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## **UN pushes for more preventive diplomacy ahead of high-level meeting**



Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe briefs correspondents

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The United Nations today further highlighted the need for preventive diplomacy to nip crises in the bud before they become more intractable and deadly, as it prepared for a high-level discussion next week to enhance the tools at hand.

“What we need to do is to make sure that we’re out there fast, that we’re out there early, we’re out there trying to solve problems before they begin,” Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs B. Lynn Pascoe told a news briefing following the release of a UN [report](#) outlining the

successes and challenges of a process that, through a system of early warnings and skilled interventions, can pre-empt conflicts before they erupt, saving both lives and national resources.

He called preventive diplomacy “a crucial part of the UN operations that has needed to be pressed and pushed forward,” and cited the Organization’s cooperation with regional bodies in the process.

As [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon did in the report, Mr. Pascoe, who heads the UN’s Department of Political Affairs (DPA), laid out some of the recent successes, such as ending inter-ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, achieved in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), halting post-election violence in Kenya, and promoting the transition from military to civilian rule in Guinea.

The Under-Secretary-General said he expected the high-level Security Council discussion on the issue on 22 September to produce an effort “to really revitalize this area, to talk about what we have done and to move the process forward... For the Secretary-General it’s been something that he’s been preaching since the first day he got here,” he added.

In his report, Mr. Ban warned that adequate financial investment, in particular for rapid responses, is crucial and Member States must ensure predictable and timely financial support.

While the biggest return on the investment in preventive diplomacy comes in lives saved, the World Bank calculates 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.

Mr. Pascoe noted that the UN can either be out in front in the efforts, or in the background, working with regional organizations which often have the needed expertise. “Frankly our biggest successes are if we have been helping to resolve a problem and you guys don’t hear about it,” he said. “We’re not in the business of looking for publicity for the work that we do.”

One example was just a couple of weeks ago in Malawi, which was facing a potentially explosive confrontation between the Government and opposition after deadly protests in July. In keeping with the more proactive approach he has been advocating, Mr. Ban sent João Honwana, a DPA director for African affairs, who quietly mediated talks that helped avert a confrontation and pointed the two sides toward a dialogue on the underlying problems.

“The sense that we should be involved has been growing day by day,” Mr. Pascoe said, noting the key role played by DPA’s Mediation Division and support unit in mobilizing the requisite expertise, resources and standby teams.

Levent Bilman, director of the Policy and Mediation Division, stressed that the unit had become a reliable asset in supporting mediators, field missions and other UN agencies and regional organizations, with the capacity to deploy experts anywhere in the world within 72 hours.

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[Citing successes, Ban urges more preventive diplomacy to defuse conflicts](#)