



## Summary Note

### ‘Operational Conflict Prevention’

Convened by H.E. Dr. Max van der Stoel

in collaboration with the

Office of the President of the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly

with the support of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands and Sweden

United Nations, New York

8 September 2006

Penthouse, Dag Hammarskjöld Library

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## **'Operational Conflict Prevention'**

### **Summary Note**

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On 8 September 2006, an informal meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on 'Operational Conflict Prevention' was held at the United Nations Secretariat in collaboration with the Office of the President of the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly and with the generous support of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands and Sweden.

Reflecting the growing importance of, and interest in, conflict prevention, and following the introduction to the General Assembly of the United Nations by Secretary-General Kofi Annan of his final report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict, a constructive exchange was enabled around matters of practice, in particular through preventive diplomacy.

In light of experience, three issues appear especially pressing at the present time. First, the international community has to date generally neglected internal conflicts, which have since the end of the Cold War predominated and which have caused tremendous losses in human and economic terms. Second, the increasing interest of regional inter-governmental organizations to engage constructively in conflict prevention initiatives has not been sufficiently welcomed. Indeed, experience has shown they have a crucial role and merit substantial political support coupled with the necessary material means. Third, it is increasingly clear that the establishment of effective early warning capacity at regional level, to alert and inform relevant actors to take appropriate action at the earliest possible stage is extremely important and should be established in varying international organizations throughout the world. Existing mechanisms should be viewed as a source of useful, practical experience.

Accordingly, the debate and discussion enabled by today's meeting is of fundamental importance and should be continued.

*H.E. Dr. Max van der Stoel  
Chairman's Statement  
8 September 2006*

The following is an overview of the proceedings, which included perspectives from the United Nations, regional, sub-regional and other inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), and midday presentations by non-governmental organizations. Attendance included UN Permanent Missions, Secretariat and specialized agency staff, and New York-based NGOs and scholars from the conflict prevention and human rights fields. To encourage broad dialogue from these diverse experiences, 'operational' was considered to encompass practical approaches to *operationalize* the concept of conflict prevention, as well as the specifically pre-conflict measures taken to avert imminent crises.

### **1. Opening**

*H.E. Dr. Max van der Stoel, Minister of State of The Netherlands, former OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and Co-Convener*

Welcome and introductory remarks were provided by Dr. van der Stoel, who commended co-convener and outgoing President of the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Dr. Jan Eliasson, for his successful steering of the General Assembly through a momentous year of unprecedented change in the organization. Dr. van der Stoel observed that while the 2005 Summit Document and changes to key UN organs and bodies had figured prominently, less attention had been paid to the important possibilities commended in the UN Charter by Article 33 on the Pacific Settlement of Disputes, an area of particular interest to Dr. Eliasson and one in which he has had significant influence.

It was anticipated that the experience and contribution of the personalities and experts present would inform and stimulate thinking on constructive approaches to operationalizing conflict prevention in the work of the UN and in regional and other inter-governmental organizations. The more and better such actors become, the more opportunities will exist for varying actions, on the basis of comparative advantage, to address and arrest early the causes of violent conflict. Important developments to this end were recognized in the area of cooperation and early political assistance from regional, sub-regional and other organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), The Commonwealth, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to their members. On this basis, Dr. van der Stoel hoped the meeting would permit a free exchange of views and new ideas on more effective approaches to preventing conflict.

Seeking to frame the day's discussion, Dr. van der Stoel noted that from the end of World War II to the present, millions have lost their lives in various armed conflicts – sometimes between States, but increasingly within States. The UN Charter concentrates exclusively on the need to prevent or end hostilities *between* States, with the specific provision of Article 1, paragraph 7, that “Nothing in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State or shall require the member to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter.”

Since 1945, *intra-State* armed conflicts have greatly outnumbered those between States and resulted in the largest number of victims. States everywhere have also become increasingly interdependent, such that internal conflicts can no longer be viewed as isolated events. Indeed, he noted, they often have serious and potentially dangerous *external* effects, especially on neighboring States. To build a more stable and secure world, ways to prevent internal armed conflicts must be found.

