

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
6 October 2021

Original: English

**Letter dated 6 October 2021 from the Permanent Representative
of Kenya to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the honour to inform you that, under the Kenya presidency, the Security Council will hold a high-level open debate on peacebuilding and sustainable peace, on the theme “Diversity, State-building and the search for peace”, on Tuesday, 12 October 2021.

To guide the discussion, Kenya has prepared a concept note for the benefit of members wishing to participate in the debate (see annex).

I would be grateful if the present letter and concept note could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Martin Kimani**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



Annex to the letter dated 6 October 2021 from the Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council high-level open debate on peacebuilding and sustainable peace, on the theme “Diversity, State-building and the search for peace”, to be held on 12 October 2021

Objective

1. The majority of situations before the Security Council and its regional counterparts stem from domestic conflicts that can threaten regional or international peace and security. Many of them are either caused by or become clashes over identity that exploit ethnic, racial, regional, partisan or religious differences. These are often deployed as an organizing principle, justification or rallying standard.
2. The internal nature of these conflicts makes many of them uniquely vulnerable to drawing on pre-existing or emerging group divisions that can escalate into mass human rights abuses and atrocities.
3. There has been welcome recognition of this challenge by the United Nations, such as through the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, the Secretariat’s crucial work promoting inclusivity and human rights, and the Security Council’s recognition thereof in transitions and in some of its subsidiary bodies.
4. However, there has been an escalation in the dangers arising from this challenge because interlinked crises have prompted more people to utilize – and sometimes weaponize – diversity as a way of responding to the disorienting changes resulting from the economic crises that started in the mid-2000s and which have deepened during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, rapid urbanization, youth unemployment, growing inequality, environmental stress and the exponential rise in “fake news” due to the dynamics of social media algorithms.
5. If the Security Council and its associated peacebuilding bodies are to effectively undertake prevention and conflict resolution, they will need to make use of ideas, methods and frameworks that reflect an appreciation for the upsurge in conflicts being driven, or worsened, by diversity. They will have to appreciate that a core imperative for effective peace, conflict prevention and State-building is to successfully mediate group dynamics and differences, particularly with regard to race, ethnicity, religion, history, gender and economic status.
6. In addition, State-building in peacekeeping and peacebuilding situations and the response to early warnings will need to be much better when it comes to the management of diversity. This will require conflict resolution, political mediation and economic development approaches that strengthen the ability of States to successfully pursue and maintain civic cohesion.
7. The high-level open debate will provide an opportunity for Member States to share their insights and experiences and to discuss how they can be used to inform the practical pursuit of peacebuilding and sustaining peace.

Background

8. Humans have a need to belong: whether it is to a family, a village or town, a political party or to a religion, we are always part of a wider “we” that is central to how we cooperate, collaborate, compete and clash. We inhabit multiple identities and act on any one of them depending on the context and the perceived need.

9. Throughout history, religious, ethnic, cultural, racial and other forms of identity have been negatively manipulated and turned into instruments for mobilization to compete for economic resources and political power. This, coupled with real or perceived marginalization and exclusion from political processes and economic resources, has generated violent demands for access or even led to separatist tendencies.¹ Thus, the instrumentalization of diverse identities can weaken institutions, undermine State legitimacy, increase fragility to conflict and, ultimately, threaten peace and security.

10. The United Nations and the World Bank, in an important 2018 study on the role of inclusion in preventing violent conflict, argue that “[a] significant proportion of contemporary violent conflicts are rooted in group-based grievances around exclusion that forge deep-seated feelings of injustice and unfairness. Recent research supports this argument. Whether based on facts or perceptions, groups who feel excluded, relatively disadvantaged, or left out are much more likely to consider violence to be an acceptable response than those who do not.”²

11. Other major trends, such as extreme weather events, which reinforce resource-related conflicts, slower global economic growth and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are increasing competition between political constituencies. In many countries, these constituencies are often defined by different identities, meaning that a sense of grievance owing to real or perceived exclusion easily leads to tensions between groups, which can escalate into violent conflict.

