

Statement by the Kingdom of the Netherlands at the Open Debate of the United Nations Security Council

Maintenance of International Peace and Security:  
“War, its lessons, and the search for a permanent peace”  
29 January 2014  
(Unofficial Transcript)

Thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this important debate. The Netherlands aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the observer of the European Union.

In 1992, I saw personally the horrible results of war when I visited Beirut from my posting in Damascus. I saw a city destroyed, and I saw the lives of people damaged. At that time, I realized that there is one key lesson from war: that we have to do our utmost to prevent it and that the search for peace is a common moral imperative.

Here I will address the issues of prevention, accountability and reconciliation.

When it comes to prevention, strengthening the international legal order is crucial. A stronger international legal order reduces the chances of conflict and is vital for the peaceful settlement of conflicts.

Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations is crystal-clear to that effect and gives concrete options. It is encouraging to see that these peaceful settlement mechanisms are being used more and more often. Let me give two examples.

The Netherlands strongly supports the United Nations as a global actor in the field of mediation, including through our substantial funding for the Department of Political Affairs, and Jeff Feltman this morning said important words to that effect.

When it comes to the judicial settlement of conflicts, the International Court of Justice and the Permanent Court of Arbitration, both housed in the Peace Palace, are global symbols of the pursuit of peace by means of law. Last year we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Peace Palace, and The Hague, as we know, has been labelled the legal capital of the world.

Another crucial element of prevention is early warning of conflicts. My Government highly values the initiative of the United Nations under the “Rights up front” action plan, which is very closely linked to the very important concept of the responsibility to protect, which we wholeheartedly support. The United Nations has clearly demonstrated the close link between peace, development and human rights. Human rights violations function as an early-warning signal of potential conflicts, and the Security Council should act accordingly. We believe, and I would like to echo my New Zealand colleague in saying, that there should be better interaction between the countries on the Council and those that are not on the Council — that there is room for improvement.

When conflicts do occur, the United Nations must make sure, and let me here echo Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, that we have the reporting and that we have the type of people who can do the work on the ground on human rights and on the political side.

Mr. President, accurate reporting by the United Nations is crucial to accountability and reconciliation, as you mentioned in the concept note (S/2014/30, annex). I would like also to reiterate that accountability is a condition for durable reconciliation and peace. Mass atrocities and international crimes should never go unpunished, regardless of whom the perpetrator is. A direct link exists between prevention, protection and prosecution, as my Minister, Mr. Timmermans, made clear during the 10-year celebration of the International Criminal Court. Prosecution also has a crucial preventative effect.

Mr. President, as you stated, the narrative of a conflict is important for reconciliation and resolution. It is crucial that objective data and proof be conserved, both during and after conflicts. The Netherlands, by hosting and funding the Syria Justice and Accountability Centre, is doing exactly that in the case of the current Syria crisis.

The conservation of the records of the international tribunals is equally important, as a point of reference for the origins of past wrongs and future reconciliation. The Dutch National Archives serve as the depository for the Nuremberg Tribunal and the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

As our colleague from Namibia said, in all phases of conflict, before, during or after, the position of women deserves specific attention. Women are crucial to the prevention of conflicts, to protection during conflicts and to reconciliation after conflicts. Therefore my Government has worked closely with UN-Women in recent months so as to have a group of Syrian women invited to Geneva and to New York. We thank the Security Council for having received them.

Allow me to conclude by reminding all of us that the tools for lasting peace exist. The burden is upon us to use them effectively. May our work be guided by the wise words of Baruch Spinoza, who said, "Peace is not an absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, for confidence, for justice".

Let us work towards a world in which we are partners in bringing about peace, justice and development. It is the ambition of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to be a partner in that endeavour.