Dr. van der Stoel discussed common causes of intra-State conflict and shared an approach for addressing them. He observed that in States which have an effective democratic system of governance and respect human rights, governmental systems provide guarantees for equitable treatment of diverse groups and interests – and armed conflicts usually do not occur. Democratic development and respect for human rights must therefore be part of policies aimed at risk reduction. The frequency of inter-group conflicts within many States makes it increasingly urgent to seek ways to defuse and possibly even solve them. A realistic aim is usually that the government agree to policies which ensure each group can maintain its cultural identity. At the same time, majority and other concerns can make reaching the best formula difficult, making the assistance of experts all the more important. Such actors can help all sides understand how to accommodate concerns, implement practical solutions otherwise unseen, and manage the tensions that can lead to disaster.

Dr. van der Stoel highlighted his frequent reference to this possible role of international experts and mediators in an internal conflict and invited comment and further thoughts on the subject. He emphasized the need for a clear distinction between outside *interference* and outside *involvement*, whereby the imposition of outside views or a particular solution constitutes interference, and the friendly offer of assistance from a dis-interested third-party with the sole aim of preventing violence and helping parties find mutually acceptable solutions should be viewed as welcome – and perhaps necessary – involvement. However, for such involvement to be positive and useful, actors must have a thorough knowledge of the nature of the conflict, observe strict neutrality and respect confidentiality – following the rules of quiet diplomacy. It was submitted that only such efforts which fully respect the sovereignty of the State concerned are acceptable.

In conclusion, Dr. van der Stoel observed that though such third-party involvement in internal conflicts is often unnecessary, early involvement by an outside mediator may often be highly desirable. Positions tend to harden as time goes by without a solution in sight. Paradoxically, the international community is often reluctant to push for mediation until a situation deteriorates to a point at which chances for success have diminished. Although there are no easy ways out of this dilemma, a significant step forward would be the creation within regional and other inter-governmental organizations, and the United Nations, of effective early warning units with qualified permanent staff to continuously follow developments where the risk of a potentially dangerous conflict appears considerable. Such units could also provide valuable

advice and indicate whether the sending of international experts and mediators to a specific crisis area might be advisable.

*H.E. Dr. Jan Eliasson, President of the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly and Co-Convenor*

Dr. Eliasson offered opening remarks on the final working day of his Presidency. He noted the distinction between 'structural', 'operational' and 'systemic' prevention: measures to ensure that crises do not arise in the first place and, if they do, that they do not recur; measures applicable in the face of immediate crisis; and measures to address global risk of conflict that transcend particular States. In his view, action is recommended, and necessary, at all three levels.

In this light, Dr. Eliasson outlined three significant challenges: (1) development of knowledge and information-sharing – including early warning systems, multi-sectoral sharing of analyses, and specialized programs for conflict prevention (like those for human rights, democracy, gender and development); (2) that conflict prevention not become a "North-South" issue, viewed as a mode of interference as has regrettably become the case of the *Responsibility to Protect*; and, (3) development of a "culture" of prevention, including the "operationalization" of ideas so that they enter common dialogue. The UN Security Council should be the focal point for promoting these practices via, *inter alia*, fact-finding missions, preventive deployment, and more automatic use of UN Charter Chapter VI provisions for the peaceful settlement of disputes. In addition, Dr. Eliasson duly noted that Article 99 of the Charter provides that "The Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security" – a possibility of which Dr. Eliasson suggested more might be made.

Responding to questions, Dr. Eliasson stressed the need to make better use of the principles enshrined in the UN Charter, specifically Article 33, which states that "The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice." He further referred to Article 35, which permits a State to bring a dispute or situation, as identified in Article 34, to the attention of the Security Council or the General Assembly. Appropriate and timely action must accordingly be taken at the earliest possible stage and with much greater frequency. Methods for the pacific settlement of disputes are numerous, but their implementation must be "more of a habit". Member States – especially the non-permanent members of the Security Council – were urged to take the initiative in this regard.

