

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

Statement by H.E. Mr Michel Sleiman, President of Lebanon

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as President of the Republic of Lebanon.

First, I would like to welcome the Heads of State and Government and Ministers who accepted Lebanon's invitation to participate in this high-level meeting, thereby affirming the importance of our discussion on the subject of preventive diplomacy.

I would also like to thank the Secretary-General for the report he has prepared to enrich our discussion. He has placed preventive diplomacy, which he considers to be one of the smartest investments we can make, among the top priorities of his second term. He is right to have done so, since investing in preventive diplomacy costs far less than conflicts and their repercussions, not to mention the heavy humanitarian consequences they entail.

When addressing preventive diplomacy, we cannot but refer to the man who authored and developed this vision, the late Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, who was the first to work to integrate it into the United Nations system. The concept of preventive diplomacy has since evolved and is no longer restricted to simply pre-empting disputes before they erupt, but also aims at preventing conflicts from escalating or spreading, as described in the peace plan prepared by former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. This concept is still evolving, and now extends to consolidating the pillars of peace after conflicts end and preventing the recurrence of those conflicts.

We firmly believe that wars and conflicts are not inevitable; rather, the course of events can be influenced to prevent their eruption and escalation. However, this requires political will, mobilizing the necessary resources, and adopting a clear preventive approach that reinforces local capacities, including building national systems capable of mediating, facilitating dialogue and containing tension.

In this context, after adopting its national entente document in 1991, Lebanon has been keen to consolidate the pact and spirit of concord in its approach to major national issues, and has resorted to national dialogue conferences and committees to promote an atmosphere of calm, moderation and stability.

In general, the particular circumstances of every conflict or crisis requires carefully selected preventive diplomacy instruments, including early warning, fact finding, mediation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. These are all instruments to be developed and promoted within the United Nations system.

Active prevention cannot be limited to State institutions, but should also extend to civil society bodies, particularly women's and youth organizations, media, universities and research centres, which can all play an important role in promoting a culture of prevention. Moreover, we must also ensure the coordination of prevention efforts among relevant United Nations entities.

We recall the Arab Peace Initiative to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict in a just and comprehensive manner that rejects any permanent refugee status for Palestinians in the Arab countries.

It is well known that peacekeeping operations constitute one of the tools of preventive diplomacy. Although they are conducted after a conflict erupts, they are highly important in containing the conflict and preventing it from spreading. This has been our own experience. The United Nations

Interim Force in Lebanon has, since its establishment in 1978, helped the Lebanese State to extend its sovereignty throughout its territory.

Similarly, the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), to which Lebanon is committed, was necessary to put an end to the destructive war Israel waged against Lebanon in 2006. The international community, in keeping with the requirements and objectives of preventive diplomacy, should strive to compel Israel to implement the resolution's provisions by fully withdrawing from all Lebanese territories and ceasing its threats and daily violations of Lebanon's sovereignty by land, sea and air.

Indeed, the conflict between Lebanon and Israel would not have escalated since 19 March 1978, the date resolution 425 (1978) was adopted, nor would the resistance have emerged and confronted the Israeli occupation, had the international community compelled Israel to fully implement that resolution, which clearly called for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of its armed forces from all Lebanese territories. We need practical measures to guarantee that binding Security Council resolutions are implemented.

Preventive diplomacy cannot be fully successful unless we address the root causes of problems. The roots of terrorism must be addressed. We reiterate our condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and reaffirm our commitment to fighting that scourge. Conflict prevention also calls for economic and social justice, as well as the establishment of a fairer and more equitable international economic and financial order that is better aligned with moral values and based less on speculation.

Finally, during its presidency of the Security Council last May, Lebanon pointed to dialogue among civilizations as a tool of preventive diplomacy. In this context, we emphasize that dialogue, communication and openness to others are the most important weapons against fanaticism, extremism, prejudice and hatred. It is therefore clear that promoting a culture of peace will contribute to conflict prevention. The Preamble to the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization states that it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed. Undoubtedly, the culture of peace cannot be separated from the culture of justice, without which no real or permanent peace can be achieved.

Talking about preventive diplomacy is much easier than implementing it. Furthermore, history records and at times even glorifies the wars and tragedies waged and caused by leaders more than those they manage to avert. Let us unite our efforts to create a world governed by the values of equality, justice and respect for others. I shall now resume my functions as President of the Council. I invite the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, to take the floor.