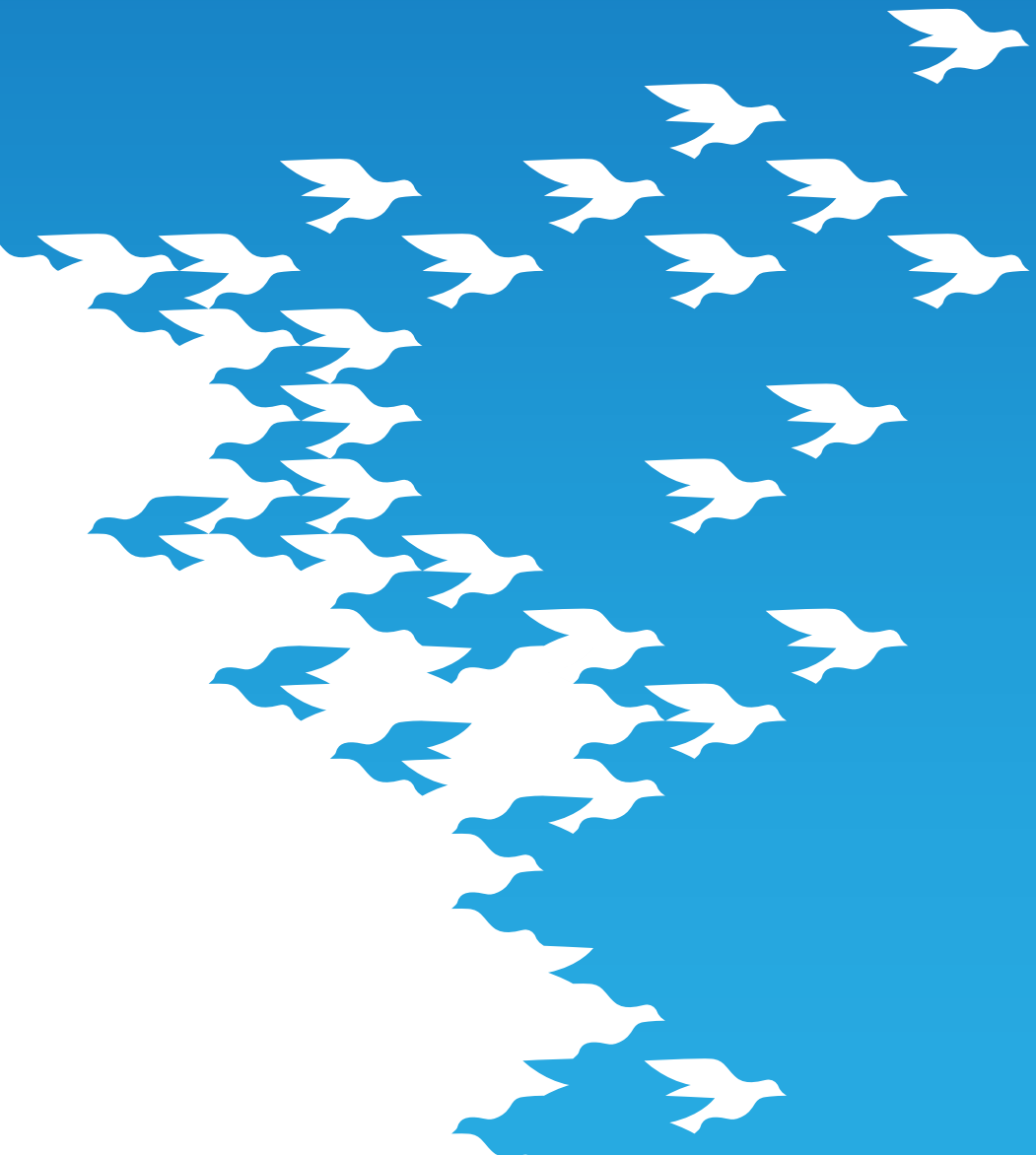
POLITICALLY speaking

2016 in Review



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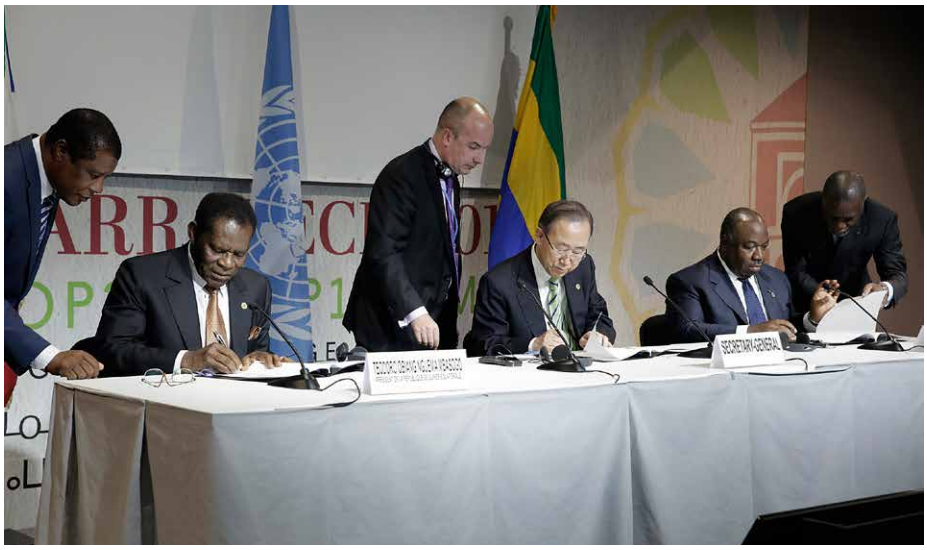
Another violent year, but with hopeful signs for improved prevention

