

Security Council Open Debate on Preventative Diplomacy
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Statement by H.E. Mr. Hague, Representative of the United Kingdom

The resolve and effectiveness of the United Nations is tested whenever lives are threatened. When conflict looms, the world looks to the United Nations for a decisive response to prevent violence through agile and creative diplomacy, to stop aggression, to end conflict when it does happen and then to help keep the peace, and be prepared to stay the course so that fragile countries do not lapse back into war.

I think we have shown this year that the United Nations can take a lead in saving life and protecting civilians. In Libya, we mustered legitimate diplomatic, economic and military pressure to prevent a regime from waging war against its people and to deter its members from committing crimes. Our swift action prevented a humanitarian catastrophe, saving the lives of thousands of civilians. It led many to abandon the Al-Qadhafi regime, so hastening its demise, and it allowed the Libyan people to seize the opportunity to determine their future.

In Côte d'Ivoire, acting with the unanimous support of the Security Council, United Nations peacekeepers undertook limited military operations to protect civilians. The United Nations demonstrated zero tolerance for attacks against civilians and United Nations peacekeepers and for the desperate acts of a ruler seeking to cling to power against the wishes of the people.

These experiences hold lessons for us as we seek to improve the role of the United Nations in preventive diplomacy, because the first lesson is that the will to act is the vital ingredient in conflict prevention. Without international will and leadership, we risk failing in our duty to uphold international peace and security, giving comfort to the perpetrators of crimes while causing victims to despair.

The increasing frequency of internal conflicts rather than conflicts between States presents different challenges but does not remove our responsibility to protect the civilian population. The impact of conflict is devastating and is not confined within national borders. Lives are lost, people displaced, trade links severed, economies crippled, and crime and terrorism can flourish. The consequences are a burden on us all and a danger to all.

We have a responsibility to use all the means available to the United Nations to prevent conflict and to ensure that it does not escalate. We must encourage sustainable peace through mediation and dialogue, through support to local conflict-prevention efforts, or through more coercive measures, as the situation demands. Military action may be necessary, as has proved the case in Libya, but it is a last resort and is appropriate only in certain circumstances. Britain is not calling for this, for instance, in the case of Syria.

The second lesson is that actions to prevent conflict must have a strong legal basis and attract regional support, as we did in Libya working with the Arab League and with a clear United Nations resolution. We must also work with the grain of the societies we are dealing with, recognizing that each situation is different and that we cannot impose solutions. Such legitimacy and wide support, themselves the product of diplomacy, must always be our goal, even when in the short term this can make it harder for nations to act.

The third lesson is that we must develop our capacity to anticipate and react to developing conflict, both as individual countries and here at the United Nations. The United Kingdom is now placing

great emphasis on effective conflict prevention. This means not waiting for problems to become crises but using our network of embassies as an early-warning system and our role in international organizations to help resolve disputes and create agreements.

We know that development is an indispensable component of conflict prevention, so in Britain we will not retreat an inch from our commitment to spend more of our national income on development. We are enshrining in our law our promise to spend 0.7 per cent of our national income on alleviating poverty elsewhere and ensuring that an increasing proportion of it contributes to conflict prevention. By 2015, 30 per cent of our official development aid will support fragile and conflict-affected areas.

In the United Kingdom, we are also using our new National Security Council to become better at anticipating conflict, and we can share our analysis with others. We also emphasize the need for strategic patience in supporting States that are emerging from conflict. Our experiences from the western Balkans to the Horn of Africa show that a hard-won peace must be preserved and not taken for granted. To cement peace, it often takes generations, and so where we are engaged, we must guard against turning our attention and resources away too soon.

Looking forward, I believe that we must apply these three lessons — political will and leadership, international legitimacy and investment in conflict prevention — to the immediate challenges we face. Each case will be different, but we need to apply conflict prevention efforts in a way that is flexible and according to our best ability to influence the situation on the ground.

For instance, in Syria the United Kingdom believes that a response from the Security Council is long overdue. The time has come for a resolution demanding an end to violence and real political reform that applies effective pressure on the Syrian authorities to this end. The consequences of inaction would weigh heavily upon us if we were to turn a blind eye to killings, abuses and repression.

In Libya, we must support the National Transitional Council's efforts to rebuild the State and chart a new course for its country. I welcome the Council's decision last week to mandate a United Nations mission for Libya. Attention must now be given to the United Nations role in coordinating international efforts at the request of the Libyan Government and in support of its own plans.

In the Sudan, we must work more effectively to establish a strong position to respond to the worrying levels of violence in Darfur, Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile state. And in Yemen, the United Nations should continue to use its good offices to help mediate a peaceful settlement and an end to the appalling violence. In parallel, we must intensify our work to build up the United Nations capacity for preventive diplomacy. This means greater cooperation between United Nations agencies to identify threats and the regular attention of the Security Council on countries at risk.

We support the United Nations increasing use of mediation specialists and special envoys, and we welcome the Secretary-General's call to increase the number of senior female mediators in line with resolution 1325 (2000). Above all, United Nations Member States must be prepared to invest early on in supporting fragile States where requested, as well as to react rapidly when a crisis arises. Such preventive action saves lives, protects fundamental human rights and helps preserve peace. These are indeed our essential tasks.