## **2. Comparative Practice**

In recognition of the increasing interest and importance of regional, sub-regional and other IGOs in conflict prevention, and in view of upcoming debate on UN Security Council Resolution 1631 on enhanced UN-regional collaboration, regional perspectives were of particular relevance to the meeting. Indeed, experience has shown that such organizations, with their strong political, cultural and other ties, understanding of in-regional dynamics, and more numerous common interests, can generate greater confidence on the basis of better knowledge, sensitivity and closer accountability – and so are more likely to be respected and effective. The view from three regional IGOs with a range of institutional frameworks, contexts, mandates and experience – the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – were offered in the morning session, and an informative note from The Commonwealth was circulated among participants.

*H.E. Ambassador Rolf Ekéus, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM)*

Echoing the words of Dr. Eliasson, Ambassador Ekéus referred to conflict prevention as one of the chief obligations set forth in the UN Charter. Nevertheless, discussing the virtue of the concept is far easier than establishing concrete mechanisms to accomplish this fundamental aim. The High Commissioner

described overcoming reluctance to conflict prevention as the central challenge, and submitted that the origins, approach and experience of the HCNM present lessons with potentially broad applicability.

Inter-group tensions arising from, *inter alia*, exclusion, alienation and threats to identity often fuel violent conflict. Such tensions can have regional and international repercussions, and are therefore of regional and global concern. Amb. Ekéus noted accordingly the important role of regional IGOs in their respective areas, and that effective conflict prevention mechanisms may be more easily established at regional level. The experience, recommendations and *modus operandi* of the HCNM – namely engaging member States *in confidence* and providing useful advice rather than interference – can inform similar developments and activities in diverse regional contexts. Quiet diplomacy has enabled the HCNM to gain the trust of parties and to provide governments sufficient space to consider discreetly and implement his recommendations out of self-interest. In his view, the job is that of physician, not policeman.

On an operational – i.e. functional – level, the HCNM described his frequent visits to capitals and areas with disputes, meeting with minority groups and others in participating OSCE States to establish and maintain dialogue and cooperation, and experience situations first-hand. Concrete recommendations and advice around issues of constitutional law, minority-related legislation, political and institutional frameworks, and other recurring concerns in inter-group relations are then provided to the governments concerned. With nearly 15 years of practice, the HCNM has accumulated significant expertise and experience in these areas, developing policies and approaches that improve inter-group relations. Armed with practical and useful recommendations based on fundamental standards of human rights, the High Commissioner conveys in confidence to governments – and in turn to majority and minority communities – how they can be implemented and why doing so will benefit all concerned. Targeted projects are then implemented by the HCNM in corresponding areas. Since its creation, the HCNM has allayed the concerns and reluctance some participating States felt at that time. With persistent, ongoing and constructive contact, it has built and maintained the credibility and confidence that allow it be effective.

In conclusion, Amb. Ekéus highlighted three arguments for the relevance of these lessons in other areas: (1) many, or indeed most, violent conflicts are rooted in and driven by inter-ethnic and/or majority-minority tensions; (2) much is known about the factors underlying such conflicts and the means to address them, and it is in the interest of all that States have access to these insights and methods; and, (3) the UN and regional IGOs should provide such advice to their member States. Contrary to the common perception of a threat to sovereignty, independent expert counsel can be given in confidence through quiet diplomacy, and States are not forced to follow it. Importantly, many examples now exist to confirm its effectiveness.

