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Ban urges students to help build rule of law institutions in emerging democracies



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

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[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon tonight articulated his vision for a world where accountability, the rule of law and conflict prevention mechanisms are entrenched for sustainable peace, and urged students to consider joining some of the United Nations peace missions in emerging democracies to help build accountable justice systems.

“At times of great flux and transformation such as those we are living through today, opportunities to make a difference are especially compelling,” Mr. Ban said, giving the Otto L. Walter annual lecture at the New York Law School.

“I will look to all of you, faculty and students alike, to stand up for the principles that animate this school – justice, equality and the certainty of law.”

He said the UN stood with those seeking to build societies where nobody is above the law, and where laws are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and are consistent with human rights.

Mr. Ban gave the example of Côte d’Ivoire, where the incumbent president refused to stand down after losing elections late last year and unleashed violence against his own people.

“The United Nations stood up for the will of the people – and for the ‘responsibility to protect.’ That new doctrine aims to ensure that people facing mass atrocity crimes are not alone when their own country cannot or will not protect them.”

The rightful winner of the elections, Alassane Ouattara, was eventually sworn-in as President earlier this year after months of conflict.

The principle of responsibility to protect was again applied in Libya where the international community came together to protect that country’s people from a massacre by its own Government, the Secretary-General said.

“Two weeks ago, the flag of a new Libya was raised at the United Nations. Where once the idea was widely debated but not put into practice, we can now say that the responsibility to protect has arrived,” said Mr. Ban.

“But let us remember; the concept is too often misunderstood as a licence for intervention. Yet human protection begins with prevention. We far prefer early engagement to late intervention. We prefer helping States succeed to responding when they fail.”

He said the international community’s challenge now is to help the emerging democracies successfully manage their transitions, build the foundation they need to ensure that the gains they have achieved are irreversible, and ensure that the peace they have found is sustainable.

That foundation, he said, is the rule of law. “Where the rule of law is weak, impunity prevails and the risk of a society lapsing into violent conflict is strong.”

He cited Somalia, where maritime pirates would not threaten international shipping lanes were it not for the country’s deep poverty, political instability and lack of legitimate justice and security institutions.

“Conversely, were it not for the substantial efforts of the United Nations to help build justice and security in post-conflict Liberia, thousands of demobilized combatants might now be agitating for another civil war.

“This is why the United Nations and its regional and civil society partners seek to strengthen the rule of law at the national and international levels.”

He said newly constituted governments are looking for a range of assistance to new drafting constitutions and rebuild or establish institutions trained in human rights and due process.

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