



Quaker United Nations Office

*Five Years of Progress in UN Preventive Action*

QUNO New York Statement at the Geneva Peacebuilding Forum event, “Strengthening International Support for Conflict Prevention”, December 1st, 2011

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

My thanks to our hosts and the organizers, and for the very interesting contributions of my fellow panelists.

The last Secretary-General’s report on prevention writ large, the “Progress report on the prevention of armed conflict” was released in 2006. The following five years have seen important developments in our understanding of violence, both in conflict settings and beyond, and in the preventive approaches taken by the United Nations and the international community as a whole. My objective today is to use the 2006 report as a starting point for a review of key subsequent developments in the field of prevention and to draw out some particular threads that may provide some context for today’s deliberations. My comments are in part informed by the discussion at the November 21st meeting in New York of the Security Council Working Group on Conflict Prevention and Resolution in Africa, on the topic of “Recent Lessons Learned in African Conflict Prevention & Resolution: Coordinating Response and Supporting Local Capacity”.

**I. The 2006 Prevention Report**

The context for the 2006 report was the run-up to the 2005 World Summit, following the Report of the High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change in 2004 and the “In Larger Freedom” report of 2005, as well as the World Summit outcome document itself. The report was a broad review of UN preventive capacity, and emphasized the need for a continued balance between operational and structural prevention. It added a third category, systemic prevention, to address supranational risks, and emphasized the role of a wide range of actors in preventing violence in a sustainable manner.

The report was clear about the need, over time, to transition from response to upstream prevention: “..the thrust of preventive work must shift...from reactive, external interventions with limited and ultimately superficial impact to internally driven initiatives for developing local and national capacities for prevention..”

Furthermore, the report acknowledged the need for prevention to be rooted in building national capacities for dialogue and consensus: “I invite Member States to consider creating elements of a

national infrastructure for peace. I draw particular attention to the importance and potential of national dialogue and consensus-building processes and urge those .. to reach out to the broadest possible cross-section of society..”

## **II. From 2006 to 2011: Solid but Disconnected Progress**

The years since 2006 have seen major developments in preventive thinking and experience, although sometimes this has occurred in threads that have not always communicated well with each other or with the mainstream of UN practice. This is not meant to be a comprehensive list, but here are some of the themes:

- 1) *The professionalization of mediation and preventive diplomacy*: following the mid-decade recommendations for strengthening mediation capacities, 2008 saw the establishment of the Mediation Support Unit and the Standby Team, and the strengthening of the capacity of the Department of Political Affairs. More recently we have seen the Secretary General’s reports on Mediation and on Preventive Diplomacy, as well as this year’s GA resolution on Mediation. The role of special political missions has been expanded, and the UN has recognized the need for regional preventive capacity by establishing three regional political missions. Overall, there has been a recognition of a need to professionalize the practice of mediation, and several strong steps have been taken in that direction.
- 2) *Better definition in peacebuilding*: the UN Peacebuilding architecture, the PBC, PBF and PBSO, was put in place in 2005. The last three years have seen several milestones in peacebuilding, including the reports on ‘Peacebuilding in the Early aftermath of Conflict’, ‘Women’s participation in peacebuilding’ and the Civilian Capacity Review, as well as the 5 year Review itself. There have been clear developments in the coordination of peacebuilding actions, particularly with the World Bank, and the PBF has firmly established itself as a flexible, catalytic and strategic funding resource. More broadly, there is a growing acceptance of the key role of rebuilding relationships between individuals, communities and government as a key element in peacebuilding – including the sense that peacebuilding is a political process, as the review attests.
- 3) *Articulating the impact of armed violence, and violence beyond conflict*: the Geneva Declaration was adopted in 2006, and this approach has continued to develop through the Oslo commitments of 2010 and the Second Ministerial Review Conference in 2011, as this line of thinking, explicitly linking armed violence with the failure to achieve development goals, gathered momentum. Additionally, this process has articulated the importance of community level prevention and the key role of civil society – an area also highlighted by the extensive work of the WHO in violence prevention over the last decade. The armed violence analysis has also highlighted the growth of armed violence outside of traditional inter and intra state conflict, noting that non-conflict deaths are almost ten times more frequent than conflict deaths. Indeed, it should be noted that the World Development Report for 2011 highlights a significant expansion in our definition of violence, that violence is not just a problem for

low-income, fragile states, that it effects all levels of society, and that making significant changes can take decades. The international community is only just beginning to digest the implications.