*Mr. Victor Rico Frontaura, Director, OAS Office of Conflict Prevention and Resolution*

Guided by the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes, the OAS has since 1985 taken a number of steps that allow the Organization to become involved in the internal affairs of a member State whenever there is a threat to democracy. Among these, Resolution 1080 and the Inter-American Democratic Charter are instruments that isolate any country that has an unconstitutional alteration or disruption of the democratic order. The OAS has contributed to reducing intra-State tensions through the promotion and defense of democracy and respect for human rights, election supervision, mediation, on-site visits and recommendations to parties in dispute via special representatives or envoys. Necessary support for such initiatives has been provided by the OAS Fund for Peace. At the same time, the OAS Secretary-General plays an active role through his 'good offices', bringing key parties together for dialogue and problem-solving. On-site visits and reports of human rights abuses by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (ICHR) further contribute to conflict prevention by providing alerts to OAS Secretariat and the international community on situations that could lead to conflict.

It was noted that although the Americas have had one of the lowest levels of armed conflict of any region in the world, many threats to peace and security remain. Economic inequality, institutional weakness that limits political participation and government responsiveness, and the marginalization of indigenous groups and women are potential sources of tensions and instability. Given their regional repercussions, many related situations may require OAS engagement. These structural or systemic problems may result in disruption of the constitutional and democratic order, rather than overt conflict, and have therefore

encouraged the OAS to seek to establish a mechanism to prevent, address and resolve crises in a timely, efficient and effective manner.

In this light, the Secretary-General created the Department for Crisis Prevention and Special Missions (DCPSM) under the Secretariat for Political Affairs (SAP) to act as focal point and principal advisory unit to the Secretary-General on political issues, developments, challenges and crises that occur or may occur. Among other activities, the Department provides advisory and technical services to Special Missions established by the OAS Permanent Council and/or General Secretariat in the event of a potential or ongoing conflict, or in response to Member States' requests. Throughout crisis stages, the OAS uses country assessment and analysis exercises, special and/or exploratory missions, impartial facilitation and negotiation services to support dialogue processes, and/or other measures deemed appropriate. Facilitation, negotiation and ongoing long-term missions are indicative of OAS interests.

Crisis resolution through peaceful and diplomatic measures is in full agreement with OAS mandates and the provisions of Article 33 of the UN Charter. Mr. Rico observed that regional IGOs are key fora for raising and addressing peace, security and conflict-related issues and should therefore play a leading role. Local familiarity, self-interest and the long-term commitment of in-regional relations, as well as common culture, experience and norms, are significant comparative advantages. Mr. Rico noted the importance and benefits of inter-institutional cooperation and collaboration in the exchange of ideas and best practices, and in crisis situations themselves. Enabled by constructive discussions like this meeting, the exchange ensures that countries, regions and organizations better understand manifestations of conflict, and the most effective measures to manage, resolve and ultimately prevent them. NGOs and civil society, with their grassroots reach and closeness to the causes of conflict, also play a key role. Accordingly, global and regional organizations would do well to involve them in preventive programs and strategies.

*H.E. Ambassador Simeon Adekanye, Deputy Permanent Representative of Nigeria (re. ECOWAS)*

Speaking informally as representative of a prominent ECOWAS Member State, Ambassador Adekanye provided an overview of a number of developments in the area of conflict prevention within ECOWAS.

For effective conflict prevention in the sub-region, it was stressed that issues of poverty, often at the core of tensions that can lead to violent conflict, must be addressed. A wide range of factors contributes to poverty and many require cooperative responses. It was noted in this light that ECOWAS was founded primarily to promote economic integration, though it is now actively addressing security issues including cooperation with the private sector, as peace and regional security are essential in the socio-economic development of Member States. Foundational instruments and agreements to this end include the Non-aggression Protocol adopted in 1978 by the authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, a 1981 Defense Assistance Protocol and a 1991 Declaration of Political Principles. An ECOWAS cease-fire monitoring group known as ECOMOG – a peace-keeping force which has intervened in three member States – was created in 1990 to assist in preventing the resurgence of violence in post-conflict situations.

