Remarks on
Military Confidence-building and Conflict Prevention

By

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I am grateful for this opportunity to participate in the 3rd Seoul Defense Dialogue and wish to thank Vice Minister Baek Seungjoo for inviting me to attend his important gathering.

The subjects of this session—confidence-building measures and conflict prevention—are very dear to the United Nations. These are among the most important roles played by the organization and are deeply rooted in the UN Charter.

I would like to go a step further and emphasize that these have not only been important in the past, but the fate of our future efforts in these specific areas will do a lot to shape the future of the United Nations—what we are as an international institution, and what will be expected of us for generations to come.

As parties to the Charter, our Member States have solemn responsibilities to uphold, including abiding by the prohibition against the threat and use of force and committing to settling disputes by peaceful means. In the Secretariat, the UN’s Department for Political Affairs plays the leading role in promoting the peaceful settlement of disputes, but many other components of the UN family also contribute to this in their own way.

In my field of disarmament, we view the uncontrolled production, stockpiling, and export of deadly weaponry contributing to disorder and instability in the world, which has a proven record of eroding confidence and aggravating existing conflicts. This applies especially to the continued production and threats of use of nuclear weapons, the deadliest of all weapons of mass destruction. They might as well be called “confidence-reduction weapons” since the impacts of their production, modernization, and spread are only sowing the seeds of proliferation and arms races.

Not surprisingly, confidence-building and conflict prevention measures come in many forms—from individual Member States, from groups of States, and from regional organizations. Yet today I would like to focus specifically on the question, What has the UN specifically to contribute—why are we unique, what is our value added to all these efforts by others?

Let us consider first of all our membership. With its 193 Member States, the UN is the most universal organization existing today for the purposes of maintaining international peace and security and for promoting international cooperation aimed at economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian development for all nations. All of these issues have a direct or indirect effect of preventing conflict. If the goal is to promote confidence-building and conflict resolution on a global scale, the UN simply has no rival that can command near universal support. To this extent, I do think it is fair to say that “UN is the only game in town”.
So what exactly does the UN do to prevent conflict? It uses three primary tools to address and prevent conflict as well as establish confidence building in order to maintain peace and security. And by “it” I mean the organization as a whole or its various components, depending on the circumstances.

The first of these is **peacekeeping**—an activity that takes place either to halt an armed conflict or to preserve a ceasefire. It is one of the oldest UN tools to maintain peace. Since 1948, there have been 69 operations—with 16 that are underway today on four continents. Today, about 116,400 staff members are serving in peacekeeping operations.

The second primary tool consists of **Special Political Missions (SPMs)**—these refer to UN civilian missions deployed for a limited time to support Member States typically to assist in the peaceful resolution of disputes, sanctions monitoring as well as fact-finding investigations. Activities can include good offices, conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding, which focus on mediation, conciliation, arbitration, or adjudication of disputes.

There are currently three types of these SPNs. First, High level envoys and Special Representatives of the Secretary-General are mandated to carry out UN mediation efforts and other mandates. Second, Sanctions and Monitoring teams, panels and other groups have responsibilities relating to assisting in the implementation of Security Council sanctions resolutions. And third, we have field-based SPMs located in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

This brings me to our third primary tool—**Humanitarian aid**, which offers a unique benefit, because it is focused on human security: that is, meeting the security needs of individuals and groups.

While I have emphasized the importance of these three primary tools, I would like to stress that disarmament and non-proliferation also have very significant roles to play both in conflict prevent and in confidence building.

I can summarize these briefly as follows.

Disarmament treaties promote the rule of law. Transparency arrangements serve to reduce the risk of misunderstandings that lead to conflict. "Weapons for development" programmes—invoking the collection of surplus arms in exchange for community-based development incentives—have been helping to prevent conflict both in "conflict-prone" and "post-conflict" societies.

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DD&R) mandates in peacekeeping and peace-building operations are vital to prevent conflict and provide confidence-building measures.
Disarmament also saves money, potentially enabling greater investments in meeting basic human needs. It reduces threats to refugees, women, and children. It alleviates threats to the environment. It reduces the incidence and the effects of armed conflict. And by so doing, it helps foreign investment, economic growth, and trade.

The United Nations has long viewed enhanced transparency as an important means of confidence-building and we are responsible for maintaining two main instruments for this purpose: the UN Report on Military Expenditures, and the UN Register of Conventional Arms. Every year governments are invited to report its military expenditures to the UN, as well as its recent imports and exports of conventional arms. We are working to expand participation in both instruments precisely because of the benefits they offer in confidence building.

This is not all the UN is doing. The Secretary-General was recently asked to prepare an inventory of military CBMs. Many countries contributed to this exercise, and the result was a rich set of possible measures, which can be tapped into by anyone interested in pursuing improved security relationships in any region. These include, for example, information exchanges, observation and verification measures, and various military constraints aimed at preventing surprise attacks.

In the area of weapons of mass destruction, disarmament and non-proliferation measures, treaties such as the NPT, CWC and BWC provide confidence amongst State parties which in turn strengthens conflict prevention.

I would go so far as to say that the main goal of arms control and disarmament seems to have been forgotten. Primarily, disarmament measures are conflict-prevention measures. We are interested in arms control and disarmament, because we are interested in preventing conflict, increasing security and protecting people.

The United Nations, including its Office for Disarmament Affairs, stands ready to work with any country or group of countries to further develop and apply military CBMs tailored to their specific national and regional situations. We understand the importance of this work and wish to contribute to its success.