THE END OF THE YEAR is a natural time to take stock. In the recent past, and from our perspective, this annual exercise has usually revealed a picture of growing violence across many parts of the world. And such is the case again this year … with a small but important difference. While it would be too much to say that we have turned a corner, I believe 2016 has given us some reason to be more hopeful about the capacity of the United Nations to prevent conflict and help parties at odds peacefully resolve their differences. The year saw the creation of a new UN mission in Colombia to monitor and verify, at the request of the parties involved, key parts of a peace agreement that is set to bring an end to half a century of war in the country. We also continued to facilitate a promising peace process in Cyprus, where conflict has separated the island's communities for generations. Meanwhile, the UN's peace and security work has undergone a though review to make it more coherent and responsive, with a renewed focus on prevention and making peace sustainable in countries coming out of conflict. This new direction is central to incoming Secretary-General António Guterres's agenda. He has made it clear he intends to pursue a "surge in diplomacy for peace".

2016 also saw major achievements in global governance. Outgoing Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon played a decisive role in the negotiation and adoption of the Paris Agreement on climate change. This followed 2015's historic accord on the Sustainable Development Goals, in which the Secretary-General was also instrumental. These agreements are evidence that an international community that seems increasingly divided is still able to come together thanks to dogged and smart diplomacy.

In the pages that follow you will see pieces published in our magazine in 2016. They provide a glimpse of the work DPA does to prevent conflict and help warring parties come together around the negotiating table. We enter 2017 with a clear objective: to combine our expertise and experience, acquired through success and setbacks, with the fresh energy and focus of new UN leadership and growing support for preventive diplomacy. I thank you for your interest in our work and hope you will continue to follow it.

Jeffrey D. Feltman
Under-Secretary-General
Political Affairs



LEFT: Signing ceremony of the agreement on the border dispute between Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, in Marrakesh, Morocco. Pictured are the Secretary-General (centre), flanked by Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo (left), President of Equatorial Guinea; and Ali Bongo Ondimba, President of the Gabonese Republic.
UN Photo/Evan Schneider

Conflict Prevention at Work I:
Equatorial Guinea and Gabon Agree on Path to Resolution of Border Dispute

The conflict prevention work of the United Nations is often, and necessarily, hard to illustrate. After all, a conflict that did not happen is impossible to point to. But one can show how preventive diplomacy and mediation expertise – and a lot of patience and perseverance – can deliver tangible results to advance peace and security. A case in point is the little-known but decades-old border dispute between Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, which, thanks to UN involvement, may finally be on its way to a resolution

On 15 November 2016, at the invitation of the Secretary-General, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea and the Gabonese Republic reached a significant milestone, signing a special agreement to submit their longstanding border dispute to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The event, which took place on the margins of the COP-22 Summit in Marrakech, capped United Nations efforts to bring the two countries together around a potential solution to a longstanding source of tension.

The Marrakech agreement is tangible evidence of conflict prevention at work. But it did not come easily or quickly. The border dispute dates back to 1972 and revolves around which country may exercise sovereignty over the Mbanié, Cocotiers and Congas islands off the West African coast. The Department of Political Affairs (DPA) has been involved in the mediation process since July 2003, at the request of Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. Two Special Advisors and Mediators – Yves Fortier of Canada from 2003-2008, and Nicolas Michel of Switzerland from 2008 to 2014 – and a Focal Point – Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman from 2014 onwards – facilitated the political agreement endorsed in Morocco.

DPA worked tirelessly with the parties, negotiating a mutually acceptable document for the referral of the dispute to the ICJ. There were mediation sessions in Geneva at the ministerial and working levels, as well as bilateral consultations in the parties' respective capitals.

Between 2008 and 2013, the parties made substantial progress on an accord, but were unable to agree on the wording of the subject matter of the dispute, namely whether the ICJ should decide on the entirety of the dispute – that being the sovereignty of the three islands and the common maritime boundary – or for the Court to limit its jurisdiction to the issue of the legal titles. This disagreement effectively brought the mediation to a stalemate in December 2013. To address the impasse, in June 2014 at DPA's prompting, the two parties reaffirmed their request for DPA assistance in finding a peaceful settlement to the dispute. However, they asked for a new process to start.

Accordingly, from 2015 to 2016, DPA intensified its shuttle diplomacy, requesting the parties to clarify their positions and seek common ground to find a peaceful settlement to the dispute. Convened by Under-Secretary-General Feltman, the Foreign Ministers of both countries were able to finalise and initial the text of a special agreement last April, marking an important step in the mediation process and paving the way for the holding of the signing ceremony in Marrakech.

