

Statement by the Republic of Lithuania at the

UN Security Council's Open Debate

“Maintenance of International Peace and Security: War, its lessons, and the search for a permanent peace”

29 January 2014, New York

Mr. President,

I would like to thank the Jordanian Presidency of the Security Council for organising this thought-provoking debate. I also thank Under Secretary General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman for his statement.

Experience shows that humanity's response to war has been a combination of normative and institutional acts.

Both the Genocide Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights arose directly from the experience of World War II.

Originating from the bloody memories of Solferino, the international humanitarian law continued to evolve, leading to the reinforcement in 1977 of the provisions on, inter alia, the illegality of indiscriminate attacks against civilians and expansion of its application to non-international conflicts.

The more recent concepts of the protection of civilians, human security, and responsibility to protect emerged as a response to the changing nature of modern conflict.

The moral outrage in the face of mass atrocities highlighted the urgency of tackling impunity for crimes against humanity, genocide and major war crimes, leading to the creation of international and mixed criminal tribunals and the International Criminal Court, a body whose purpose is to make accountability truly universal.

Commissions of inquiry and fact finding missions established themselves as an important tool for registering mass violations of human rights and crimes against humanity. Today, they are a useful instrument in the work of this Council.

Furthermore, the world has seen more than 30 truth and reconciliation commissions established to research, record and testify abuses of international humanitarian and human rights law. Recommendations by these commissions command high legitimacy and are essential for ending impunity and preventing further abuses.

Such commissions are instrumental in the healing process of conflict affected communities, as sharing personal stories of pain and loss can help the victims to recover their dignity and give them courage, while remembering, to move on with their lives.

In our part of the world, joint commissions of historians to seek common understanding of contentious issues have been set up.

Truth is essential, as knowledge and memory of the brutalities of war continuously push humankind to engage in seeking better, more effective ways to protect human lives and human dignity and create durable peace.

To have an impact, however, truth alone is not enough. It must be supported by political will and firmly anchored in an enabling legal and institutional framework of respect for human rights, the rule of law, accountability, and democratic governance.

Mr. President,

One fundamental lesson that requires enhanced application is that of prevention. Unresolved grievances, exclusion and marginalisation, extremist ideologies and unchecked personal ambitions, territorial claims and ethnic tensions - a hundred years from the beginning of World War I, the causes of conflict remain hauntingly similar.

Knowing this, it is essential that we should improve significantly our ability to anticipate the warning signs of a looming conflict and act accordingly. The world is not short of inspiring examples of preventive action. An outstanding case of preventive thinking in Europe after World War II was Franco-German reconciliation, binding two former enemies in a solid framework of interdependence. What started with the emergence of the European Coal and Steel Community, today is a 28-strong European Union, whose membership continues to be sought and inspire democratic transformations among aspirant countries.

Regional organisations are well placed to develop preventive capacities. Lithuania's experience as OSCE chair a couple of years ago, working jointly with the UN and the EU to defuse emerging crises, strengthened our belief in the importance of confidence building, use of good offices, and mediation for conflict prevention. The efforts of subregional organisations in Africa and elsewhere aimed at conflict prevention offer a promising alternative for the future.

A key element of prevention is education. In his powerful testimony two days ago at the Holocaust remembrance ceremony, Steven Spielberg spoke how survivors can teach other survivors to rebuild their lives after experiencing unspeakable horrors. Through education, we can keep alive the memory of the countless victims of wars, genocides, ethnic cleansings, religious extremism and totalitarian ideologies. Their stories are essential in promoting the shared values of humanity and respect for human life, so that the much too promised "Never Again" can finally become never again indeed.

I thank you.