Most notably, the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security was established in 1997, giving ECOWAS authority in operational conflict prevention-related measures such as: fact-finding missions; third-party engagement (mediation and good offices); and the daily dissemination of data from a monitoring and observation center. A 'Council of Elders', comprised of former Heads of State, traditional religious and political leaders, and mediators, provides both advice and action in the area of conflict prevention.

ECOWAS continues to enhance its conflict prevention efforts, focusing on such conflict-producing issues as the trade in small arms and light weapons and narcotics trafficking, and employing various committees and partnerships to foster a multi-sectoral sharing of experiences and information.

## *The Commonwealth*

An informative note on the 'good offices' role of The Commonwealth Secretary-General in conflict prevention and resolution was provided by The Commonwealth Secretariat and circulated to participants. The document highlights recognition within the organization of the tremendous costs of conflict, which have encouraged active Commonwealth engagement to address underlying issues before violence erupts. Significant experience has been developed using a dual approach of short-term dialogue and problem-solving measures, implemented through the Good Offices of the Secretary-General, and long-term measures that target root causes by helping to build a positive environment for democracy and development. The Secretariat's political, economic, and technical assistance programs provide practical assistance in building or strengthening key institutions and systems that can support good political and economic governance.

Procedurally, the Secretary-General monitors political and economic developments across The Commonwealth and chooses to apply his or her Good Offices – either directly or through special envoy – to help defuse situations deemed likely to deteriorate into political crisis or conflict. Good Offices can be employed to promote and support dialogue, and mobilize The Commonwealth and international support for post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. Promoting respect for human rights standards, gender equality, youth development and civil society participation is integral to the role. A general procedure for the use of Good Offices in situations of serious or persistent violations of the Principles of the Harare Commonwealth Declaration was agreed by Heads of Government in March 2002, and the scope, depth and stature of the work in this area has grown considerably. Good Offices are now widely accepted as the preferred option to assist member countries in meeting their obligations under the Declaration.

While proactively engaging where action is necessary, The Commonwealth seeks as much as possible to work in cooperation with the member government concerned. Once engaged, key stakeholders such as political parties, civil society organizations and international partners are also involved. Good Offices must enjoy broad political support among Commonwealth countries, and situations not resolved via such engagement are examined by The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), a standing mechanism to deal with serious and persistent violations of Harare Declaration principles. Comprising the Foreign Ministers of eight Commonwealth countries and a representative of the Chairperson in Office, CMAG is charged with assessing the nature of infringements and recommending measures for collective Commonwealth action.

### **3. Views and Developments from Civil Society**

*Ambassador Don Steinberg, Vice President, International Crisis Group/Crisiswatch*

Noting the timely nature of the meeting, Ambassador Steinberg highlighted the broad and growing recognition of the essential nature of conflict prevention, resolution and post-conflict reconstruction in diplomacy and the promotion of international security, without which the promotion of governance, sustainable development, and cooperation cannot succeed. Conflicts and failed States threaten international security, and they are also expensive: the UN estimates that over \$250 billion was spent on eight major humanitarian interventions and peacekeeping operations in the 1990s alone. By contrast, programs that address the underlying causes of conflict cost a fraction of that amount. Too often, the international community seems to say: "Billions for relief, but very few pennies for prevention."

Given scarce resources, there is an added imperative to know where to put the 'ounce of prevention', though this suggests a degree of prescience in anticipating conflict not yet achieved. Nevertheless, Amb. Steinberg argued, "associative" if not "causative" factors have been identified, including nine instructive examples: (1) lack of political participation, responsive governance, and rule of law – safety valves to permit the peaceful redress of grievances; (2) rapid urbanization and population pressure coupled with weak economies – youth without opportunities are susceptible to fanatics or zealots; (3) the condition of the education system – investment in good schools indicates faith in the future, and girls' education is

essential to improving health, agriculture, and other socio-economic standards; (4) the absence of civil society institutions and the involvement of women as planners, implementers and beneficiaries of development projects, private sector initiatives, humanitarian relief, and peace processes; (5) intolerance of religious and ethnic differences; (6) location – neighbors play a key role in either mediating or fueling disputes; (7) a dominant role of the military and security forces in the political structure, and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons; (8) the absence of international engagement, including closed political systems, economies, and media; and, (9) whether there has been upheaval in a country in the past 15 years – the past *is* an indicator of future developments.

