

Statement by Nigeria 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

I thank you and your delegation, Mr. President, for organizing this important debate and for the excellent concept note (S/2014/30, annex) provided to guide our discussion. I also thank Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Feltman for sharing his thoughts on this topic.

The first sentence in the preamble of the Charter of the United Nations highlights the need to save successive generations from the scourge of war. Yet that remains a daunting task. While the number of wars between States has been reduced significantly since the end of the Second World War, the number of wars within States have increased considerably. The quest for a permanent peace was the primary reason for the establishment of the United Nations. The costs of war in human and material terms leave us with unsavoury legacies. The search for a permanent peace should therefore lead us to question why past approaches have not been successful. It is no longer remains an argument of nations arming themselves to defend sovereignty or territorial integrity, but a conscious act of preparation for war. We remain tied to the dictum that if you want peace you must prepare for war.

To its credit, the United Nations has acted to prevent outbreaks of conflict, but it can do only so much in that respect. States’ interests may diverge from the principles of the United Nations, and sometimes they come into open conflict, leading inevitably to violations of the Charter and an outbreak of one form of conflict or another. Showing its resilience and undaunted interest in keeping the peace and on separating combatants, the United Nations has often been called upon to provide troops to play those roles, which it has admirably done during the past six decades. In fulfilling its mandate to maintain international peace and security, the Security Council has played a pivotal role in the prevention of wars.

As the representatives of our countries, we must unequivocally state our commitment to peace and abjuration of war as a means of settling disputes and disagreements, especially between and within States. In abjuring war, we should not merely wish for a state of absence of conflict, but we should strive to establish a state of just peace in the world, where oppression no longer tramples the dignity of peoples or denies them their rights and freedoms. Where such rights are denied and where impunity is allowed to prevail, there the seeds of conflicts and wars are planted and nurtured by hatred, extremism and intolerance. In proclaiming the need for a just peace, we must also demand an end to all wars as extensions of politics and means of settling human affairs.

Wars are manifestations of human folly, and therefore cannot be defended by either reason or wisdom. As rational beings conscious of right and wrong, we must know that war is wrong and peace — a just peace — is right. We must aspire to end wars and usher in the reign of peace across the globe.

Upholding the Charter of the United Nations faithfully would mean, first of all, renouncing once and for all the prerogative to take recourse in war and accepting the spirit of peaceful settlement of all disputes, including by mediation, arbitration and juridical means. Secondly, it means exerting all the powers of the Member States towards ensuring that threats to international peace and security are not allowed to remain unchallenged. In that scenario, the responsibility to protect becomes the responsibility to prevent.

There are feasible alternatives to a world characterized by conflicts. It is up to us to consciously make the choices that would prevent war. We need, therefore, to revisit the philosophical underpinnings and assumptions of our foreign policies. We need to ensure that foreign policies are not designed to be instruments of war and conflict. Indeed, we need to rethink beyond narrow, so-called national interests within and between States. Inclusion rather than exclusion and compassion rather than oppression should be the basis of our relations. That can be achieved only when we emphasize what unites us rather than what divides us.

Despite what may appear as daunting challenges to the elimination of the scourge of war, there is no alternative but to sustain our efforts in the search for a permanent peace. We therefore firmly believe that the use of preventive diplomacy tools presents the most viable option for the attainment of that objective. Across the street from United Nations Headquarters there is monument erected to promote the

cause of peace. On it are inscribed the words “to beat swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks”. It is a reminder of the need for us to end wars and embrace peace.