Statement by Nigeria at the Open Debate of the United Nations Security Council

Conflict Prevention
21 August 2014
(Unofficial Transcript)

Mr. Sarki (Nigeria): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this very important open debate and for the excellent concept note that preceded this meeting (S/2014/572, annex). We commend your delegation for the initiative that resulted in the unanimous adoption of resolution 2171 (2014) this morning. We thank His Excellency the Secretary-General for his sobering remarks on conflicts and their consequences all over the world. We pay tribute to the outgoing United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay, the highly respected African judge, whom we are very proud of and indeed fortunate to have had in that office for the past six years. We salute her courage, her sense of justice and her dedication and commitment in protecting human decency. We wish her well in her future endeavours.

Edmund Burke, your countryman, Mr. President, in his study on the causes of discontents, recommended that in order to understand tumult and disorder, we must study the temper of the times. In our world today, the temper that is clearly discernible is one of foreboding and despair. Conflicts and disturbances to general peace and tranquillity are causing apprehension and unease everywhere. People are wondering if indeed the end of time and doomsday are at hand. A no-less respected authority than the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace echoed that sentiment in a recent article entitled "Is the World Falling Apart?", in which an assessment of instability around the world was made.

Conflicts nowadays seem to have a life of their own. They seem to have an automacity about them that gives them the character of an instantaneous eruption, thereby giving little room or time for intervention, mediation and reconciliation to happen. Conflict-prevention has therefore become a recurring topic in Security Council deliberations. Regional and subregional organizations like the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States and the Southern African Development Commmunity are constantly engaged in conflict-prevention and resolution and post-conflict management activities. The AU Peace and Security Council and the United Nations Security Council regularly meet to address conflict situations in Africa. Other mechanisms, such as the use of the good offices of eminent persons, and institutional frameworks like the Intergovernmental Authority for Development are also deployed to address conflicts in Africa. The responsibility to protect was initially an African idea that has now become an integral part of conflict- prevention and mitigation in the United Nations. The observance of the rule of law and the opposition to unconstitutional changes of Governments are also some of the measures put in place by the African Union to prevent conflict in our region.

The Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights have enumerated the various natures of conflicts and their consequences. Various factors, including fragile constitutional frameworks, the absence of good governance, competition over limited natural resources and economic disparities, can come together and make a State vulnerable to conflict, and conflicts incur great human suffering and economic loss. Conflicts impede development and, in some cases, even reverse it. Professor Michael Chalmers, in his analysis of the cost of conflict-prevention, determined that $1 in preventive action saved $10 in the recovery costs borne by the international community, the nation concerned and the neighbouring States. That clearly makes a case for preventive action to forestall conflicts.

Another important dimension in the effort to prevent conflicts is restricting access to arms by non-State actors, terrorist groups and criminal gangs, who generally show no hesitation in engaging in hostile acts against States and communities, or in rival groups. The proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons is making that a very difficult task. We call on the Council to pay heed to the adoption of the Arms Trade Treaty and the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons and to ensure that the provisions of

those treaties are scrupulously observed by all actors.

Horizon scanning and early warning are tools that are available to the Council for conflict prevention. They allow the Council to take a long-term view of situations in order to facilitate detection and assessment of issues that may emerge in the future with the potential of causing conflict or crisis. The tools provided in Article 1 of Chapter I and in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations on the Council's disposal for the provision of conflict do not function in isolation, and the means of their application is obviously highly context specific. The strategies are by nature anticipatory, relying upon early warning to be effective. Efforts must therefore be made to establish trust with key local, national and regional actors well before a crisis reaches the tipping point.

Various parts of the United Nations system have a role to play in conflict prevention. It is essential that those offices function in a coherent manner and do not provide varying analyses of a potential conflict situation. The Council committed itself to a preventive approach to conflict management in resolution 1626 (2005). The Council has the potential to be a pivot in the process of generating political will, securing pre-position funding, building capacities on the ground and promoting the use of the full range of preventive diplomacy tools. We should also not forget the important role that the Office of the Secretary-General could play in the prevention of conflicts and in mitigating their impact.

That is why we believe that the time has now come for the United Nations to use its resources, all of it, to act in anticipation towards the maintenance of international peace and security.