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## **UN hears leaders from Europe and Africa stress role of mediation in resolving conflicts**



President Tarja Halonen of Finland

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Leaders from Europe and Africa used the opening day of the General Assembly's annual session today to stress the important role that mediation can play in resolving conflicts before they become intractable.

Finland's President Tarja Halonen [said](#) UN capabilities in conflict mediation must be strengthened to give the world body a greater role in the prevention and settlement of disputes,

calling for mediation to be deployed at every phase of a conflict in an effort to stop it starting or continuing.

“We need to enhance the capabilities of the UN in this field. Training and guidance are pivotal,” she said, adding that non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women and grassroots activities also have an important role to play in conflict mediation.

This year’s theme of the general debate is the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, and earlier this year the General Assembly adopted a resolution – the joint initiative of Finland and Turkey – calling for a greater role for mediation.

Ms. Halonen said that peace processes must also be more inclusive, stressing the need for women to play a more prominent role.

“The record is far from impressive at the moment as the number of women around the negotiation tables continues to be strikingly low.”

President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal noted the use of mediation both in internal conflicts and in inter-State disputes. Among the former examples he cited the efforts of the presidents of Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal in resolving a serious internal crisis in Guinea-Bissau several years ago, and mediation initiatives under the aegis of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Niger and Guinea.

He also called for Security Council reform with a permanent seat with veto rights being awarded to Africa.

Mozambique’s President Armando Emilio Guebuza [stressed](#) that mediation cannot be started “assuming that we have all the answers. The mediation process should be conducted in an objective, impartial and neutral manner, ensuring the involvement of stakeholders at all stages and their ownership of the process,” he said.

He, too, called for UN reform, with an enhanced General Assembly endowed with necessary authority to take the most important decisions on the international agenda, and an enlarged Security Council that assumes its vital role in building the credibility of the UN as a universal entity.

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