

Mr. Kickert (Austria):

Let us make 2017 a year for peace. The Secretary-General's appeal is crisp and clear. The Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security. If it takes this responsibility seriously, it must shift its focus to prevention rather than on the management of conflicts, because when conflicts erupt, human suffering has already begun.

Conflict prevention is as necessary as it is notoriously difficult. It is also thankless, as, when successful, it mostly goes unnoticed by the public eye. Since the 2015 reports on peace operations, peacebuilding, and women, peace and security, the concept of conflict prevention as an essential element of achieving sustained peace has gained more traction than ever before. The question we are all grappling with is how to put it into practice.

Allow me to focus on five areas in which the United Nations could become more effective in preventing conflict.

In order to remain credible, the Security Council has a legal and moral obligation to prevent mass atrocities. We therefore encourage all its members to support the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, as elaborated by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group and already signed by 112 Member States.

Secondly, the Secretary-General has a mandate to play a proactive role in warning the Security-Council when international peace and security are threatened. We encourage him, as many speakers before me have done, to do so proactively whenever necessary. In this regard, we are heartened by the organizational changes introduced by the Secretary-General to place more emphasis in his Office on conflict prevention.

Thirdly, regional organizations, under Chapter VIII of the Charter, play an increasing role in prevention and in sustaining peace. In 2017, Austria will make its contribution by chairing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). As a regional organization created in the midst of the Cold War as a first platform for cooperation on a then-divided continent, it continues to play a vital role in preventing and addressing conflicts in the region.

In 2017, the OSCE region faces many challenges that are exacerbated by a lack of trust and growing radicalization and violent extremism. The Austrian chairmanship will focus its energy on using established formats as well as informal and alternative channels of communication to advance negotiated solutions to the conflicts in the region. Foreign Minister Kurz will be in New York in February to present the priorities and work plan of the Austrian chairmanship-in-office to the Security Council.

Fourthly, effective prevention work needs to start at the regional and country levels. Nothing is more helpful than being in the field and knowing the actors. To that end, it is necessary to decentralize in order to further strengthen regional offices and United Nations Resident Coordinators and their teams. The root causes for conflict are often multidimensional; they may be economic, political or related to persistent violations of minority or women's rights. The United Nations and its partners must be able to address those root causes as part of a broader conflict prevention effort. In that context, the Human Rights Up Front initiative is crucial, as human rights abuses are the early warning signs of upcoming conflicts.

Fifthly, where United Nations peace missions are deployed we need more proactive procedures to adapt them to changing local needs in order to prevent a recurrence of conflict after withdrawal. Partnerships between host Governments and international partners need to be strengthened when missions are phased out, in order to ensure the sustainability of peace. The current peacebuilding architecture must become much more flexible in support of such efforts.

Let me conclude by thanking you, Mr. President, for making prevention and sustaining peace a priority of your presidency and of Sweden's membership of the Security Council. Let me assure you of Austria's support.