

Réunion : Conseil de sécurité

Thème: La guerre, ses enseignements et la quête de la paix permanente

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Orateur : Jeffrey Feltman, Secrétaire général adjoint aux affaires politiques

Difficulté : **

Éléments à fournir : /

Mr President,

Thank you for inviting me to represent the Secretary-General today in addressing the Council “War, its lessons and the search for a permanent peace”. The relevance and timeliness of this debate are all too clear when we look to Syria, South Sudan or the Central African Republic at the moment.

The founders of the United Nations, in seeking to end the scourge of war, had in the forefront of their minds the searing experience of a global conflagration that pitted States against States. In more recent years, the UN has often been called upon to contribute to ending conflicts inside States rather than between States. Moreover, in a point relevant for today’s debate, even as conflicts between States lessen in number, conflicts inside States too often reoccur.

In both types of conflicts, distortions of history and identity can be contributing factors. Wartime rhetoric cultivates division. Helping groups inside States move beyond such zero-sum thinking to accepting a shared national narrative is especially hard. The United Nations has a long history of helping to establish the means to resolve territorial disputes, but reconciling competing visions of history and identity is far less of a developed science.

While we hope to contribute to permanent peace when we act — be it as members of the Security Council or the UN Secretariat — past crises have shown that immediate imperatives tend to be so overpowering that what appear to be longer-term aspects often receive less attention, even though peacebuilding is now an indispensable part of our conflict management and prevention work. In other words, while we have time-tested formulas for separating armies, for tending to the needy, for enacting political road maps and rebuilding actual roads and ministries, we have reflected less on our ability to repair trust in societies and to foster genuine reconciliation. How can we mend shattered social fabrics so that people look in their adversary’s eyes once again and see the human being rather than the enemy?

Mr President,

In the time I have to explore this topic today, I will address two main questions. What are the essential elements of reconciliation? And how should the UN's approach to crisis management be combined with the imperative of enabling societies to heal?

So, what are the essential elements of reconciliation? When I refer to reconciliation, I have the following in mind — by accounting for and sharing views about the past, including prior to conflict, in order to restore mutual respect and trust between groups and individuals. To make this a reality, I see a double responsibility. First, the responsibility of the international community to assist in creating conditions that, second, enable national actors to live up to their responsibility for rebuilding trust and respect, including reckoning with their own behaviour and actions.

Rebuilding trust and respect requires engaging with one another at all levels of society, not just at the level of political and economic elites. Leaders need to set the example, not just in ceasing wartime rhetoric and ending the intentional promotion of grievances, but also by deeds of genuine cooperation and honest examinations of their own roles in conflict. Leaders also need to demonstrate that power-sharing and other forms of post-conflict governance do not signify that the winner takes all, but that room is available for engagement for all parts of society.

It is often being said that youth is the hope for overcoming past hatred. However, reality shows that youth brought up just after war tend to be more extreme than their parents. By often being deprived of the chance to meet "the other", they are also deprived of the chance to experience what they have in common. So, we need to find ways in our work in the aftermath of conflict to break the vicious cycle of divided communities when the hatred and sense of victimhood is most pronounced and palpable. Working with teachers and parents is as important as working with the young people themselves.

More broadly, education and curricula tend to be disseminators of contentious narratives. As difficult as it is, it appears critical to start early with the development of history curricula that, at the very least, share the different interpretations of recent events. This could form the beginning of developing a shared narrative and establishing points of convergence in people's experiences and thinking.

Mr President,

Let me now turn to my second question. How can the UN's approach to crisis management be combined with the imperative of enabling societies to heal?

Over the past few months, this Council has, along with other business, expressed alarm about the catastrophic situation in the Central African Republic, the ongoing slaughter in Syria and the outbreak of brutal hostilities in South Sudan. While outside forces play roles in each of these conflicts, the root causes, the initial sparks and the momentum of these conflicts are essentially internal. In all three cases, the physical end to war, while urgently needed, will not produce lasting peace and security. In all three countries, an end to the fighting will not

permanently end the conflict. As we have seen repeatedly, fighting that ends without reconciliation — especially fighting inside States — is fighting that can and often does resume.

In the CAR, religious communities that peacefully coexisted for generations now view each other not as neighbours but as enemies. As difficult as ending the fighting is, rebuilding a shared sense of community and forging a common narrative about recent events will be even harder, but it is essential if the CAR citizens will ever enjoy lasting peace and stability.

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