12. Even in largely stable and relatively wealthy countries, there has been a visible increase in the politicization of diversity, be it religious, cultural, economic, ethnic or purely political partisanship. The Fragile States Index indicates that 16 per cent of democracies, many of them in the global North, “worsened significantly in both the group grievance and factionalized elites indicators between 2008 and 2019”.³

13. One form of conflict is illustrative of the linkage between diversity and violence: recall how young men and women from all over the world have, seemingly in a matter of days, changed from obsessing over the latest forms of entertainment into becoming terrorists prepared to kill and die, doing so in pursuit of a cause that they have embraced as an expression of an identity that they felt gave them purpose and power.

14. Economic globalization has made an immense contribution to the creation of wealth and the reduction of poverty. In addition, it has sundered old certainties and loosed new freedoms that have, in turn, opened doors to new insecurities.

15. Social media and profit-seeking digital platforms have changed how most people find and interpret information. They are producing “echo chambers” through which users are herded by algorithms to connections that conform with their worldview, no matter how blinkered, leading to civic polarization, misinformation, disinformation and shared narratives filled with incitement and extremism.

16. It is this dynamic character of identity, as a driver of violent conflict, that has made it so difficult for an international system rooted in more traditional State-security approaches to apprehend.

Guiding questions

17. The following questions will serve to guide the debate:

¹ Dorcas Ettang (African Peacebuilding Network), “Statebuilding and peacebuilding in contexts of identity-related conflicts: a necessary collaboration”, Kujenga Amani, February 2015.

² United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2018.

³ Nate Haken (Fund for Peace), “Democracies Under Pressure”, Fragile States Index, 10 May 2020.

(a) What successful experiences can be shared by States with regard to how they have built and sustained peace by embracing diversity and inclusion from the point of view of ethnic, gender, racial, regional, religious and other identities?

(b) How can early warning and early response tools be made more useful and acceptable to States that are increasingly vulnerable to violent conflicts defined by diversity?

(c) How can United Nations bodies, regional organizations and development institutions be more effective in delivering the skills, incentives and joint initiatives, in the right sequence and to the right scale, to mitigate and resolve conflicts sparked by real or perceived exclusion?

(d) What do the rapid advances in machine learning, algorithmic manipulation of attention and artificial intelligence mean for civic cohesion, free speech, trust in government and peace?

(e) How should Member States and the Security Council deal with social media and digital commons that are directly involved in stoking violence through incitement, hate speech, fake news and “deep fakes”, particularly in situations in which a pattern of atrocities threatens to escalate?

(f) How can peacekeeping transitions prevent relapses into violent conflicts between armed actors who claim to represent the interests of groups defined by identity?

(g) Do frameworks relating to good governance, as well as fragility, conflict and violence, have sufficient tools to enable the effective reconciliation of group grievances and conflict to deliver more resilient and stable States?

(h) How can existing mechanisms of the United Nations be strengthened to help States embed conflict resolution and inclusion in pre- and post-conflict State-building processes?

Format

18. The event will be a high-level open debate, at Heads of State and Government level, and will be chaired by Uhuru Kenyatta, the President of Kenya.

19. The high-level debate will be held in person in the Security Council Chamber on Tuesday, 12 October 2021, at 10 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time.

20. In accordance with the Security Council note [S/2017/507](#), all participants and members of the Security Council are encouraged to deliver succinct statements focusing on specific examples, commitments, achievements, challenges, identification of gaps and solution-oriented recommendations.

21. Member States that are not members of the Security Council and observer States are invited to submit written statements of no more than 1,000 words to the Security Council Affairs Division (dppa-scsb3@un.org), in Microsoft Word and with a cover letter duly signed by the Permanent Representative/Chargé d'affaires and addressed to the President of the Security Council, by close of business on 12 October, to be included in a compilation document.

Briefers

- Secretary-General of the United Nations
- Mr. Thabo Mbeki, former President of South Africa (to be confirmed)
- An academic