The peaceful resolution of the dispute demonstrates that a legal settlement is possible. The signing ceremony successfully brought an end to DPA's involvement in the mediation process, leaving the two parties now to complete the ratification process for the special agreement to enter into force. Once completed, the special agreement can then be notified to the ICJ.

Conflict Prevention at Work II: Comoros Elections

The Department of Political Affairs describes its work using three nouns: diplomacy, prevention and action. This tag line cannot possibly encapsulate all of DPAs activities, but it does capture key elements of its core work of preventive diplomacy. As we highlight below, those elements were in evidence the Comoros islands earlier this year, when UN and DPA action, taken together with the African Union, proved instrumental in helping reduce tensions during and after key elections.

ABOVE: Special Representative Haile Menkerios. UN Photo

The 2016 presidential and Gubernatorial elections in Comoros were seen as a significant test of the country's democratic culture and institutions, as well as its ability to deliver a peaceful transition of power. With a history of political tension – including more than 20 attempted coups since the country gained independence in 1975–, personality-based politics, high levels of unemployment and poverty, and a fragile national reconciliation process, the elections had the potential to tip the country back into turmoil.

In this delicate political environment, outgoing President Ikililou Dhoinine asked the Secretary-General for the UN's continued support throughout the electoral process. In response, Agostinho Zacarias, the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) a.i. took the lead, together with the representative of the African Union (AU) in Comoros, in coordinating support efforts. DPA sent staff to assist the RC a.i. during the election period.

While the first round of voting on 21 February passed peacefully, tensions flared in the country after the publication of provisional results on 24 February. A number of candidates rejected the results amid claims of vote rigging. At the urging of President Ikililou, and encouraged by the UN, the candidates resolved the dispute through a 15 March agreement allowing the elections to proceed to the second round on 15 April. After that poll, a single percentage point separated the two leading candidates for the Presidency, and the results were once again disputed, heightening tension. The Constitutional Court subsequently ordered a partial rerun of the elections.

At this key juncture, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) to the African Union, Haile Menkerios, travelled to the country to engage with the Government, candidates, electoral institutions and other stakeholders, underlining the need to respect the Constitution and the rule of law, and that violence would not be tolerated. DPA's Electoral Assistance Division sent staff a to provide the necessary expertise on the ground during this decisive period in the electoral process, while the United Nations Development Programme sent an expert on constitutional affairs. In addition, following consultations between the AU and UN, the Chairperson of the AU Commission authorized the deployment of 11 senior electoral observers.

The partial re-run on 11 May passed peacefully, with former President Colonel Azali Assoumani, who ruled the country from 1999 to 2006, declared the victor. Comorian authorities credited the UN and AU with helping the country ensure a peaceful transition of power through credible elections.

"I think this type of cooperation provides an example for support in other similar contexts," said Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman. "The visit of SRSG Menkerios was a watershed event for the country, signalling that violence would not be condoned by the international community and that the world was watching developments on the ground," he said.

"There were instances during the elections when violence could have sparked and flared," Mr. Feltman continued. "But thanks to the joint efforts of the country's leadership, the UN and the AU, this was prevented, allowing a peaceful outcome that, I believe, reflects the will of the people of Comoros."

ABOVE: Preliminary Conclusion of Colombia Peace Agreement, Havana, Cuba, June 2016. UN Photo

Colombia:
Building Peace From the Ground Up

As the United Nations mobilizes to help Colombia end the hemisphere's oldest armed conflict, much attention is inevitably focused on the role to be played by the United Nations Mission in Colombia, an observer corps deployed this year with the critically important task of verifying the cease-fire and laying down of arms agreement between the Government and the guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People's Army (FARC-EP). But the UN's contribution to efforts to bring peace to Colombia goes back many years and involves different parts of the world organization.

After the Security Council authorized the United Nations Mission in Colombia in January, the cover page of the prestigious Colombian weekly, *Semana*, featured a UN flag under the headline, *"Llegó la ONU"* ("The UN has arrived"). The weekly suggested that, with the UN involved, there was no going back on efforts to end a war which has raged for over fifty years.

This was a testament to the hope placed in the UN's global mandate and experience in peace operations. But it also ob-

scured the painstaking peacebuilding work done by the United Nations inside Colombia for many years, even during times when there was no hope at all of a formal peace process. And it neglected the important contribution that will be expected of the United Nations system in the period ahead as Colombia seeks not only to consolidate a cease-fire and the laying down of arms, but to move into the medium and longer-term challenges of implementing a comprehensive peace agreement that seeks to ensure the successful social and political reintegration of combatants and to bring development to impoverished regions where the conflict has persisted.

Addressing Root Causes

IT IS FAIR TO SAY that much of what the UN system has done in Colombia for over a decade has been closely tied to the plight of millions of Colombians living the consequences of armed conflict and its related violence: from documenting the egregious human rights violations committed by a variety of actors, to providing protection and humanitarian assistance to the country's more than 7 million internally displaced, to calculating the devastating economic and social costs of war paid by a country otherwise blessed by natural resources, unparalleled environmental diversity and hardworking and industrious people.

