

REMARKS BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL
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AT THE UN SUMMIT FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS –
ROUND TABLE ONE “ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF
LARGE MOVEMENTS OF REFUGEES”
[Conference Room 2 – 10:00-13:00]

New York, 19 September 2016

Wars and disasters have displaced an unprecedented number of people across the world. Needless to say, displacement also has political roots, with implications for peace and security.

I am therefore happy to see several important and relevant elements that address root causes in the Declaration that leaders have adopted today.

Importantly, leaders recognized that as long as we do not address the causes that force people to flee their homes, we will not be able to stem the flow of refugees effectively.

The declaration also recognizes that displacement is not only a humanitarian, development or operational challenge. This becomes clear when we look at the top seven countries where most refugees originated from in 2015: Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic. In all seven countries, men, women and children are displaced because of violent conflict. In all seven countries, UN special political missions or peacekeeping operations are active. All seven situations are on the agenda of the Security Council.

Today’s conflicts have evolved in complexity and are more intractable. The New York Declaration notes that protracted crises exacerbate the vulnerability of communities, lead to poverty, and hamper self-reliance and resilience. Hence, we have the need to resolve these long-standing crises without further delay.

We note with great satisfaction that Leaders have also integrated one lesson from the UN's long-standing work on peace and security into the declaration: prevention has to be a guiding principle for our efforts.

Prevention means *early action*; addressing with foresight the political differences that lead to or perpetuate violent conflict.

When we fail to act early, the suffering multiplies; our humanitarian resources fall short; and the continued displacement exacerbates the political tensions that need to be overcome.

Prevention also means *inclusiveness*; leaving no one aside or behind.

When peace agreements, development programmes and humanitarian assistance are not inclusive, they sow the seeds of further instability and violence.

Finally, prevention means *sustainability*; having a long-term vision for how peace is made and sustained.

Accordingly, addressing root causes also includes strengthening democracy; building stronger, more resilient, accountable State institutions; ensuring adequate checks and balances; promoting the rule of law; and working to establish effective democratic control over the armed forces.

To meet these challenges, we need to reinvest in specialized capacities, in particular, civilian tools such as mediation expertise, electoral assistance, capacities to prevent violent extremism. We need to look at prevention as a joint diplomatic, political, development and human rights effort and strengthen the UN's role.

It is now incumbent upon us, collectively, to translate the leaders' re-commitment to the principle of prevention into reality, to quickly move from rhetoric to practice.

To conclude, allow me to raise an important concern that undermines our efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts as well as to effectively respond to large-scale displacement: *polarization*.

No matter how well prepared and equipped we are, the increasing polarization in the international system and in regional contexts undermines any effective response.

Large movements, and the conflicts that trigger them, are not isolated phenomena. They bleed across national and regional borders.

When the efforts of the international community, especially those of neighbours, are at odds, conflicts persist. Men, women and children are forced to flee and find neither the protection they need and deserve, nor can they return to their homes.

Acting proactively, pre-emptively and in concert is vital to peace and security. When countries and communities are left alone to provide protection to millions of people on the run, tensions grow, xenophobia and nationalism rise, and stability is undermined.

As we advance our efforts to address the root causes of displacement, and representing the UN's political arm, whose motto is 'Diplomacy. Prevention. Action' – DPA – , I call on you to make proactive, inclusive, long-term and unified prevention a guiding principle of our work.