Amb. Steinberg characterized the above as key factors that must be monitored as indicators and potential triggers of conflict. Though natural disasters that may translate into conflict cannot be stopped, many dynamics can be addressed. Challenges facing countries in avoiding or emerging from conflict are many, but they are remarkably similar from State-to-State, and useful lessons have been learned. Among them, it was submitted, strong partnerships and division of labor are needed among governments, international organizations, and civil society institutions. NGOs have played key roles in building democracy and rule of law, promoting economic development, reforming education, strengthening civil society and providing expertise and information in areas where the involvement of foreign governments or even the United Nations system might be considered interference in internal affairs. International Crisis Group monitors developments in some 50 existing or potential conflict areas and provides governments, IGOs, assistance bodies, and NGOs with expert field research, analysis and substantive policy recommendations, preparing about 100 succinct, timely and readable reports and briefing papers each year.

In conclusion, it was noted that the requirements of conflict prevention have, in spite of positive developments, often been of secondary importance to governments, IGOs, and donor agencies. Often referred to as the “soft side” of foreign policy, effective prevention is among the *hardest* challenges, and so requires far greater effort.

*Ambassador Ragnar Ångeby, Director, Conflict Prevention in Practice Project, Folke Bernadotte Academy and Mr. John Packer, President, The Themis Foundation*

As part of their collaboration within the global *Initiative on Conflict Prevention through Quiet Diplomacy* which aims to create or strengthen within regional inter-governmental organizations the institutional capacity to prevent violent conflict through quiet diplomacy, Amb. Ångeby and John Packer announced a new Conflict Prevention Handbook Series of easy-to-read and use booklets with guidance on how conflict prevention actors may address challenges posed by recurrent issues. The first two of these handbooks were presented on “Options and Techniques for Quiet Diplomacy” and on “Discrimination and Conflict Prevention”. Copies were available for all participants and would be translated and disseminated broadly. They will also be used in related training programs.

*Dr. Ben Hoffman, President, Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation, and Director of its International Peace and Prosperity Project in Guinea-Bissau and Mr. Josué Gomes de Almeida, Director, Ministry of Economy, Guinea-Bissau*

Dr. Hoffman described the origin and nature of a unique privately-funded project to prevent conflict and build peace and prosperity in the poor and historically unstable country of Guinea-Bissau in West Africa. With modest financing from an American philanthropist, and following a design elaborated by a team of independent experts, Dr. Hoffman has led the project over the last years from an initial and tentative engagement to a leading role recently invited by the President formally to mediate among political factions in the country. This description was supported by a presentation from Mr. Gomes de Almeida who has been involved in the project as a responsible official and as an active citizen of the country. Aside from confirming the positive and effective elements of the project, Mr. Gomes de Almeida explained why he believed it has so far enjoyed success and what lessons he felt might be drawn. Important among these have been the constructive and complementary roles of official and non-official actors and especially the domestically-rooted and driven nature of the process.

#### 4. Developments at the United Nations

*H.E. Ambassador Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs*

Noting that the prevention agenda is both crucial and too often overlooked, Under-Secretary-General Gambari cited the latest report on Conflict Prevention as evidence that the current Secretary-General has pushed the agenda further than any predecessor, making it a signature issue of his tenure. At the same time, he emphasized that although important conceptual, normative and institutional progress on conflict prevention has been made since the 2001 report, much remains to be done on the ground. The recent establishment of a Mediation Support Unit in the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) is a crucial step in this area, helping to shift from a culture of reaction to one of proactive engagement by enhancing the organization's 'good offices' and preventive diplomacy work.

