

THE VISION OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON PREVENTION

With profound gratitude and humility, I took up the helm of the UN system at a time of great aspirations as well as great challenges. While the universal and comprehensive agenda for sustainable development and sustaining peace pledged to “leave no one behind”, the goals of peaceful coexistence and development are at risk in many countries. The fundamental norms and values of the United Nations are being disregarded. Millions flee in search of safer, better lives, even as doors are closing in many places. Brutal and violent conflicts continue to rage in many corners of the world, taking countless lives and displacing millions more. For many others, sustainable development seems distant. Terrorism and violent extremism are affecting all regions of the world. Climate-related natural disasters are becoming more frequent and their destructive powers more intense.

How can the United Nations better help countries to avoid such crises and build resilient societies that can deliver on the promise to leave no one behind? How can we preserve the norms that safeguard humanity? How can we win back the trust of “we the peoples”?

By prevention, I mean doing everything we can to help countries to avert the outbreak of crises that take a high toll on humanity, undermining institutions and capacities to achieve peace and development. I mean rededicating ourselves to the UN Charter and the mandate of Agenda 2030 and ensuring that our assistance goes to those who need it the most. Prevention should permeate everything we do. It should cut across all pillars of the UN’s work, and unite us for more effective delivery.

Preventing human suffering and ensuring progress on the SDGs are primarily the responsibility of Member States. But the United Nations has a vital supporting role. We need to become much better at it, building trust with Member States and all stakeholders. I see us doing this in four ways: A surge in preventive diplomacy; Agenda 2030 and Sustaining Peace as essential to long-term prevention; Strengthening partnerships; and Reforms to overcome fragmentation and consolidate our capacities to meet the prevention challenge.

I. A surge in preventive diplomacy

Nobody is winning today’s wars. I appeal to all leaders, parties and those with influence to bring these burning conflicts to an end. I and my peace envoys are fully engaged in support of the national and regional actors. But wars can only be ended by the actions of the direct parties and their supporters to forge political solutions and tackle the root causes. Meanwhile, we must make concerted efforts to prevent new conflicts from flaring up. This means promptly identifying and responding to early signs of tension, using all tools available.

As part of our surge in preventive diplomacy, I am strengthening the UN’s mediation and facilitation capacity in the broadest terms, enhancing leadership, resources and partnerships. To make prevention effective, dialogue towards peace needs to be comprehensive. We thus need to pay attention to the local, national, regional and international levels. Accountability is a critical element in resolving conflict and addressing root causes to prevent conflict. I am ready to make greater use of my powers under the Charter, including with respect to early warning and good offices.

Integral to my view of prevention is inclusion and women's empowerment in their fullest sense. We need more women at the table at all levels. This effort starts at home and I have taken steps to advance gender parity at the UN and in all our activities. We will further strengthen our support to integrate gender perspectives in mediation efforts, and we will be quickly expanding the pool of qualified women leaders to serve as my envoys or as mediation specialists.

Based on these parameters, I will appoint a High Level Advisory Group to provide recommendations on how to further enhance our work in mediation.

II. Agenda 2030 and Sustaining Peace as essential to long-term prevention

The best way to prevent societies from descending into crisis is to ensure they are resilient through investment in inclusive and sustainable development, including concerted climate action and management of mass migration. Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change are an essential part of humanity's universal blueprint for the future.

For all countries, addressing inequalities, strengthening institutions and ensuring that development strategies are risk-informed are central to preventing the fraying of the social fabric that could erupt into crisis. We need to invest more to help countries build strong and inclusive institutions and resilient communities. Our partnership with the World Bank and regional development banks will be critical. Development is the key to prevention. Far from diverting resources or attention away from development, an effective and broad focus on prevention will generate more investment and concerted efforts to achieve the SDGs.

