

Security Council Open Debate on Preventative Diplomacy
22nd of September, 2011, Security Council Chamber

Statement by H.E. Mr. Coelbo, Representative of Portugal

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you, President Sleiman, for the conduct of the Lebanese presidency of the Security Council and especially for the organization of this debate. I would also like to thank the Secretary General for his excellent report (S/2011/552), which provides us with concrete avenues of action through which to make the preventive work of the Security Council more efficient.

We are considering a very timely theme today. A broad consensus exists as to the merits and utility of a culture of prevention that allows us to identify crises before they transform into conflicts, with all the human and material costs that such conflicts always levy. It is therefore time to transform that consensus into concrete actions that ensure, moving forward, that the Security Council uses the preventive instruments at its disposal in a better, more systematic manner.

The international community faces new obstacles to peaceful coexistence among peoples that challenge the stability of whole regions. As Portugal recognizes the central role played by the Security Council in this area, we inscribed on the agenda of our presidency of the Council, this November, a meeting on new challenges to international peace and security. We intend to promote an integrated vision that mirrors the many challenges we face in the twenty-first century.

Today, no one questions the interlinkages among those challenges. Security is now also related to sustainable development, climate, energy, epidemics, food security and access to water and basic commodities. Indeed, what we used to characterize as the roots of a conflict are very much at the surface today, with a more direct and proportional impact on our security and well-being. It is also important to mention positive experiences in the field of shared natural resources. Portugal has such a positive experience in what regards the management of shared water resources with our neighbour, Spain.

The United Nations represents a forum of excellence for the debate on the broader concept of security. We therefore see our discussions here today as a value-added contribution to our meeting in November. Preventive diplomacy is a central principle of Portugal's foreign policy. We have actively supported Security Council initiatives that seek to promote a better understanding of the causes of conflict and that seek to discuss options to overcome those obstacles, as was the case, for example, in the tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

We have sought for those initiatives also to reflect the priority that we accord to the promotion and protection of human rights, humanitarian issues and the protection of civilians. Moreover, we want to do so while also promoting a closer collaboration with nongovernmental organizations and a better coordination of efforts among the United Nations missions, the European Union and the African Union. It is that integrated vision of security — based on complementarity, synergy and cooperation — that should be encouraged, so as to strengthen the cohesion of the international system.

We greatly appreciate, Mr. President, the most useful concept paper presented by your delegation (S/2011/570, annex), in which the key issues of this debate are encapsulated, including the importance of identifying the factors leading to tension, be they political, cultural, socio-economic or environmental in nature.

The United Nations has at its disposal the means to promote timely detection and early warning of conflicts, thereby avoiding the unnecessary degeneration of tensions into open conflict. I think it is necessary to refine the relationship between the many relevant organs and organizations, thereby promoting a culture of prevention that allows for the maintenance and consolidation of peace in an integrated — rather than sequential — manner.

Preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and peacebuilding are a complementary triumvirate that together guarantee the emergence of sustainable peace. It is not enough to make peace; it is also necessary to help it take root and grow. That is certainly a more difficult task, especially as it is intimately linked to the rule of law and socio-economic development. Security and development are, however, two sides of the same coin.

I would like, in this context, to highlight the work of the Peacebuilding Commission, in whose founding Portugal was proud to participate. During the 2010 review process of the Peacebuilding Commission, its preventive role was clearly underlined. The Peacebuilding Commission has played a central role in linking peace and security with economic and social development and with humanitarian efforts. The country-specific configurations of the Peacebuilding Commission for West Africa, of which Portugal is a part, are concrete examples of that function in action.

We believe that peacekeeping operations can and should assume functions of early peacebuilding, in the areas of security-sector reform, justice and the correctional system, as well as in processes of disarmament, demining and reintegration. Those fundamental actions complement and reinforce the socio-economic reconstruction undertaken by other actors. I think that the positive experiences in the Balkans and in Timor-Leste are clear in this respect, inspiring also possible solutions that are appropriate for Libya.

For these reasons, Portugal has sought to maintain an active participation in peacekeeping operations, a principle that we will continue to honour to the greatest extent possible.

I have highlighted the importance of an integrated vision of security, in an international framework of complementarity, cooperation and synergy. It is essential that the links between the United Nations and other regional and international organizations be strengthened, consolidating or even institutionalizing the lines of dialogue and communication. The actions of one or another are always strengthened when influential actors collaborate. Knowledge of the situation and the actors on the ground is irreplaceable, and for that reason Portugal has continuously defended the participation of regional organizations such as the African Union or the Arab League as part of a more robust preventive diplomacy.

Allow me also to highlight here the efforts that we have made in the context of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries to strengthen the preventive element and support those of us that are in situations of fragility.

The European Union, naturally, also has a role to play in this context. The panoply of instruments that the Union has at its disposal can and should be used to complement the actions of the United Nations, thereby mutually supporting their respective efforts for preventive diplomacy.

The work of regional and international organizations in conflict prevention cannot in any way be seen as a substitute for the principle of national ownership. National capabilities and capacities and the support given to their consolidation must serve as the foundation for preventive diplomacy, thereby catalysing national strategies for the promotion of peace.

Ultimately, the responsibility to prevent conflict must lie with national institutions; otherwise, there is a risk that the solutions that are found may not be consistent or sustainable in the long run. Conflict prevention should also be based on an inclusive approach in which new civil society actors must also participate. It is important to catalyse partnerships between all relevant actors: civil society, parliaments, academic institutions and women's and youth organizations, as well as the labour and business community.

Their presence on the ground and their very nature and objectives make them particularly useful and appropriate agents to warn of possible nascent conflicts and to help find mutually acceptable solutions. Their involvement is the best guarantee of the success of preventive diplomacy, and this, in our opinion, is the concept of security that should prevail in this era of globalization and interdependence.

Today we have a much clearer perception of the challenges facing international peace and security than we did a decade ago. We also have a better understanding of the instruments necessary to meet these challenges.

The Arab world is undergoing an unprecedented transformation that will have many geopolitical consequences that are not yet fully understood or defined but that certainly transcend the regional dimension. The response of the international community to that transformation is, and will continue to be, crucial to ensure the success of political transitions as well as international peace, stability and security.

I am particularly heartened to highlight democratic and inclusive pluralism, efforts to strengthen civil society, the opening of society and the economy, respect for the rule of law and human rights as essential elements of this transformation.

Preventive diplomacy is certainly part of this process, and its relevance is indisputable. For that reason, it gives me great pride to participate in a debate where we celebrate this fact.

Allow me to conclude by renewing and strengthening Portugal's commitment to the promotion of peace and security and to continuing to strengthen preventive diplomacy.