- 4) *Building national preventive capacity*: following on the call in the 2006 report for building national infrastructures for prevention, there have been several coordinated efforts by the UN system on the ground, for example those involving UNDP and BCPR as well as DPA, to support national governments in creating local capacities for prevention, including in Kenya, Ghana and South Sudan. The Framework team has a key role in linking these discussions to the UN community in New York. In addition, the role of Peacekeeping Missions in prevention has been growing. For example, the recent deployment for UNMISS includes a large contingent of civil affairs officers, and the mission has an explicit mandate to “support the Government of the Republic of South Sudan in exercising its responsibilities for conflict prevention, mitigation, and resolution”.
- 5) *New mechanisms in justice and human rights*: the ICC issued its first arrest warrants in 2005, and potential ICC involvement has now become a standard discussion in response contexts. The Human Rights Council was of course established in 2006, and mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review are gradually moving to increase government accountability. In parallel, the concept of a State’s responsibility to protect its citizens was developed in the Secretary General’s 2009 Report on Implementing the Responsibility to Protect, although the use of R2P to justify military intervention remains a contentious issue.
- 6) *Recognition of the importance of local and regional roles and voices*: the last several years have seen a growing awareness of the importance of local and regional actors, both in response and upstream preventive action. The voices of fragile states are now being better heard (for example, in the statements of the g7+ nations) and regional organizations are articulating their own principles and approaches to prevention (such as the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework of 2008). The UN has steadily improved its communication with and support for regional organizations (for example, the Peace & Security Council of the African Union and the UN Security Council have met annually since 2008) and the voice of regional organizations is increasingly sought in response situations. In addition there has been a growing emphasis within peacebuilding on building national capacities.
- 7) *Inclusion as a necessary condition*: it has become clear that prevention requires the inclusion of all of society. The World Development Report 2011 notes that “Political exclusion and inequality affecting regional, religious, or ethnic groups are associated with higher risks of civil war ... while inequality between richer and poorer households is closely associated with higher risks of violent crime.” Inclusion of women, of youth, of minorities, of regions beyond the capital and communities outside the elites, inclusion of civil society, in peace-making, in peacebuilding and in prevention is a requirement for preventive action to be sustainable. It is being increasingly acknowledged that national capacity is more than just

government capacity. Additionally, women's issues and perspectives received a particular focus in 2010, with two Secretary General's reports and the launch of UN Women, although implementation remains a challenge.

- 8) *Responsible Investment and Development*: the notion that development and private sector actors have a role to play in prevention has been recognized since the late 90's, with the development of the "Do no harm" doctrine and the idea of "conflict-sensitive development" on the one hand, and the growing field of Corporate Social Responsibility (echoed at the UN with the Global Compact in 1999) on the other. These trends have continued in recent years, with the adoption of the UN Principles of Responsible Investment in 2006 and the development of a number of agreements around natural resource extraction. Last but not least, there has been a growing interest in the impact of environmental issues and climate change on conflict.

This is necessarily an incomplete list, but serves to illustrate the wide variety of contexts in which progress is being made in the field of prevention. Nevertheless, it should also be clear that many of these advances have been made in isolation: the UN system is still far from adopting a unified approach to prevention issues, or even a common understanding of how all these threads can work together.

### **III. Looking to the Future: Responding to a New Understanding of Security and Violence**

2011 saw significant advances in our understanding of violence and conflict, and the implications for the UN are only just beginning to be addressed.

Firstly, we are now working with a *broader definition of violence*. The World Development Report 2011 on "Conflict, Security and Development" highlighted the insights that had been percolating through from a number of areas, that violence today is multi-dimensional, and occurring in a wide variety of contexts. For a while now the armed violence community has been noting the rapid growth of deadly violence outside the traditional conflict settings where the UN has often focused much of its attention. The studies that have been produced as part of the Geneva Declaration process, that show that non-conflict deaths outnumber conflict deaths by almost ten to one, graphically illustrate the impact of urban violence, organized crime and high levels of interpersonal violence. Violence is shown to be a scourge of cities as well as the countryside, of middle-income as well as low-income communities. Additionally, in many contexts, violence is multi-dimensional, with a number of different types of violence coming together in unpredictable ways.

Secondly, the *perspective of fragile and conflict-affected countries* themselves is beginning to be better articulated, particularly through the role of the g7+ countries in the International Dialogue for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding. In 2010 in Dili, this group of fragile and conflict-affected countries

identified their five security priorities: Conflict Resolution and Prevention, Reconciliation, Social Inclusion, Peacebuilding & Dialogue and Rule of Law (note that these were listed as security priorities). Then the ‘New Deal’ that emerged from the Busan meeting in November 2011 set out five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding goals (the “PSGs”), beginning with ‘Legitimate Politics - Foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution’ (the full list is Legitimate Politics, Security, Justice, Economic Foundations and Revenues and Services). The interesting thing about the g7+ approach is how it *brings together the perspectives of security, politics and development*. These are still largely separate conversations in a UN context, yet the reality on the ground is that they are inextricably linked. This is an issue that needs to be addressed both at a policy level (it is critical that whatever framework replaces the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 acknowledges the impact of violent conflict on development objectives) and in implementation on the ground.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In the period since the last Secretary-General’s report on Prevention in 2006, the UN system has significantly expanded its knowledge and experience of major elements of preventive action. The core message of that report remains valid, that we still need to continue to shift the thrust of preventive work from “reactive, external interventions” to “developing local and national capacities for prevention”. As our understanding of the effects of the interconnected nature of violence, security and development grows, the importance of a holistic and connected approach to prevention is greater than ever.

Andrew Tomlinson  
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