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## **Citing successes, Ban urges more preventive diplomacy to defuse conflicts**



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

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[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon is calling on the world community to reinforce preventive diplomacy which, through a system of early warnings and skilled interventions, can pre-empt conflicts before they erupt, saving both lives and national resources.

“Preventive diplomacy today is delivering concrete results, with relatively modest resources, in many regions of the world, helping to save lives and to protect development gains,” he tells the Security Council in the first ever [report](#) on the issue, citing recent successes in easing mounting tension between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), post-election violence in Kenya, and the transition from military to civilian rule in Guinea.

“It is an approach that may not be effective in all situations and will continue to face the uncertainty, risks and evolving challenges which, in a sense, come with the terrain. Yet I firmly believe that better preventive diplomacy is not optional; it is necessary.”

Adequate financial investment, in particular for rapid responses, is crucial and Member States must ensure predictable and timely financial support, he stresses in the report, which is dedicated to the memory of former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, who died in a plane crash 50 years ago while trying to bring peace to the nascent but conflict-torn DRC.

“We must also continue our efforts to invest in and better equip ‘preventive diplomats’ who lead our efforts on the ground to avert violent conflict. We will need to expand our pool of highly skilled envoys and mediators who can be deployed rapidly to situations of concern, with a focus on increasing the number of senior female mediators,” he writes.

He notes that preventive diplomacy today is being conducted by a broader array of actors, using a wider range of tools, than ever before, with growing partnerships between the UN and regional organizations, the opening of more regional UN offices, and the creation of new early warning systems, including by the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the African Union (AU).

Mr. Ban recalls that in 2008 the General Assembly made possible the strengthening of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), aimed at bolstering the UN’s preventive capacity. Since then, DPA has enhanced its analytical capacities, technical expertise in key areas such as electoral assistance, its partnerships, and its ability to facilitate system-wide responses.

“As a result, it is becoming better geared toward rapid response and, through its reinforced regional divisions and Mediation Support Unit, can assist good offices and mediation initiatives worldwide, whether undertaken by the Organization or its partners. Its standby team of mediation experts is able to deploy within 72 hours to assist negotiators on peace process design, security arrangements, constitution-making, gender, power-sharing and wealth-sharing,” he says.

He stresses that while the biggest return on investment in preventive diplomacy comes in lives saved, it also makes strong economic sense, noting that the World Bank has calculated that the average cost of civil war is equivalent to more than 30 years of gross domestic product (GDP) growth for a medium-size developing country, with the most severe civil wars imposing cumulative costs of tens of billions of dollars.

Yet prevention efforts can be much less costly. The UN regional office in West Africa ([UNOWA](#)), which has played an important role in prevention efforts in Guinea, Niger and elsewhere in the sub-region, has a regular budget of less than \$8 million per year.

Among recent successes, Mr. Ban cites his 2008 appointment of former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo as Special Envoy for the Great Lakes amid growing regional tensions and a widespread fear that the DRC would again become the theatre of war. A year later the tensions had subsided and Presidents Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Joseph Kabila of DRC met for the first time in many years, with their countries resuming formal diplomatic relations soon after.

In Guinea he notes that UNOWA, in partnership with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the AU and others facilitated the country's transition from military to constitutional rule during 2009 and 2010, preventing political tensions from escalating into full-blown conflict with the potential destabilization of neighbouring Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau.

Other examples include the successful holding this year of the referendum that saw South Sudan secede from Sudan, the easing of tensions between the governing and opposition parties in Sierra Leone in 2009, and the end to inter-ethnic violence and return to constitutional order in Kyrgyzstan in 2010.

But Mr. Ban warns that while preventive diplomacy has grown and evolved significantly, it is neither easy, straightforward, or inevitably successful, facing "great obstacles and long odds, with success often hostage to multiple factors. One of the most critical of these is the will of the parties.

"If the parties do not want peace, or are unwilling to compromise, it is extraordinarily difficult, especially for outsiders, to persuade them otherwise. Here, the linkage between preventive diplomacy and the power to produce incentives and disincentives can be critical to convince key actors, with due respect for their sovereignty, that there is value in choosing dialogue over violence, and, if necessary, to accept external assistance to that end," he writes.

Even so, although quiet successes rarely make the news, recent engagements reconfirm that the combination of analysis, early warning, rapid response and partnerships can help defuse tensions in escalating crises and assist parties in resolving disputes peacefully.

"With increasing knowledge, stronger partnerships and better instruments, I am convinced that it is possible to further strengthen the international community's capacity for preventive diplomacy in the interest of peace, security and development," he concludes.

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