



STATEMENT BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON**

AT

**THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY PLENARY MEETING
ON THE REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
ON THE PREVENTION OF ARMED CONFLICTS
(A/60/891)**

**UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS
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Excellencies,

Prevention of armed conflicts is a moral imperative. It is a human necessity to save lives and protect civilian populations. It is a political necessity for the credibility of international cooperation, in particular the United Nations. But it is also an economic necessity both for the countries involved and for the international community, because of the enormous costs of war and post-conflict recovery and reconstruction. Early action should be the natural reaction to early warning. Prevention must thus be a moral, political and economic priority for the United Nations and its Member States.

With this background I am particularly pleased to receive the progress report of the Secretary-General on the prevention of armed conflict. His personal commitment to early action and preventive diplomacy has been pivotal in integrating a culture of prevention into all activities of the Organization. His first comprehensive report on the subject in 2001¹, has been a cornerstone for the Organization's agenda in the field of prevention.

Based on the Secretary-General's 2001 report, you, the Members of the General Assembly, adopted a comprehensive plan of action for the preventive work of the United Nations in resolution 57/337. The Security Council also passed a resolution (1366 (2001)) on its role in the prevention of armed conflicts.

The United Nations has an essential role to play in preventing armed conflicts, by virtue of its mandate, legitimacy, universal membership and

¹ A/55/985-S/2001/574

broad-ranging activities and competence. One of its principle tasks under the Charter is the maintenance of peace and security, in other words, the prevention of war. Preventive diplomacy must engage all parts of the UN system, including specialized agencies, funds, programmes, regional and field offices, and the international financial institutions, as well as civil society and non-governmental organizations. From the review annexed to the report of the Secretary- General, it is evident that many of the activities of the UN have, directly or indirectly, a conflict-prevention dimension. This is most welcome.

As pointed out by the Secretary-General, Article 33 of the Charter obligates Member States to seek peaceful settlements of any dispute that may endanger peace and security. Any Member State can, according to Article 35, bring disputes or situations to the attention of the Security Council or the General Assembly. I could not agree more with the Secretary-General when he encourages Member States to make more effective use of tools for pacific settlement of disputes, such as negotiation, mediation, conciliation and judicial settlement. On a personal note, I consider Article 35 to be diplomatic poetry; it is unfortunate that the tools listed there are rarely used.

Such preventive action should be proportional to the intensity of the conflict. If measures like fact-finding missions and the range of tools under Chapter VI of the Charter do not suffice, further steps such as deploying peacekeeping missions and actions under Chapters VI and VII must be considered.

The gist of the Secretary-General's report is the importance of using the full capacity of the United Nations. With the Department of Political Affairs as

the focal point, with the Secretary-General's good offices, effective system-wide coherence is key, bringing in actors in human rights and economic, environmental and social development. To promote democracy, respect for human rights, protection of refugees, and sustainable development worldwide must be part of a comprehensive preventive strategy. We need to work both with the more short-term measures described as operational prevention and the long-term, so-called structural prevention addressing sources of tension and root causes of conflict.

The Secretary-General is pointing at some crucial issues that we, the international community, need to address, such as natural resources, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation and migration. I would like to make the linkage here to the reform agenda of the United Nations and the importance of a strengthened UN. The United Nations is in a unique position to address these challenges in a comprehensive way.

Many of the reforms that you decided on in the World Summit Outcome last year and that the General Assembly implemented during this session will in fact be important tools in preventing armed conflict.

The Peacebuilding Commission has the potential to make a difference to countries emerging from conflict to choose the way of sustainable development instead of relapsing into conflict, helped by the international community.

The Human Rights Council is to strengthen the standing of human rights within the UN system. The UN Charter itself recognizes the importance of

universal respect for human rights for the creation of conditions of stability and well-being that are necessary for peaceful relations among nations. The new Human Rights Council will contribute, through dialogue and cooperation, towards prevention of human rights violations and respond promptly to human rights emergencies.

The full realization of the Millennium Development Goals and a committed approach to poverty reduction and sustainable development is a prerequisite for the maintenance of peace and security. The World Summit Outcome reaffirmed the inter-linkage between development, peace and security and human rights. Our leaders made substantial commitments at the World Summit in the field of development, commitments that were followed up through a resolution adopted by you on 30 June.

The World Summit Outcome welcomed the establishment of the Democracy Fund at the UN. I am encouraged that the Fund has now decided on the financing of the first projects.

I could not end without referring to the importance of the commitments made in the World Summit Outcome on the Responsibility to Protect. This was a major achievement on which we all must build. The most important part of this concept is the responsibility to prevent ethnic cleansing, mass killings and genocide, and to supply States with the capacity to protect their own populations. This is a crucial task for the United Nations.

I sincerely hope that the General Assembly will continue to play an active role in preventing armed conflict, in accordance with its role in the Charter. The General Assembly is not only the engine for normative work but also

the highest forum for expressing the common concern and the political will of the international community.

I look forward to an active and constructive debate today. Since only a few days remain of the 60th session, we will at the end of this meeting – I hope you will agree -- decide to revert to the Secretary-General's report and the recommendations contained therein during the 61st session. I have already discussed the importance of this matter with my successor.

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Additional comments (excerpt) following the statement by the Deputy Secretary-General:

What a qualitative difference we could have in the United Nations if we moved the focus from the late stages of conflict to the early stages, if we were to spend more time on smoke detection rather than taking care of the house that has already burned down. And you, Mr. Deputy Secretary-General, with your background in the media world, know, of course, how much effect television cameras have. When I was Emergency Relief Coordinator, I sometimes slightly bitterly asked myself whether conflict existed if there were no pictures of the conflict. What happened when the cameras disappeared? And, by the way, have you ever seen a headline in a newspaper that a disaster did not occur? Prevention is not rewarded to the extent that it ought to be.