

The Secretary-General:

May I first thank you, Madam, and the Swedish presidency for convening this meeting and allowing me to have my first formal presence in the Security Council, discussing what I believe must be the priority of everything we do together — preventing conflicts and sustaining peace. I believe that the massive attendance at this meeting proves that, indeed, this message is something that we all fully recognize.

The United Nations was established to prevent war by binding us in a rules-based international order. Today, that order is under grave threat. Millions of people in crisis look to the Council to preserve global stability and to protect them from harm, but the enormous human and economic cost of conflicts around the world shows how complex and challenging this is. Yet we spend far more time and resources responding to crises rather than preventing them. People are paying too high a price. The Member States are paying too high a price. We need a whole new approach.

It has proved very difficult to persuade decision-makers at the national and international levels that prevention must be their priority — perhaps because successful prevention does not attract attention. The television cameras are not there when a crisis is avoided. Most of today's conflicts are still essentially internal, even if they quickly take on regional and transnational overtones. They are fuelled by competition for power and resources, inequality, marginalization and exclusion, poor governance, weak institutions and sectarian divides. They are exacerbated by climate change, population growth and the globalization of crime and terrorism. With so many factors at work, it takes very little to trigger a crisis that can engulf a country or a region, with global consequences.

But while the causes of crisis are deeply interlinked, the United Nations response remains fragmented. The interconnected nature of today's crises requires us to connect our own efforts for peace and security, sustainable development and human rights not just in words but in practice. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions on sustaining peace demonstrate strong intergovernmental support for an integrated approach. The challenge now is to make corresponding

I have appointed a senior adviser on policy, whose main task will be to map the prevention capacities of the United Nations system and to bring them together into an integrated platform for early detection and action. This work will enable us to link the reform of our peace and security architecture with the reform of the United Nations development system, while respecting the specific areas of competence of the Security Council and the General Assembly. We need the support of both organs for our efforts to build and sustain peace across the continuum, from prevention, conflict resolution and peacekeeping to peacebuilding and long-term development.

The primary work of conflict prevention lies with Member States.

(spoke in French)

The United Nations system as a whole must stand ready to assist Governments in implementing Agenda 2030, strengthening governance and institutions, and promoting the rule of law and all human rights: civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights. The Human Rights Up Front initiative, which also seeks to integrate the issues of peace and security, human rights and sustainable development, will allow us continue to strengthen the capacities of the United Nations in this field.

Humanitarian agencies and development actors need to work together to help States prevent crises and strengthen the resilience of their societies. The current fragmented system does not give us the capacity to address the root causes of conflict.

It is essential to ensure that women and girls participate fully in building inclusive and resilient societies. Where gender equality permeates the social fabric and women and men face difficulties as equal partners, societies have a much better chance of achieving stability and preserving human dignity and prosperity.

It is also crucial to resolve the global scourge of youth unemployment, not only to ensure their development but also to prevent instability and social conflicts and to reduce violent extremism. Combating youth unemployment should not just be an absolute priority in national development policies, but also a priority in international cooperation.

We must rebalance our approach to peace and security. For decades, this has been dominated by responding to conflict. For the future, we need to do far more to prevent war and sustain peace. The reforms I am setting in motion aim to achieve this. I have started with the decision-making processes in the Secretariat. The newly established Executive Committee will increase our capacity to integrate all pillars of the United Nations under a common vision for action. As societies become multi-ethnic, multireligious and multicultural, we will need greater political, cultural and economic investments in inclusivity and cohesion, so that people appreciate the benefits of diversity rather than perceiving it as a threat. All groups need to see that their individual identities are respected, while feeling that they belong as valued members of the community as a whole. Civil society has a role to play in raising the alarm when such respect is threatened or lost.

We must commit to a surge in diplomacy for peace, in partnership with regional organizations, while mobilizing the entire range of those with influence, from religious authorities to civil society and the business community. We will launch an initiative to enhance our mediation capacity, both at United Nations Headquarters and in the field,

and to support regional and national mediation efforts. I ask the Security Council to make greater use of the options laid out in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations. I am prepared to support the Council through the use of my good offices and through my personal engagement.

Too many prevention opportunities have been lost because Member States mistrusted each other's motives, and because of concerns over national sovereignty. Such concerns are understandable, in a world where power is unequal and principles have sometimes been applied selectively. Indeed, prevention should never be used to serve other political goals. On the contrary, prevention is best served by strong sovereign States, acting for the good of their people.

In taking preventive action, we need to avoid double standards. But that does not mean there are no standards at all. Preventive action is essential to avert mass atrocities and grave abuses of human rights. And we can achieve that only through reasoned discussion, based on facts and the pursuit of truth. Prevention must consistently be seen as a value in itself. It is an essential means of reducing human suffering and enabling people to reach their full potential.

International cooperation for prevention, in particular translating early warning into early action, depends upon trust between Member States and in their relations with the United Nations. I stand ready to foster a more trusting relationship and to improve communications with the Council, with consistency, candour and transparency. Disagreements about the past cannot be allowed to prevent us from acting today.

Together, we need to demonstrate leadership and strengthen the credibility and authority of the United Nations by putting peace first. Ending the boundless human suffering and the wanton waste of resources generated by conflict is in everyone's interests. The Council, working with the Peacebuilding Commission, all other parts of the United Nations system and regional organizations, can enable faster preventive action when the warning signs are there. The cost of inaction is simply too high.

War is never inevitable. It is always a matter of choice: the choice to exclude, to discriminate, to marginalize and to resort to violence. By restoring trust between Governments and their citizens and among Member States, we can prevent and avoid conflict. But peace, too, is never inevitable. It is the result of difficult decisions, hard work and compromise. We should never take it for granted, but should prize and nurture it in every country, at every time. Prevention is not merely a priority, but the priority. If we live up to our responsibilities, we will save lives, reduce suffering and give hope to millions.

Allow me to repeat the appeal I made 10 days ago in my first message as Secretary-

General: Let us make this year, 2017, a year for peace. I think it would be naive to say that 2017 will be a year of peace, but at least it is our obligation to do everything we can to make it a year for peace.