MEETING BRIEF

Reframing Prevention, Investing in Peace

The three 2015 UN global peace and security reviews—on peace operations, the peacebuilding architecture, and the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security—conveyed a common message: the need for a renewed focus on prevention. Although not a new agenda, prevention has remained under-prioritized for decades and needs to be brought back to the forefront as the only sustainable way to anticipate and address the ever-evolving conflicts around the world today. Now that everyone seems to be talking about prevention, what would it take to move this agenda from rhetoric to action?

This was the question addressed at a high-level policy forum discussion, co-hosted by the governments of Argentina, Ethiopia, Norway, and the Republic of Korea, and the International Peace Institute (IPI), on Wednesday, May 11, 2016. In the discussion, participants suggested the following steps:

- Prevention should be reframed as a tool whose ultimate aim is not solely to resolve conflict but to sustain peace.
- It is important to address not only internal vulnerabilities (including weak governance) but also external geopolitical pressures that drive conflict and frustrate peace. For this to happen, the Security Council, particularly the five permanent members, must genuinely recommit to moving from crisis management to prevention.
- Prevention requires investment. The UN has developed a broad range of tools for preventive diplomacy and mediation, under the leadership of the Department of Political Affairs. These tools need to be strengthened and systematized as part of a UN system-wide strategy for prevention.
- The UN should build partnerships for peace, including partnerships with regional organizations and civil society, in particular women’s and youth groups.
- Local stakeholders should be listened to with the intent to understand, not to prescribe exogenous solutions. Local actors can prevent conflict themselves, and the UN can help them acquire further specific capacities (akin to preventive strategies relating to health).
- The mistrust that pervades relations within and among states, and in particular between governments and civil society must be addressed. A compact with member states to build trust should be a priority for the next secretary-general.
- Member states must demonstrate their renewed commitment to prevention both financially and politically. Given the magnitude of risks, they should invest early and think big—on the scale of the Marshall Plan—particularly to prevent fragile countries from becoming failed ones.