Amb. Gambari suggested that although successful, Good Offices and preventive diplomacy have to date been largely improvised. Experienced and talented envoys have achieved remarkable results in many cases, but the organization lacks a solid system for selecting and training its mediators, supporting their missions, and assimilating the lessons of success and failure for future application. The Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change noted this deficit in its 2004 report, finding that minimal resources were being devoted to this area despite "skyrocketing demand" for their services. In response, the 2005 World Summit supported the enhancement of mediation capacity and the Good Offices role of the Secretary-General, and member States approved a very small start-up mediation support capacity to support envoys in the field and serve as a repository of lessons.

It was noted that the background paper prepared by Dr. van der Stoel for this meeting welcomes this development, underlining the importance of "professionally staffed, adequately resourced" mechanisms that would allow the UN to act early and effectively to avert conflicts or prevent them from getting worse. Unfortunately, only two posts were approved by the General Assembly for the Mediation Support Unit, along with four posts to strengthen Regional Divisions in DPA. USG Gambari also stressed that DPA remains woefully understaffed, with fewer desk officers than some NGOs and a travel budget that prevents sufficiently early and active engagement. As the Unit will enable and enhance responses to requests for UN good offices and mediation, Gambari expressed his hope that more predictable and secure funding would be provided. Indeed, he urged Member States to see the wisdom of such an investment.

The Under-Secretary-General finished his remarks by outlining a number of Mediation Support Unit projects already underway, including: (1) the creation, with help from the Government of Norway (and, it is hoped, others too), of a *standing team of mediation experts* specialized in issues such as power-sharing, constitution-making, security sector reform and other recurring matters who can deploy rapidly where needed; (2) the launch at the end of September of an online *comprehensive databank of peace agreements and lessons learned*, called UN Peacemaker, containing operational guidance material; (3) consultation with veteran mediators in all regions – with a first regional consultation in Capetown in October 2006 – and a survey of UN and other sources to produce lessons learned and other *guidance materials*, to be posted on the Peacemaker website; (4) linking experienced mediators with serving mediation teams in real time, including a *mediators-on-call project* whereby veteran envoys and successful former SRSGs provide direct advice and through which experienced mediators and their staff will be invited for *fellowships with the Support Unit* to write up their experiences and advise current mediators; and, (5) development of specialized mediation training courses with the help of the Folke Bernadotte Academy in Sweden and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

As the prevention report makes clear, more professional Good Offices and mediation support is but one small part of the prevention equation. Yet its importance is clear and progress is being made. The USG encouraged all present to work with the UN and DPA on this endeavor and to help in efforts to secure better financial support for it from member States.

*Dr. David Hamburg, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide*

In his opening remarks, Dr. Hamburg referred to the 1997 Carnegie Commission *Final Report on Preventing Deadly Conflict*, which identified three broad aims of preventive action: to prevent the emergence of violent conflict; to prevent ongoing conflicts from spreading; and to prevent the re-emergence of violence. He explained that the phrase “operational conflict prevention” was coined to refer to a conflict “on the horizon,” but should rather be refined to mean “ongoing support” for preventing violence. That is, for greatest effect, interlocutors should maintain steady contact and sympathetic interest with the parties involved. Regional inter-governmental organizations can facilitate this process by offering a range of options, best practices and support in a proactive and forward-looking manner. Specifically, Dr. Hamburg confirmed the need to expand further the lessons learned from the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, especially with regard to educational initiatives and the need to engage actively at a much earlier stage than they had conceived at the time of the Carnegie Commission’s report.

The UN Department of Political Affairs should be the focal point within the UN for prevention activities, undertaking both “primary” prevention (as in the field of public health) and “early” prevention, with ample time to act. It was stressed that there is *always* ample warning and time to prepare, in spite of declarations to the contrary, which were qualified as an excuse for inaction. Given the need to monitor potential conflicts at the earliest possible stage, the UN Peacebuilding Commission places insufficient emphasis on the “pre-conflict” period. There is, therefore, a need to create a counterpart which better incorporates this element. Dr. Hamburg concluded with a call for further analysis to identify comparative advantage strategies for prevention, using a combination of experiences from the UN, the European Union and other IGOs.