In 2004, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) issued a ground-breaking Human Development Report *Callejon con Salida* (Exiting a Dead End) documenting in full detail the root causes of the conflict and the need to address exclusion and inequity. In 2011 another report, *"Colombia Rural: Razones para la esperanza"* (Rural Colombia: reasons for hope) stressed why most of the transformations needed to happen in rural areas. Both shaped the national debate about peace and continue to be basic reference texts for peacemakers in Colombia. Meanwhile, a multi-donor programme named Reconciliation and Development (*REDES*) opened local offices in the areas hardest hit by conflict to support local communities trying to build new livelihoods. The UN system operated on a simple premise: that peace can be built locally even in the most violent scenarios, if emphasis is placed on addressing the political, social, economic and racial causes of conflict. As a result, local authorities and hundreds of civil society organizations (including women's organizations) strengthened their abilities to design social policies and advocate for their communities. These local peace actors are now an invaluable asset throughout the country.

Once the Government of President Juan Manuel Santos announced peace talks with the FARC-EP in 2012, the UN system on the ground further consolidated its peace-building work. Hand in hand with the Parliamentary Peace Commissions and the National University, the UN system organized some 40 regional events throughout Colombia that mirrored the items on the peace agenda (such as land, political participation, the drug issue, victims' rights). In this context, some 12,000 Colombians from all walks of life came together to provide their own views on what the parties should be discussing at the negotiating table. Neither the Government nor the FARC sponsored the meetings at the start. But the parties soon acknowledged that such broad-based discussions provided legitimacy and useful inputs to the peace process and then asked for additional UN-organized nation-wide summits to be held in Bogota. From this point onward, the UN and its partners were regularly invited to the negotiating table in Havana to present the results of the civil society meetings.

Peace Process Picks Up Steam

AN EMOTIONAL WATERSHED in the process was the visits to Havana, during the second half of 2014, of five delegations of victims of the armed conflict, for face-to-face encounters with representatives of the Colombian state and the FARC-EP. The victims were selected from all regions and walks of life by the United Nations, the National University and the Catholic Church, which accompanied them to Havana. They told their stories and in some cases received apologies and requests for forgiveness, first steps in a necessary process of acknowledgment of responsibilities and reconciliation. Selecting a representative group of victims was extraordinarily complex. But the effort was possible, on the UN side, thanks to the work of agencies including UNDP, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNICEF and UN Women, drawing from their extensive work with conflict victims over the years.

Over more than four years of negotiations in Havana, a range of UN agencies, offices and Special Representatives responded to invitations by the parties to provide advice and support on the crafting of their agreements and the design of mechanisms to implement them. The UN also devised innovative communications campaigns to help convey the benefits of peace to a sceptical public.

Building the Peace Beyond an Agreement

THE PEACE PROCESS appeared to suffer a setback when a slim majority of Colombians voted "No" in the 2 October plebiscite that was to set to give the final seal of approval to the agreements between the Government and FARC-EP. The parties subsequently returned to Havana to discuss adjustments to the agreements taking into account the concerns of the "No" camp. The outcome of the vote, while not expected, has provided an opportunity to craft an agreement that enjoys broader support in the country. A modified agreement has now been signed

ABOVE: Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman in Tumaco, Colombia, 2015. UN Photo

The UN system operated on a simple premise: that peace can be built locally even in the most violent scenarios, if emphasis is placed on addressing the political, social, economic and racial causes of conflict.

by the parties and should be submitted to the legislature for approval. Meanwhile, UN observers remain on the ground to help consolidate a cease-fire and the UN system continues its preparations to support Colombia in carrying out agreements whose subject matter ranges from immediate issues such as the reintegration of combatants and humanitarian de-mining, to medium and long-term investments in rural development, political inclusion, fighting illicit drugs and transitional justice. UN entities on the ground in Colombia will also remain vigilant to the human rights and humanitarian challenges that will remain of concern even after the end of the conflict with the FARC.

In short, the United Nations has been in Colombia for years, supporting the search for peace, and is prepared to remain there for as long as it takes, working by Colombia's side as it embarks on a challenge not only to end a war but to transform the realities that kept it burning for so long.

This article was co-written by Denise Cook, currently the UN Resident Coordinator in Uruguay, and Jared Kotler, Team Leader for Colombia in the Department of Political Affairs. Both served previously in Bogota as Peace and Development Advisers to the UN system. From 2006 through 2016, DPA – first on its own, and then in partnership with UNDP – deployed Peace and Development Advisors to Colombia to help create the link between prospects for "big picture" peace processes and local peacebuilding activities of the UN system.

LEFT: UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Sigrid Kaag visiting the Bekaa Valley. UN Photo

Special Political Missions
Operating Amid Ever More Complex Environments

Over the past year in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, special political missions (SPMs) managed by the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) continued to play an active role in preventing conflict, bringing warring parties to the negotiating table, facilitating peace agreements and supporting local initiatives and complex political transitions to sustain peace.

