



United Nations
Secretary-General

Munich

18 February 2017

Remarks to Munich Security Conference

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is indeed a great pleasure for me to be back in Munich now in this new capacity.

We live in a dangerous world. We are witnessing a multiplication of new conflicts, old conflicts seem never to die – be it in Afghanistan or Somalia – and these conflicts are becoming more and more interlinked and linked to a new threat of global terrorism. If one looks from Nigeria to Mali to Libya, Israel-Palestine, Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, it is clear that all these crises are connected to each other. Fighters moving from one place to another and sometimes going back to countries of origin, namely here in Germany, representing a huge threat to our common global security.

Now, many of these conflicts were borne of the fragility of states. In the beginning, they were internal conflicts, sometimes asymmetric, normally with huge violations of international humanitarian law and huge suffering, displacement of populations, but then other states become involved – either as parties to the conflict or supporters of the parties to the conflict. They internationalize, [become] interlinked, more strongly, and the truth is that they have been developing in a world where power relations became unclear.

I lived the Cold War, the bipolar world. I lived as Prime Minister [during] the period of a unipolar world. Now, yet we are not in a multipolar world, we are in a kind of chaotic situation, probably leading to a multipolar world. But in these chaotic situations with unclear power relations, impunity and unpredictability have been the name of the game. And it is in this context that I believe that we need and, I've said it several times, a surge in diplomacy for peace. Member States will have to assume the leading role, but I presume the Secretary-General of the United Nations can, using his good offices, be an added value in that surge, acting as a catalyst, sometimes a convener, but always as a bridge-builder and an honest broker. And trying to make countries understand, especially those that are involved as parties to a conflict or as supporters of the parties to a conflict, that independently of their differences, their contradictions, their different perspectives, the truth is that the danger for them and the danger for us all, let's say Syria, for instance – not only the suffering of the Syrian people, not only the destabilization of the region, Iraq, refugees in Jordan and Lebanon – but the threat feeding global terrorism, the threat to us all is such and the threat to the countries involved is such that I believe the intelligent thing to do is to come together and put an end to this kind of conflict.

It will not be easy. We will also need a lot of preventive diplomacy, a lot of efforts in mediation, and we especially need to have a strategy to address the root causes of these kinds of conflicts in the world.

There are things that are obvious: the alignment of the sustainable and inclusive development with the sustaining peace agenda. It is clear that development is an important element in the prevention of conflicts, especially if it is inclusive and sustainable.

It is clear that we need to address the fragility of states and to support states, institutions, civil societies, to become stronger, more resilient that will help diminish the tendency for states to be involved in conflict situations.

It is also very important to understand the linkages with what I would call today's global megatrends. If one looks at climate change, population growth, urbanization, many times chaotic urbanization, food insecurity, water scarcity, massive movements of people – all of these trends are becoming also more and more interlinked, enhancing each other, strengthening each other, and there have been dramatic consequences, namely the competition for resources, increasing the probability of conflicts to take place and generating dramatic humanitarian situations.

And I would say climate change and population growth are probably the two key elements. And in climate change, the commitment of the international community to stick to the Paris Agreement and to be more ambitious than the Paris Agreement was and to make sure that we stay the course in regard to it is absolutely essential. And I would say on population growth that new attention needs to be focused on that, especially in Africa. And for me, a key condition to address it is the combination of education and the empowerment of women and girls. This is probably the best way to be able to address the problems of excessive population growth that is impacting dramatically in some parts of the world.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the asymmetric effects of globalization are also contributing to these problems of global peace and security. Globalization has been an incredible generator of wealth, of prosperity, improving living conditions mostly everywhere in the world, decreasing absolute poverty quite substantially.

But globalization had its losers. Globalization – it was asymmetric, as I said – and there is, in some parts of the world, in several communities, the feeling that they were left behind, that nobody was taking care of them, and this has generated with the increase of inequalities.

Fortune has just published that the eight richest persons in the world have a wealth that is similar to the wealth of half of the poorest part of the world's population. And, of course, too excessive of inequalities are also a generator of instability and unrest. And all of this has undermined the confidence between peoples and public opinion and their political establishments, and also the confidence in relation to international organizations.

We see huge pockets of youth unemployment, and I believe that is probably the biggest threat in relation to our global security. There is nothing worse than a young man or woman [who has] graduation from university, not having a chance to find a job, not having any hope, nothing worse than this situation and nothing better for the recruitment of violent extremist organizations or of terrorist organizations.

