the prevention of armed conflict at the heart of its effort to unite across old divisions, to build a continent characterized by sustainable peace, the rule of law, and economic progress. It is only then that Africa can break out of the vicious circle of poverty, conflict and under-development, and move into the mainstream of the process of globalization. Fortunately, through the AU, NEPAD and especially the African Peer Review Mechanism, the leaders of the continent are showing new and enhanced determination to lead the way. The international community should then act to complement these efforts.

I thank you for your attention.