Meanwhile, as a recent report from the Secretary-General recalls, in West Africa and the Sahel, Central Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Great Lakes region, SPMs with a regional mandate are working side-by-side with regional and subregional organizations to identify early warning indicators of crises and build a collective response to prevent them from escalating.

In 2016, the operating environment in which special political missions work has continued to increase in complexity, according to the report. Terrorism, transnational organized crime, arms proliferation, rising intercommunal tensions, environmental degradation, fragmented power structures and institutional fragility are now common features in many of the countries to which they are deployed. As the challenges that the missions face have become more complex, so have their mandates and institutional design.

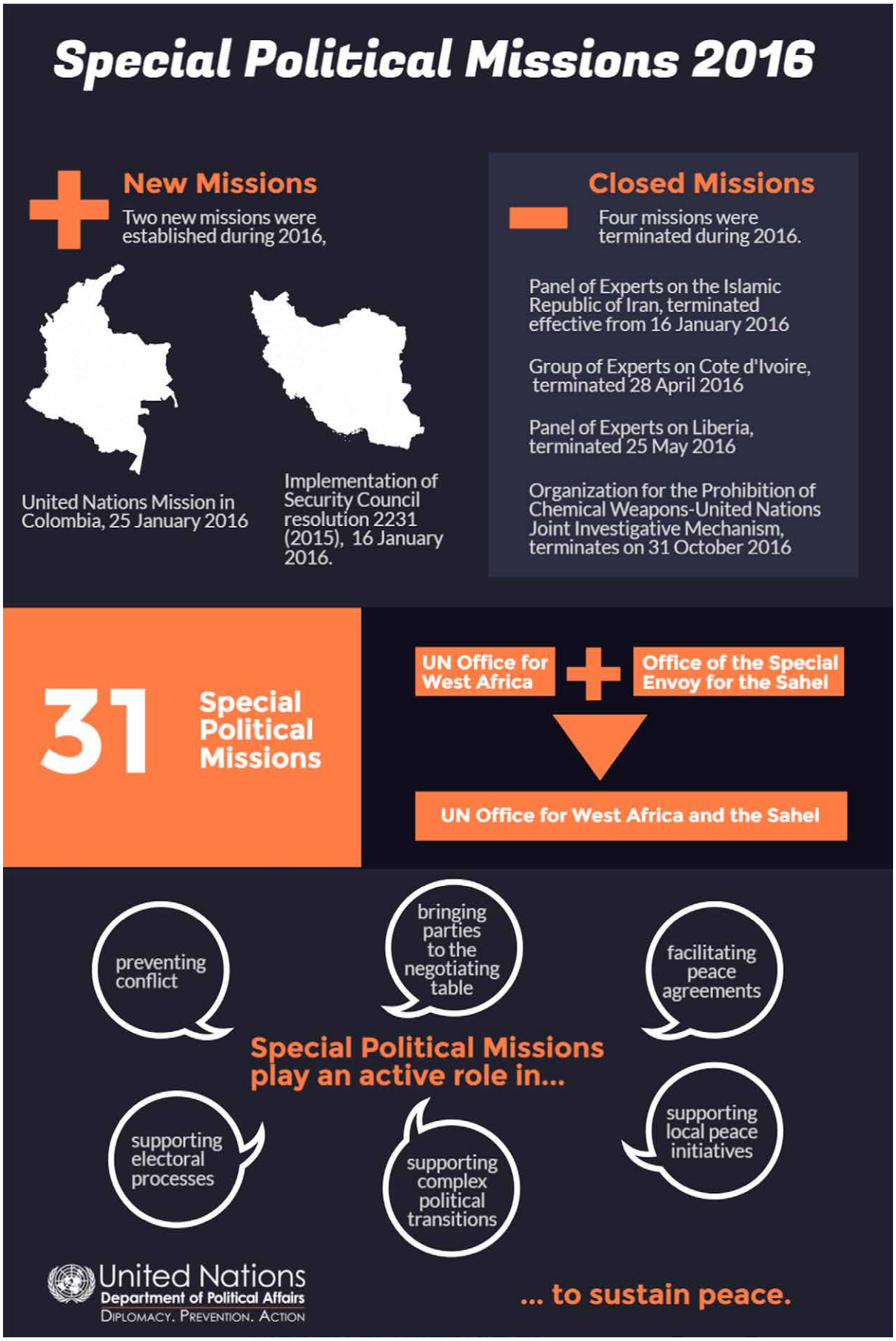
One of the most significant characteristics of missions today is the diversity in their functions and structures. The missions can range from small offices of special envoys carrying out a good offices mandate and regional offices with a preventive function to monitoring teams, groups and panels overseeing Security Council sanctions regimes, field-based missions carrying out specialized mandates, such as electoral observation, and complex, multidimensional operations with comprehensive mandates to support fragile transitions and sustain peace. SPMs include 11 special envoys, three 3 regional offices and nine country-based SPMs.

Key Developments in 2015-2016

- the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Colombia. On 19 January 2016, the Government of Colombia, on the basis of a joint communiqué with FARC-EP, requested the establishment of a United Nations special political mission to monitor and verify the laying down of arms and serve as the international component of the tripartite mechanism that would monitor and verify the eventual peace agreement between them (S/2016/53).