For countries at particular risk of or recovering from conflict, the resolutions on Sustaining Peace and the Women, Peace and Security agenda provide additional tools adapted to their needs. The SDGs and Sustaining Peace are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Sustainable development underpins peace, and sustained peace enables sustainable development. Implementation of both agendas will ensure that stable societies prosper and fragile societies become resilient and can manage risks and shocks effectively. Societies are more resilient when they uphold the full breadth of human rights of all, gender equality and women's empowerment, the rule-of-law, inclusion and diversity as well as nurture their youth and children. These norms make for tolerant and vibrant societies where diversity is celebrated. Conversely, it is often the systematic undermining of these norms that point to risks of crisis. Sovereignty is strengthened when people, their dignity and rights are fully protected and respected. Working in support of Member States, our prevention work seeks to shore up national and local institutions and capacities to detect and avert looming crises, sustain peace and achieve sustainable development.

III. Strengthening partnerships

We must recognize that the UN is not the only actor, and in many cases not even the most important actor. The ultimate goal is not to expand our remit but to make a real difference for people, especially the most vulnerable. As the anchor of multilateralism with universal membership, the UN has unparalleled capacity to convene and mobilize. The UN system is most impactful when truly enabling others. This means building meaningful partnerships with the widest array of Governments, regional organizations, international financial institutions, civil society organizations, academia and the private sector, always being truthful to our mission as the guardian of the international norms that the Organization has generated

over the past seven decades. The most recent example of our resolve to strengthen our partnerships to prevent conflict and sustain peace was the signing of the Joint United Nations-African Union Framework for Enhanced Partnership in Peace and Security on 19 April 2017.

IV. Reforms to consolidate our capacities to meet the prevention challenge

We cannot meet the prevention challenge with the status quo. The UN needs to be much more united in its thinking and in its action, putting people at the centre of its work. People do not experience problems and crises in silos. They question why our support comes from so many different actors with different plans and messages, burdening their already limited systems and capacities. We need to bring together the capacities of diverse actors in the Organization in support of people and countries in managing risks, building resilience against shocks and averting outbreaks of crisis. This means the horizontal joining-up of all pillars of the UN's work – peace and security, development, human rights – as well as vertical integration in each from prevention to conflict resolution, from peacekeeping to peacebuilding and sustainable development.

I have begun this with my own office and decision-making. The Executive Office has been restructured for better strategic analysis, coordination and planning across all pillars; and the Executive Committee of the Secretariat has been established and is meeting weekly for timely decision-making and action.

I have also set up an Internal Review Team to provide options on the peace and security architecture. My report on Sustaining Peace will be an opportunity to further elaborate the steps I have taken or propose. The architecture will be strengthened with the addition of the Office of Counter-Terrorism as proposed to the General Assembly, including to ensure that the work on preventing violent extremism is rooted in the Global CT Strategy.

Through the QCPR resolution, Member States have encouraged me to propose bold measures to reform the UN development system. Under the leadership of the DSG, this work is well underway so as to spell out the needed reforms by the end of this year as requested by the GA, with my first set of proposals in June 2017.

To underpin our ability to implement these reforms, I have also launched a process for significant management reform to streamline our processes and rules, especially on budget, human resources and procurement. The reforms require that the system becomes much more nimble, efficient and cost-effective. A crucial part of this work is my gender parity initiative, a new whistle-blower policy and my new approach to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse committed under the UN flag.

The outcome of these reforms will enable an integrated prevention platform. This is not a new entity or structure but an integrated way of thinking and acting, harnessing the diverse prevention tools and capacities across the system, at HQ and in the field, in support of Member States. It will build upon the Human Rights Up Front initiative, enhance our work on the ground, and strengthen the accountability of each actor to collective results. It will be underpinned by a consolidated arrangement for financing prevention so that existing and new funding streams are most effectively utilized. Effective public outreach and communication will be crucial to our success as we go forward along this path. In an information saturated world of a continuously expanding media landscape, we will need to be much more innovative and strategic in telling our story.

In all of these endeavours, building trust with Member States, our staff and all stakeholders is crucial to success. This means I and other leaders in the system will actively reach out to consult, listen and bring in fresh ideas.

I have been humbled by the confidence placed in me by all Member States during the selection process. I will rely on the same confidence, the same trust to work together to steer our Organization through the reforms and reinstate prevention at the core of our everyday work.