And at the same time, this lack of confidence between peoples and their political establishments is something that needs to be looked at, not as blaming the people, but as trying to understand the reasons and trying to figure out why these rust belts of this world are generating a huge change in the geography of politics. Understanding the people, understanding their concerns, their anxieties and fears, and caring for them, and trying to find solutions for them is absolutely essential to re-establish the confidence between political establishments and populations.

The philosopher that has more influenced my political life has been Habermas, and for Habermas, one of his contributions to thinking is that one of the key elements of a modern democracy is the permanent interflow of communication between political societies and civil societies, and the fact that that flow of communication has an impact on the political decisions and an impact on the change of that action that might be necessary in political decisions, independently of the electoral moment of the electoral periods.

Now, the challenge for us is: how do we get into this interflow of communication in a digital era? With the new information and communication technologies, in a world in which everything goes at enormous speed, but we absolutely need to preserve the capacity of countries, of governments, of institutions, to have long-term strategies, to have visions for the future. And one of the worst worrying symptoms of today's difficulties in the world is that there are so few countries that show the capacity to present a long-term strategy in relation to their own objectives.

So, in this context of a lack of confidence of people in relation to their own institutions, there is also a lack of confidence of people in relation to multilateral institutions. And when one needs to respond to global challenges, more and more global capacity, more and more multilateral instruments, the truth is that for the EU [European Union], for the UN, for other organizations, we also feel that lack of confidence. And the only responsive reform – we need to deeply reform our international institutions in order to be able to meet the expectations of the peoples of this world.

In the case of the UN, we are engaging in three areas of reform.

First, the peace and security strategy, operational setup, and architecture. We are investing essentially in peacekeeping: we need to be able to shift more and more resources to prevention and peacebuilding. On the other hand, the operational setup in peacekeeping takes place in countries where there is no peace to keep, and there is, I think, a solid debate that needs to be engaged on about this puzzle – robust peacekeeping, peace enforcement, counter-terrorism. How can these things be linked in operational setups around the world and how can we ensure that way that we operate is effective and meets the requirement of populations and the protection of populations? And how can we use partnerships with other entities, taking profit of our competitive advantages – the EU, the AU [African Union], other organizations around the world?

And finally, the structures: our structures are also dysfunctional in the UN in relation to the capacity to manage the peace continuum from prevention to conflict resolution to peacekeeping to peacebuilding and to long-term development.

The second area of reform: the UN development system. We are too fragmented. We need coordination and accountability and we need to make sure that independent capacity of evaluation is established to measure not only our agencies' performance according to our mandates, but how they perform in relation to contribution to our global goals that were fixed in the summits of last year, in climate change and in the Sustainable Development Goals.

And then, management reform. The rules and regulations of the UN have been made – if there was a conspiracy to make sure that we would not be able to operate, that conspiracy would lead exactly to the rules we have. And we need to engage with Member States to make them understand that it is not [by] micromanaging the Organization that we are going to be effective and cost-effective – that we need to have flexibility, that we need to have simplifications of procedures, to have decentralization of decisions, to have, again, transparency and accountability in order to be able to deliver.

Allow me a last observation as we are here in this Munich conference.

We have a situation in which we are completely obsessed with the crises of today and with the need to respond to them. But I think that we need to also consider that the problems of peace and security in the future will have new dimensions for which we need to be prepared.

Today, cyberspace is already a major concern for us all. Let's be clear: we lack the multilateral instruments to address the problems of cyberspace. But we have artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, that are there, enormous progress in the private sector, enormous potential for a generation of well-being for mankind – or for man and womankind. But at the same time, huge risks in many dimensions – in security dimensions, but also in ethical dimensions. And there is a lack of knowledge in government, in international organizations, about what these new areas represent, the private sector being clearly ahead with scientific and technological breakthroughs that really are changing the nature of relations in our world. To develop a capacity of analysis, of discussion, and to be able to think about models of governance for these new areas of scientific and technological development that will be essential in our lives in ten years' time, is absolutely crucial. I believe that when people will meet herein 10 or 20 years' time in Munich, we will probably be discussing other things in relation to the priorities of today, but I hope we don't get to those discussions too late and [having done] too little.

Thank you very much.