- the merger of the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel into the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).

- the closing of the United Nations Electoral Observation Mission in Burundi (MENUB), which began its operations to monitor and report on the electoral process on 1 January 2015.


Special Political Missions 2016
New Missions
Two new missions were established during 2016,
United Nations Mission in Colombia, 25 January 2016
Implementation of Security Council resolution 2231 (2015), 16 January 2016.
Closed Missions
Four missions were terminated during 2016.
Panel of Experts on the Islamic Republic of Iran, terminated effective from 16 January 2016
Group of Experts on Cote d'Ivoire, terminated 28 April 2016
Panel of Experts on Liberia, terminated 25 May 2016
Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, terminates on 31 October 2016
31 Special Political Missions
UN Office for West Africa
Office of the Special Envoy for the Sahel
UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel
preventing conflict
bringing parties to the negotiating table
facilitating peace agreements
Special Political Missions play an active role in...
supporting electoral processes
supporting complex political transitions
supporting local peace initiatives
United Nations
Department of Political Affairs
Diplomacy. Prevention. Action
... to sustain peace.

"Lessons-learning", Sustaining Peace and Partnerships

Elizabeth Spehar, former Director of DPA's Policy and Mediation Division, arrived in Nicosia on 13 June to take up her new role as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus. Ms Spehar also serves as Deputy Special Adviser on Cyprus as part of the Secretary-General's Good Offices effort to support negotiations between the island's communities. As she prepared to leave NY for Cyprus, we talked to Ms Spehar about the unique perspective she brings to her new posting and the future of conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding.

ABOVE: Elizabeth Spehar. UN Photo

Politically Speaking: You have served as head of DPA's Policy and Mediation Division (PMD), the "think tank" of the Department. How has this experience – in addition to your previous work, including in Cyprus – equipped you for your new assignment in Nicosia?

Elizabeth Spehar: First of all I should say how pleased and honoured I am to have been given this opportunity, having been appointed by the Secretary-General for this key position at a key time. From my work in the Policy and Mediation Division (PMD), I've developed an enhanced appreciation for the types of support that the missions on the ground can receive from an outfit like PMD within DPA. Largely through PMD's Mediation Support Unit (MSU), mediation support capacity is readily available through experienced staff, the Standby Team of mediation experts as well as through a comprehensive roster. PMD also has guidance and learning capacities, knowledge management and planning assets and other resources that it can bring to bear. I would say that, based on my experience in PMD, today I have an even greater appreciation of the importance of "lessons-learning", and of identifying and applying best practices. This is one of the areas I am interested in looking at in the context of my new assignment in Cyprus. Since the UN has been on the island for many years and we have dealt with many of the same issues over such a long period of time, there is a lot to learn from what we have done in the past, from various perspectives. It just makes sense to be very cognizant of what we've done and evaluate that experience carefully as we go forward.

How do you see the role of the two UN missions in Cyprus evolving if there is a settlement?

The two missions share many resources. The teams work very well together and there is a high degree of complementarity in their tasks. If indeed the leaders and the two communities ultimately agree on a settlement deal, then of course our role on the ground to support its implementation will have to be looked into in detail. The Security Council already signaled some time ago that it expected there to be contingency planning for a settlement. Some thinking has thus already begun. At the same time, much will depend, first and foremost, on what the leaders will ask of us as well as the contours of the settlement proposal that they will reach.

You helped shape DPA's contribution to the recent reviews of the UN's work on peace and security, and specifically of its peace operations, the peacebuilding architecture and the push to increase women's participation in peace and security efforts (the "1325" review, named for the relevant Security Council resolution). What is your assessment of those exercises and their potential impact, on DPA and the UN as a whole?

I believe that, for DPA and for the UN more broadly, these reviews have been very timely. The reviews have come at a moment when the UN's peace and security architecture is coming under increasing strain, with resource limitations as well as new and daunting challenges. All three documents speak very much to DPA's work. There were some key commonalities across the studies which I think are helpful. It's not that the studies said anything particularly new, but they reiterated some critical points and they clarified and endorsed certain concepts that we cannot, we should not lose sight of. One is the primacy of political solutions to resolve conflict and achieve peace. Another is the imperative of women's participation and bringing a gender lens to all of our peace and security efforts, with a focus on increased women's leadership and on more actual implementation of the UN's extensive women, peace and security commitments. The High-Level Panel on Peace Operations made a forceful case for bringing prevention and mediation back to the fore. And the peacebuilding architecture review very effectively promoted the comprehensive concept of "sustaining peace". The main strength of the reviews has been to re-focus attention on these vital areas, exhort more action on the part of both the system and its Member States and to point out the need to put much greater political and financial resources toward this end. Now we all need to see how we can follow through.

The term "sustaining peace" is being heard more and more. What exactly does it mean?

