

Secretary-General's remarks at Security Council open debate on "Respect for the Principles and Purposes of the Charter as a Key Element for the Maintenance of International Peace and Security"

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Excelentísima Sra. Delcy Eloína Rodríguez Gómez, Canciller de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela y Presidenta del Consejo de Seguridad,

Distinguidos Ministros,

Distinguidos Miembros del Consejo de Seguridad,

Agradezco a la Presidencia de Venezuela haber organizado este debate abierto sobre un tema de enorme importancia para las Naciones Unidas.

Today's event continues the useful discussion initiated last year under the Chinese presidency.

The year 2015 saw important steps to uphold the values and advance the vision set out in the Charter of the United Nations.

Reviews of the international peace and security architecture provided valuable ideas for strengthening our work in conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change demonstrated our capacity to overcome divisions and chart a course towards the common good.

While we celebrate these achievements, we must also recognize that 2015 was one of the most troubled and turbulent years in recent history. Civil wars ravaged Syria and Yemen. Violent extremism spread. The blatant disrespect for fundamental principles of international human

rights and humanitarian law defies our common humanity -- and challenges the Security Council in fulfilling its duties under the Charter.

For the millions living amidst war and extreme poverty, and for countless others whose rights are violated or neglected in other ways, the ideals and aspirations of the Charter remain elusive. Bringing the promise of the Charter to the most vulnerable must continue to be our goal.

Decades of experience have validated the Charter's vision. We understand better than ever that peace, development and human rights are intrinsically connected. We have seen that conflict-affected countries generally experience the highest poverty rates, and were the least likely to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. We know that human rights abuses are our most effective early warning signs of the instability that often escalates into atrocity crimes.

The primary responsibility for preventing conflict and protecting human rights lies with Member States. It is clearly established in the Charter, and reiterated in numerous resolutions adopted by this Council as well as by the General Assembly.

But in some situations, Member States may lack the capacity to fulfil their obligations.

In others, it is Member States themselves which are the main violators of human rights.

The United Nations can help Member States meet these national challenges and uphold their **responsibility to protect**

We continue to offer assistance in building up national capacity to identify and address the precursors of genocide and other grave crimes.

The Human Rights up Front initiative is helping the United Nations system to coordinate better across the peace and security, development and human rights pillars, and to engage with

Member States at early stages of crises.

We are placing a growing focus on prevention -- through both early warning and early action.

We should all much prefer to assess early information than to wait for the warning signs of disaster. We should be open to modest steps that could address situations of concern before they grow more serious and complex.

Our engagement with Member States on these matters will continue to be based on cooperation, transparency and respect for sovereignty.

I know that at times Member States feel that such efforts are a form of interference that undermines national sovereignty. But it is violence and conflict – and not our attempt to help Member States prevent it – that threaten State sovereignty. It is violations of human rights by the State that erode the legitimacy of the State.

In its engagements, the United Nations seeks to reinforce sovereignty, not challenge or undermine it.

Article 99 of the Charter empowers the Secretary-General to “bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security”. The General Assembly has recognized this as well.

Article 99 has been formally invoked only rarely in UN history. But that does not mean it is no longer operative or relevant, or that it cannot be invoked in the future. It remains a key mechanism.

Whether or not Article 99 is formally invoked may be secondary. First and foremost is our responsibility to alert the Council when we see situations that we feel require its engagement. I will continue to act in that spirit.

When considering which items reach the agenda of the Security Council, my further hope is that we will be driven by the Charter, not by geo-political rivalries or other external dynamics.

When a member state uses an overly broad definition of terrorism to monopolize power at the risk of long-term stability, that would seem to merit the Council's attention. When we see massive loss of life and cross-border flows of people, that would seem to merit the Council's attention.

We must not avert our eyes from these or other such situations, no matter how complex or contentious they might be to discuss. And the world must see that the Council is addressing the situations that matter most to most people.

The Security Council has many tools with which to encourage and seek to secure the peaceful resolution of disputes before they escalate.

But ultimately the unity of the Security Council is the crucial factor. We have seen what [heights] are possible when unity is visible -- and we have seen the depths that are inevitable when unity has vanished.

We look forward to working with you to best serve "we the peoples" in the enduring spirit of the Charter.

Thank you.

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