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Remarks at SDG 16 Conference on Peace, Justice and Inclusive Societies

Transforming governance for a more peaceful, just and inclusive future:
SDG 16 as the roadmap to respond to COVID-19 and build back better

Plenary Session 1.2: Enhancing resilience to shocks and crises:
Lessons learned from the pandemic

Wednesday, 28 April 2021

Thank you, Director-General, thank you dear Jan. I am really grateful to all the organizers for inviting the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) to this conference.

And as you mentioned in your introductory remarks, this session in particular is very close to the focus of the work of DPPA and in line with our goal to create more resilient societies that can manage conflicts in non-violent manners through inclusive political processes and political institutions.

The peace and security environment we face today is likely to deteriorate around several trends in the coming years:

Violent conflicts have become more fragmented, with many more armed non-state actors and regional actors, which are harder to resolve, calling into question the effectiveness of traditional conflict management and resolution tools – including peace operations and mediation efforts.

- Climate emergency has exacerbated risks and created additional sources of stress.
- Technological disruption, that has been mentioned today several times, is shaping politics – and conflicts – across the world.
- Inequalities, as important risk factors for violent conflicts, are increasing, including as a result of COVID-19.
- At the same time, a renewed global and regional strategic competition has made multilateral cooperation more difficult when it is needed the most.

While these trends have been evident for some time, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many, adding stress both at the national level and within the multilateral system.

By disrupting lives and economies, challenging community relations, and undermining trust in national (and international) institutions, the pandemic has created new flashpoints for tension and increased risks of instability.

Women and girls, especially, have already been disproportionately affected by the deteriorating peace, security, health, socio-economic and human rights environment – including with the unprecedented spike in domestic and gender-based violence during the pandemic.

The pandemic has also made more evident the devastating impact of disinformation and hate speech– and the manipulation of information for political purposes – at both the international and national levels.

The convergence of these risks, coupled with the longer-term ripple effects of the pandemic, will create needs that unquestionably outpace the ability to respond.

We think that the real, the only real sustainable solution is prevention. It is only prevention that can help us, if I may use the terminology, "flatten the curve" of conflict, and create space for our conflict management tools not to be overwhelmed.

Financing is of course key in this regard as we still struggle to fundraise in a sustainable way. In 2018, only four percent of Official Development Aid was spent on prevention and 13 percent on peacebuilding. Our prevention capacities cannot meet existing demand, let alone a prevention challenge magnified by the threats we identified in today's discussion.

The need to invest in prevention goes beyond additional funding.

It requires expanding our analytical lens so that the concept and practice of prevention can address multidimensional risks beyond the peace and security realm.

As the sustaining peace resolutions of 2016 emphasize, peacebuilding and sustaining peace is the responsibility of the entire United Nations system. The development actors are particularly important.

Inequality, poverty, and discrimination often occur in the context of weak governance, security, and justice institutions that fail to ensure equitable resource sharing—this problem lies at the root of most political instability and violent conflict.

Consequently, the prevention approach goes beyond SDG 16 and cuts across the 2030 Agenda.

In terms of successful prevention, the pandemic showed us that there is a need to work more closely with national actors, engaging earlier, listening to them, upstream and operationally to address emerging threats, and use our tools flexibly. We can also move towards switching the narrative from one of "prevention intervention" to building resilience, strengthening social cohesion and promoting more peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

We have made considerable progress in recent years in this context. I will mention just a few points in order to save time, including:

- creating a dedicated mechanism to address the security implications of climate change across our work;
- making a concerted investment in innovation within the Department;
- putting the women, peace and security and youth, peace and security agendas at the centre of our work; and
- further strengthening the Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on conflict prevention – which deploys Peace and Development Advisors in 65 countries to play a critical role in accompanying, connecting, and empowering national actors to lead peace efforts. Their role, bridging the gap between peace and

development, and ensuring that such efforts are inclusive and sustainable, was particularly critical in the COVID-19 response.

To conclude, the foundations for real, impactful work on prevention have been laid out – we now need to do the hard work to build on them. To recover better, and to minimize the impact of shocks, such as the pandemic, especially on already fragile situations, we need more investment in the Sustainable Development Goals, and we need to do that through collective efforts. As COVID-19 has demonstrated, global solutions and global solidarity are in the interest of everyone. We need to listen to and work with partners in countries and regions, in order to make progress in this area.

Thank you.