This is a concept – sustaining peace – that came out particularly strongly in the Advisory Group of Experts' (AGE) report on the peacebuilding architecture. The report makes the case that sustaining peace is a critical objective, if not THE critical objective of the United Nations, and that it's an all-of-system responsibility. "Sustaining peace" is both an objective and an approach that implies working across the pillars of the organization, aligning and integrating development, human rights and peace and security efforts. It also entails constant efforts across a conflict cycle. Preventive action is central to this concept, and should be engaged before, during and after a crisis breaks out and during the aftermath of a crisis to prevent a relapse. It defines peacebuilding as something that also needs to occur at all stages of a conflict cycle in order to make peace durable. We have two important identical resolutions that were adopted in parallel by the Security Council and the General Assembly in response to the AGE report. The resolutions endorse this new term, undergirding the fact that we need a continuous, joined-up and holistic approach to addressing conflict and achieving peace. That is the essence of "sustaining peace".

DPA was deeply involved in the different reviews. What do they mean for the Department in the coming years?

I think the reviews were very important for DPA. They opened up the opportunity to put before Member States and others, in a more prominent way, the key role of DPA in prevention and mediation efforts in the UN, and in particular the Department's role in supporting the Secretary-General's good offices and preventive diplomacy more broadly. Of course, DPA is not the only prevention actor, and one of the strengths of DPA now is that is has started to work much more systematically with other partners, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UN Women, to name a few, on peace and security challenges. This is a key development. I think the role of DPA, across the conflict spectrum, has become even clearer for many stakeholders. Its critical role in "sustaining peace", alongside other actors, has been acknowledged. The Global Study and the Secretary-General's response to the study has left no doubt about the centrality of the women, peace and security agenda and the need for us and all other actors to pick up the pace in implementation and in achieving concrete results. These points have now been forcefully made or reiterated through the reviews, so today, we are at the stage where we need to see: What now? The messages of these reports have to somehow be carried forward. Cooperation between UN actors in the peace and security field needs to be deepened, and fragmentation needs to be addressed. The same needs to be pursued more systematically with regional partners, refining the ways in which we understand and execute our respective roles in this field. DPA needs to see how it can fulfill its role across the conflict cycle more fully to support the goal of sustaining peace. This will entail further exploring and developing its role in peacebuilding, including its contributions to longer-term, structural prevention efforts. Both DPA and the rest of the system have already been working hard on implementing many of the reports' recommendations that are in their purview to address. But the reports also clearly acknowledge that, as much as we can try to improve and be more efficient and cooperate more, the reality is if there are not more resources put into these areas – particularly in prevention, mediation, in peacebuilding – if more predictable funding is not available, it really hampers our ability to do more and respond more effectively, in the way that these reports challenge us to do. And that's one area where it seems DPA and other parts of the system need to continue the dialogue with Member States. We haven't yet managed to see that commitment from the membership for more consistent and more reliable resourcing for some of this core work.

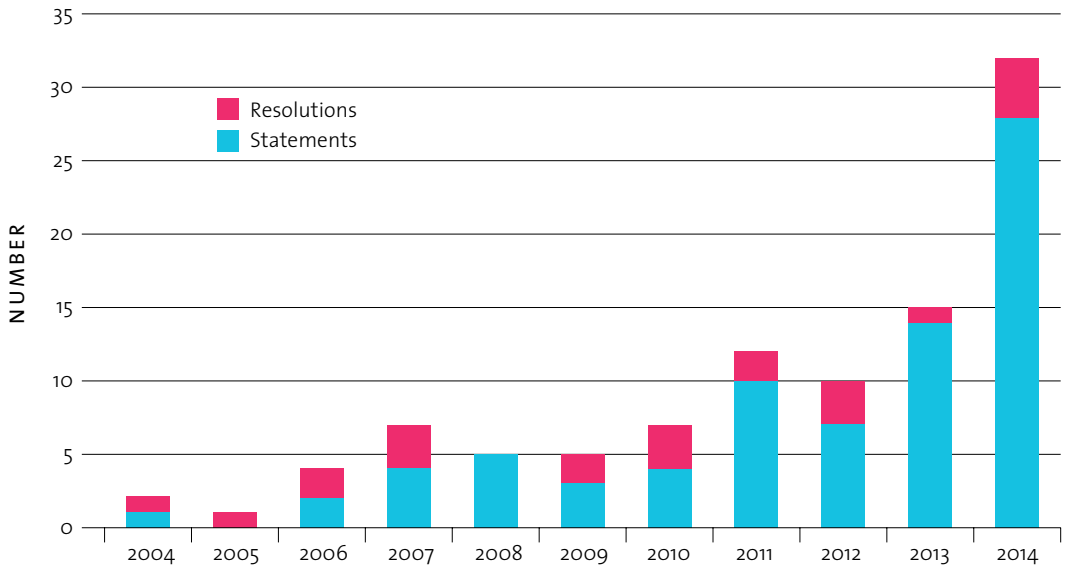
ABOVE: Poppy eradication campaign in north-eastern Afghan province of Badakhshan. Photo: UNAMA

The Convergence of Conflict and Crime: Impact on Preventive Diplomacy and Peacemaking

Recent experiences in Mali, the Sahel, and North Africa all bear witness to the impact of shifting alliances between different state forces, rebel groups, and criminal networks, while a growing body of evidence suggests that today's armed conflicts generate organized crime. These are some of the observations of a new DPA-commissioned paper on the impact of organized crime on conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding and how the UN can better face up to it.

