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General Assembly of the United Nations

President of the 66th Session

OPENING REMARKS AT THE HIGH LEVEL MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE ROLE OF MEMBER STATES IN MEDIATION

New York, 23 May 2012

Your Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Distinguished Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to the high level meeting on the role of Member States in mediation.

I sincerely thank the Ministers, high level officials, delegates, and representatives of civil society, research institutes and academia for joining today's meeting.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We live in uncertain times.

Unprecedented shifts are taking place across the world.

As nations are transforming into new democracies, the moment is now for mediation.

Mediation can prevent conflict and stave off bloodshed.

Mediation can support peaceful transitions and nurture reconciliation.

Mediation is inclusive and can help build representative, democratic societies that realise the legitimate aspirations of their peoples.

It is against this backdrop that I selected the theme, "The peaceful settlement of disputes" as one of the four pillars of my Presidency this session.

This pillar has provided space for extensive deliberations and increasing the momentum around mediation.

For the General Debate in September, Heads of State and Government expressed their strong support for the increasing role of mediation, in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

On 9 November last year, at the interactive meeting on United Nations mediation that I convened here at the UN, we had comprehensive discussions from prevention, peacemaking and peacekeeping perspectives.

On 11 January this year, the Friends of Mediation brought together representatives of regional organizations, again at the United Nations.

There, we heard firsthand about the extensive and increasing mediation efforts being undertaken by regional organizations.

On 24-25 February this year, the International Istanbul Conference, which I was pleased to address, focused on the mediation efforts of track II actors. These actors include former high level personalities and civil society organizations.

And so, we come to, today.

Today, our meeting aims to complement the process to date, with a special focus on Member States.

In recent years, more and more Member States from varied parts of the world have become actively engaged in mediation efforts.

Member States are using mediation as a tool to build bridges, settle disputes and resolve conflicts.

By distilling from the experiences of key mediators, we will seek today to identify the main challenges to effectively dealing with regional and international conflicts.

We will hear from Ministers, other eminent mediators and experts about their experiences, and about how mediation processes can be more effectively conducted and managed.

Following this informal high level meeting, a chair's summary will be circulated to the Membership.

Through this meeting, we will contribute to the report and guidance prepared by the Secretary-General, mandated by the General Assembly last year, and to the upcoming General Assembly resolution on mediation.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I would take this opportunity to briefly offer a few points on what I believe are the essential elements for successful mediation endeavours.

The first is:

Strong leadership and coordinated action.

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of mediators, both in terms of number and variety.

Depending on the situation and nature of the conflict, there are often multiple actors dealing with different dimensions of the issue.

For the sake of coordination and efficiency, however, in each specific case there should be one lead mediator or one lead mediation team. This lead should be supported by others, where necessary.

Enhancing coordination and coherence will be discussed in greater detail during the afternoon panel.

The second essential element for a successful mediation process is:

A fine balance between principles and vision.

Among other key elements, a mediator should, of course, be impartial and neutral.

This does not mean, however, that he or she should not have a vision for a possible compromise or resolution of the dispute, based on consultations with, and the expectations of, the parties involved.

The third essential element is:

Knowledge.

A mediator should have deep knowledge and a sound understanding of the parties, the situation, the history of the conflict, as well as the relevant cultural and other values.

During negotiations, the core issues and root causes of the conflict should be properly addressed, so that the peace agreement can be viable.

Mediators should bear in mind that mediation is an ongoing and dynamic process, requiring a long term approach and a comprehensive but flexible plan.

And fourth is:

Sustainability and inclusiveness.

The sustainability of a peace agreement depends largely on whether or not it is inclusive.

In this respect, female leaders and women's organizations play a vital role in garnering the support of their communities for peace processes.

To ensure greater inclusiveness, traditional or indigenous mediation mechanisms should be incorporated and combined with official mediation efforts.

These are but a few necessary components of a mediation process.

No doubt additional important elements will emerge from today's discussions.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me be frank.

Statistics suggest that there are more mediation failures than mediation successes.

But this should not discourage us.

We should thoroughly analyse - at the political, legal and academic levels - the reasons for our shortcomings.

And we should seriously consider how to reverse these figures, so that mediation is rightfully employed as a meaningful, effective tool.

Improving our response to, and prevention of, conflicts through dialogue should remain our guiding light.

In this regard, the analysis in the Secretary-General's upcoming report will make a major contribution to our endeavours and discussions.

Let me also commend the Secretary-General for identifying the prevention of violent conflict among the priorities of his five-year action agenda.

The UN has a central role to play in mediation.

The UN provides legitimacy and expertise to mediation processes.

Given the recent, increasing demand for UN participation in mediation efforts, the UN's capability should be further strengthened.

We should explore other possible means and tools that would help better address the challenges for successful mediation.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Human rights violations, mass atrocities and conflicts are going on across the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere.

Dialogue among civilizations offers a complementary approach to both preventing and peacefully resolving conflicts.

We should strengthen the role of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations as a mediation tool of the international community.

More emphasis should also be placed on the institutionalization of practices not only within UN, but outside it as well.

I am also following with great interest new initiatives of Member States and regional organizations.

The UN should continue to support these efforts.

And I would urge the international community to give greater attention to enhancing the capacity of civil society organizations, and to benefit from their comparative advantage.

This moment is a test.

The need for effective mediation is great and growing.

Let us show the world that the best way forward – that the only way forward – is through the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Thank you.

I am eager to hear now from the Secretary-General and our most distinguished group of eminent speakers, who have extensive expertise and experience in mediation.
