

**Security Council**

Distr.: General
6 August 2014

Original: English

Letter dated 5 August 2014 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you that, as President of the Security Council for the month of August, the United Kingdom has scheduled an open debate on 21 August on conflict prevention, under the item “Maintenance of international peace and security”.

In order to help steer the discussion on the subject, the United Kingdom has prepared the attached concept note (see annex).

I should be grateful if this letter and the concept note attached could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Mark Lyall Grant



Annex to the letter dated 5 August 2014 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note: Security Council open debate on conflict prevention, 21 August 2014

Introduction

On 21 August, the United Kingdom, as President of the Security Council, will hold an open debate on the topic of conflict prevention under the item “Maintenance of international peace and security”.

With the numerous tragic and pressing conflicts that persist in the world today, it is more important than ever that the Security Council shifts from a culture of reaction to one of prevention. During this debate we invite views on how the Council can improve its record in fully understanding early warning signs of conflict and responding through early action.

Background

The United Nations was founded to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, owing to the untold sorrow the two World Wars brought to mankind.¹ Under the Charter the Security Council was given the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and specific tools to help prevent conflict. The Council’s record in rising to those responsibilities is mixed and some key tools remain underutilized.

The nature of conflict has changed dramatically over the past 100 years; this poses an even greater challenge to the United Nations and the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security. Conflict today is less often inter-State, and more predominantly intra-State, asymmetric and multilayered. It is driven by a wide range of factors, for which there are often clear indicators. Analysis of these indicators can inform us of the likelihood of armed conflict breaking out.

It is difficult to think of a situation in which we were not aware of warning signs on the horizon. When the Tunisian street vendor Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in 2010, no one foresaw this as a catalyst for the Arab Spring. Yet the Arab Human Development Report, published just five years before, had set out the indicators and warning signs. We knew the situation would flare if no preventive action were taken, we just did not know when and we did not appreciate the scale.

Similar warning signs have been visible elsewhere, as a prelude to conflict in other regions. A key challenge for the Council in responding to such warnings has been finding consensus on the balance between, on the one hand, a response that is sufficiently early to prevent international peace and security crises and, on the other, respecting the prerogative of national authorities to resolve internal crises. The many crises facing the Council today show that the balance has not been found. The

¹ Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations.

solution may lie in making better use of the tools provided by the Charter and the capacities of the United Nations system.

The Security Council's preventive role

The Council's preventive role is set out in Article 1 of the Charter and Chapter VI sets out a variety of tools at the Council's disposal which it may use or call upon parties to use: negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement and the involvement of regional organizations. Some of these tools are rarely used. This represents a missed opportunity to detect the indicators of conflict as they arise. The Council should serve as a smoke detector, not just a fire extinguisher.

While Council-mandated special political missions and peacekeeping missions are often deployed once conflict has already broken out, they are also valuable conflict prevention tools, given the cyclical nature of conflict and the high risk of recurrence.

- *What has prevented the Council from using the full variety of tools contained in Chapter VI? How can we be more active in considering the best tool for the type of conflict that may be brewing?*
- *Does the Council have the right mechanisms for receiving and understanding information to allow it to act?*

The Secretary-General, his Special Envoys and Special Representatives

As recognized in resolution 1366 (2001), the Secretary-General has an important role to play, including through his good offices function. United Nations interdisciplinary fact-finding and confidence-building missions to regions of tension are also valuable.

The Secretary-General's Special Envoys and Special Representatives also have a critical role to play in conflict prevention and resolution. Security Council missions to areas of potential or existing conflict can play an important preventive and resolution role and have not been used to full effect. Since the presidential statement of 30 November 1999, the Council has not driven forward the idea of "preventive missions".

- *How could the Council better support the Secretary-General and his representatives in these endeavours? Are there key examples of situations where quiet diplomacy has been complemented by Security Council consideration and action?*
- *Should the Council revive the idea of "preventive missions" and take a more innovative approach to conflict prevention using such tools?*

United Nations regional offices

The regional offices of the United Nations in West Africa, Central Africa and Central Asia (UNOWA, UNOCA and UNRCCA) serve as forward platforms for good offices and preventive diplomacy, working with regional and subregional groups. They provide cost-effective supplementary mechanisms and channels for early warning, convening and mediation.

The offices have had some success in taking early action to reduce growing tensions and in seeking to reduce ongoing conflicts. For example, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia provided good offices and support for crisis response in Kyrgyzstan following the outbreak of inter-ethnic violence in 2010.

- *What are the key successes of these offices and what factors have facilitated such success? Can the Council do more to support them or complement their activities?*

The need for a United Nations system-wide and flexible approach

Many United Nations actors have a role to play in conflict prevention. A number of different prevention and early warning mechanisms exist across the United Nations system, with offices which support these functions: the joint Office of the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect, the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

It is essential that these mandates and offices function in a coherent manner and do not provide conflicting or different analyses of a situation. The report of the Secretary-General's Internal Review Panel on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka provided a very useful analysis of the damaging consequences when the United Nations system and its engagement with Member States does not function holistically and with the appropriate attention to the prevention of serious violations.

The Council and the United Nations system should also recall that women serve as critical agents in developing long-term strategies for conflict prevention and the promotion of peace at local and national levels. But women often remain excluded from decision-making related to conflict prevention: they must be empowered to participate fully. Early warning and response mechanisms must also be gender sensitive in design and implementation.

- *How can the Council and others best ensure that the United Nations adopts a system-wide approach to early warning, early action and conflict prevention?*
- *How can the Council ensure that it receives the right information, early on, from the United Nations system?*

Briefers and product

The Secretary-General is expected to brief the Council, alongside the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay. Our intention is that a resolution will be adopted at this debate.