## **5. Closing Session**

As co-convenor of the event, Dr. van der Stoel conveyed his gratitude to the Office of the President of the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly for their collaboration and to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands and Sweden for their generous financial support. He thanked invited speakers and participants for their contributions to a constructive and useful discussion of an issue of fundamental importance, and urged its continuance with a view to necessary institutional development within global, regional, sub-regional and other inter-governmental organizations around the world.

## Annex I – Program

### 'Operational Conflict Prevention'

United Nations, New York  
8 September 2006  
Penthouse, Dag Hammarskjöld Library  
09:00–17:00

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- 09:00 *Opening* H.E. Dr. Jan Eliasson  
President of the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly  
Foreign Minister of Sweden
- H.E. Dr. Max van der Stoep  
Minister of State of The Netherlands
- Comments from the floor*
- 10:00 *Coffee*
- 10:30 *Comparative Practice*  
Presentation of the film "The Silent Diplomat"
- Presentations from Regional and Other Inter-Governmental Organizations*
- H.E. Ambassador Rolf Ekeus High Commissioner on National Minorities  
Organisation for Security and Cooperation in  
Europe (OSCE)
- Mr. Victor Rico Frontaura Director  
Office of Conflict Prevention and Resolution  
Department of Democratic and Political Affairs  
Organization of American States (OAS)
- H.E. Ambassador Simeon Adekanye  
Deputy Permanent Representative of Nigeria to  
the United Nations (an ECOWAS Member State)
- Comments from the floor*
- 12:30 *Buffet Lunch* Ambassador Don Steinberg Vice President  
*West Terrace* International Crisis Group/Crisiswatch
- Ambassador Ragnar Ängeby Director  
Conflict Prevention in Practice Project  
and Folke Bernadotte Academy
- Mr. John Packer President, The Themis Foundation

Dr. Ben Hoffman	President, Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation and Director of its International Peace and Prosperity Project in Guinea-Bissau
and	
Mr. Josué Gomes de Almeida	Director, Ministry of Economy, Guinea-Bissau

*15:00 Developments at the United Nations*

H.E. Amb. Ibrahim Gambari	Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs
Dr. David Hamburg	Chairman of the Secretary-General's Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Genocide, and former President of the Carnegie Corporation and initiator of the Project on Preventing Deadly Conflict

*Comments from the floor*

*16:30 Closing Session*

Remarks by Dr. van der Stoep

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NOTE: An end-of-day refreshment will be offered by the Permanent Representative of The Netherlands to the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Frank Majoor.

## Annex II – References

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- Report of the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, “A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility” (December 2004) UN Doc: A/59/565 and Corr.1 Available at: [www.un.org/secureworld](http://www.un.org/secureworld)
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- Ibrahim Gambari, “Making the UN a Better Broker of Peace,” *Washington Times*, October 5, 2005.
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- Interim Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict (September 2003) UN Doc: A/58/365–S/2003/888 Available at : [www.un.org/esa/peacebuilding/Library](http://www.un.org/esa/peacebuilding/Library)
- First Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict (June 2001) UN Doc: A/55/985–S/2001/574 Available at the UN Conflict prevention, peace-building and development Library: [www.un.org/esa/peacebuilding/Library](http://www.un.org/esa/peacebuilding/Library)

### **Other**

- Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict. *Final Report on Preventing Deadly Conflict*. New York: The Carnegie Corporation, 1997. Available under ‘Publications’ at: [www.ccpdc.org](http://www.ccpdc.org)
- GPPAC, “From Reaction to Prevention: Civil Society Forging Partnerships to Prevent Violent Conflict and Build Peace,” 19-21 July 2005, New York, UN Headquarters. Available at [www.gppac.net](http://www.gppac.net)