

Security Council Open Debate on Preventive Diplomacy Tools: Prospects and Challenges in Africa
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Statement by Deputy Secretary General Migiro

Preventive diplomacy is an old art, but it faces new and evolving challenges. There is a pressing need to re-evaluate how we can use our limited resources and capabilities to maximize the impact of preventive action. I therefore thank the Nigerian presidency of the Security Council for its initiative in convening this debate. I would like to welcome in particular His Excellency the Foreign Minister of Nigeria. I thank you, Mr. Minister, for taking time out of your business schedule to be with us this morning for this important debate.

I am pleased to speak to the Council today on behalf of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

The term “preventive diplomacy” was first coined by former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. Since his time, the good offices of successive Secretaries-General have helped in the peaceful resolution of inter-State wars, civil conflicts, electoral disputes, border disputes, questions of autonomy and independence and a range of other problems. In today’s fluid geopolitical landscape, we have new challenges to address. Preventive diplomacy must evolve to deal with increasingly complex civil wars, organized crime and drug trafficking and other transnational threats.

In recent years, we have witnessed the very welcome emergence of stronger policy frameworks in favour of conflict prevention, particularly in Africa, with a growing capacity for operational response. Preventive diplomacy today is being conducted by a broader array of actors than ever before, using a wide range of tools. This makes it possible to consider multifaceted preventive strategies of a kind that were previously not an option.

Over the past three years, we have sought to strengthen the Department of Political Affairs so that it would be capable of effectively carrying out its lead role in this area. In the past year alone, the United Nations has supported, often in partnership with others, more than 20 peace processes, and responded to many more disputes that did not reach that level.

We have improved our response capacity at Headquarters; we have regional diplomacy and peacemaking offices on the ground; we cooperate more effectively within the United Nations system and with regional and subregional organizations.

With the support of Member States, we are continuing to professionalize our mediation support capacity, which is seen as an increasingly valuable resource within the United Nations system and by our partners. We have also attempted to develop new tools, including the use of investigative mandates to help defuse tensions in judicial cases with political implications.

We are helping national authorities to build their capacity for dispute resolution, in addition to development programmes that can help address some of the structural causes of conflict. Most missions mandated by the Security Council today include an important mediatory role, typically carried out by the head of mission, in recognition of the fact that the need for diplomacy persists throughout the conflict cycle. All of this holds promise for our preventive diplomacy in Africa. We see a need to focus, in particular, on four fronts.

First, we must continue to strengthen our partnerships. Successful peace processes require the contributions of a range of actors, at both the regional and the international levels. Our Dakar-based Office for West Africa has forged innovative working relations with the African Union and ECOWAS to address political crises throughout the subregion, a model that could be usefully replicated elsewhere. Other noteworthy developments include the increasing use of international contact groups and elders structures. Recent engagements in Guinea, Niger, the Comoros and Kenya have shown what we can achieve through partnerships that yield a combination of influence, impartiality, capacity and capability.

Secondly, we must be prepared to persuade. Effective preventive action depends critically on the will of the parties to the conflict. The better we understand motives, calculations and incentives to use violence, the better we can target our response. We must be willing to use all available leverage to persuade the key actors that it is in their own interest to accept diplomatic assistance to avert conflict. Neighbouring countries and subregional organizations that are closest to events on the ground and may have unique influence can be key allies here.

Thirdly, the international community should continue to invest in prevention. The global economic crisis has put new pressures on resources, and there is an overall trend towards doing more with less. Diplomatic approaches and responses, when successful, are highly cost-effective.

Fourthly, we must do more to support and encourage the role of women in prevention. Time and again, women in Africa and elsewhere have demonstrated a strong commitment to working to achieve sustainable peace. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) reaffirmed the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding. Yet women are still underrepresented in the formal stages of conflict prevention. We can and must do better.

According to recent studies, 15 years' worth of development aid to Africa has been effectively cancelled out by the cost of war on the continent. The case for preventive diplomacy is compelling on moral, political and financial grounds.

We have improved our ability to detect warning signs of impending crises, and we have at our disposal a growing range of tools and instruments to address them. We must now set our sights on building our capacity for international preventive diplomacy, so that when called upon we can respond reliably and promptly.