

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

Statement by Secretary-General H.E. Ban ki Moon

Preventive diplomacy's time has come once again. I am grateful to the presidency of Lebanon and to President Sleiman for this opportunity to take stock and chart the way forward. I also want to thank Nigeria, which helped reenergize and refocus our discussion on this issue during its presidency in July 2010.

When I took office almost five years ago, it was clear to me that we needed to raise our ability to act early and preventively against emerging threats to an entirely new level. Building on the ideas and accomplishments of my predecessors, I saw significant untapped potential for what we could help achieve through preventive diplomacy. We have sought to reinforce our missions abroad, strengthen our envoys and their teams, improve our expertise, deepen our partnerships and reshape the Department of Political Affairs to make this vision a reality.

Today, preventive diplomacy is being conducted by a broader array of actors, including regional and civil society organizations, using a wider and more innovative range of tools. There is growing global support for prevention, coupled with the creation of new preventive capacities in multilateral organizations and Member States. The pace, intensity and increasing professionalization of our preventive efforts are beginning to pay off. We have used diplomacy to ensure a peaceful referendum in the Sudan, a democratic transition in Guinea, and an end to the violence in Kenya and Kyrgyzstan.

From Afghanistan to the Middle East, from West Africa to the Sudan and Somalia, our missions are carrying out preventive diplomacy every day, helping to sustain complex political, peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes.

However, we still have a long way to go. Violent conflict continues to wreak a shocking toll on individuals, societies and economies. Every day, we can see the costs of the failure to prevent. Despite recent advances, preventive diplomacy continues to face long odds and numerous challenges. A critical factor is political will. If the parties do not want peace or are unwilling to compromise, it is extraordinarily difficult to persuade them or impose it from the outside.

For this and other familiar reasons, we are still too often unable to act until a situation visibly deteriorates. But this should not deter us from trying to resolve underlying tensions and, when conflict does erupt, to stop its spread and mitigate the damage it can cause.

My report (S/2011/552) outlines several areas of focus. First, we must prioritize early action. Too often, we find ourselves scrambling to manage emergencies that could have been prevented from spiralling out of control in the first place. It is incumbent on all of us — Member States, regional organizations and the United Nations — to act early and decisively. The Security Council can do much to address an emerging threat, whether or not it is on its

formal agenda, precisely to avoid it ending up there. I or my representatives come before this Council virtually every day to talk about conflicts we are trying to resolve.

Secondly, we must continue to invest in and better equip the women and men who lead our preventive diplomacy efforts on the ground.

Thirdly, while prevention is infinitely cheaper than cure and is one of the smartest, most cost-effective investments we can make, it still needs adequate investment if it is to deliver results. At the same time, we will continue to maximize the impact of the resources we already have.

Fourthly, we must further strengthen our strategic partnerships with regional and subregional organizations. In crisis situations, we must be able to decide quickly on who can do what to help. Sometimes, preventive diplomacy is getting the international community to speak with one voice. The Security Council has a key role to play in that regard.

Finally, we must continue to support national institutions and mechanisms for mediation and dialogue. Including civil society organizations, especially women and youth who can lead the charge for peaceful change, in preventive efforts is critical.

Preventive diplomacy may not be effective in all situations. Uncertainty, risks and evolving challenges come with the terrain. Yet I firmly believe that better preventive diplomacy is not an option; it is a necessity. Prevention will remain a fundamental priority in my second term as Secretary-General. I count on the support of Member States, regional organizations, civil society and other partners. I know that this is what they expect of me, and it is what people everywhere expect of the United Nations.