The paper – Crime-Proofing Conflict Prevention, Management, and Peacebuilding: A Review of Emerging Good Practice – notes that peace operations take place today in highly complex and fluid strategic environments, where groups with clear criminal agendas have a major impact on conflict dynamics, peace processes, and post-war transitions. While traditional conflict analysis has tended to treat criminal and political actors as entirely separate (the "upperworld" versus the "underworld"), emerging research and evidence from a variety of settings suggest that this hard and fast distinction is overstated. The increasing international recognition of the close connections between organized crime and conflict in recent years is borne out by one important measure, namely the number of Security Council resolutions and statements with references to such crime adopted since 2004, as illustrated in the figure below.

FIGURE 1: Number of UNSC resolutions and presidential statements with reference to "organized crime," 2004 – 2014



SOURCE: Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (February 2015)

Recognizing that organized crime is not always separated from, but is in fact sometimes intertwined with, politics has potentially serious implications for the work of DPA and other entities working in conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding. Where criminal agendas are present, conflict-related work requires "crime-proofing", or putting the focus not just on formal politics but also on informal and illicit political economy.

According to the paper, "crime-proofing" requires that DPA and others boost analytical capacities for mapping criminal networks and illicit economies, including through the development of risk indicators at both local and transnational levels that can effectively feed into the planning and design of political missions.

The paper also recommends that, to limit the influence of organized crime in transitional political arrangements, DPA should consider crime-proofing its electoral assistance practices and strengthening its anti-corruption programming, particularly at the local level. And it calls on DPA to, at minimum, act to prevent the unintended facilitation of organized crime as a consequence of UN interventions. It can do this in promoting the development of guidance on how to identify and understand what drives criminal actors; in encouraging sensitivity in UN procurement practices to impacts on informal and illicit economies; in limiting opportunities for the criminal infiltration of UN police reform and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs; and, especially, in the design, implementation, and review of sanctions regimes.

For Eugenia Zorbas, of DPA's policy planning team, "the convergence between armed groups and organized crime, and the hybridization of their strategies, is evident, even if it is very difficult to gather reliable data on organized crime – perhaps even more so when it comes to interaction with government officials."

"This research paper points us to some possible 'good practices' based on a review of how other organizations, external to the UN, have begun to tackle different aspects of this problem," she added.

Bridging The Gap Between Early Warning and Early Action

The importance of conflict prevention *needs no demonstration. As we have written before, the number of active civil wars increased almost threefold between 2007 and 2014, following two decades of consistent decline. And the numbers have not really improved since 2014. So, why does it seem so difficult to get preventive diplomacy right? And why are many countries still reluctant to invest adequately in conflict prevention, even in the face of compelling evidence of its potential? We put these and other questions to* ***Richard Gowan,*** *the lead contributor to the recent International Crisis Group report "Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action". Mr. Gowan is a fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations and teaches conflict resolution at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.*

ABOVE: UN-mediated Intra-Syrian Talks in Geneva. UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

Politically Speaking: The difficulty of moving from early warning to early action has long been recognized, and international policymakers, to varying degrees, are already guided by the four key areas you identify (knowledge and relationships, framework diplomacy, strategic planning and communication, creating pathways to peace). How does this study propose to address this seemingly perennial gap?

Richard Gowan: We know quite a lot about how to prevent conflicts in theory, but we do not apply this in practice. The UN and other organizations have, for example, grown considerably better at spotting warning signs of looming crises over the last two decades. But when a crisis really escalates, we are still caught off-guard.

There are a number of reasons for that. Some are bureaucratic. The UN and other crisis management organizations are already overloaded, tracking multiple complex conflicts. So when signs of one more crisis start to emerge, officials often overlook them or downplay them until it is too late. That, broadly speaking, was the story of the international failure

Seizing the Moment: Steps to Early Action

In a report drawing on five years of field-centered analysis and policy recommendations, the International Crisis Group, a conflict prevention organization based in Brussels, Belgium, has identified four key areas that can become likely threats to peace if left unaddressed: 1) Leaders and elites whose choices for or against violence are pivotal; 2) Politics and strategies of militaries and internal security forces; 3) Marginalized peripheral regions; and 4) Regional and wider international factors to a conflict.

To move from early warning to effective early action, the report recommends a greater focus on **knowledge and relationships** – in-depth analysis, building ties and cultivating communication channels with leaders, elites, security forces and civil society. Engaging and balancing the interests of external actors early on, what is called **framework diplomacy**, helps developing common positions on how to act in an emerging crisis and might avoid deadlocks in peace negotiations later on, according to the study. More efforts should be put into **strategic planning and communication**, laying out clear overall goals for engaging in crises and communicate these clearly both to the conflict parties and to other international actors with interests at stake. The researchers conclude that these steps will **create pathways to peace** by opening up alternatives to violence to the conflict parties which may persuade them to pause before escalating – and perhaps even convince them to follow an alternative political route that avoids, or at least limits, all-out violence.

to respond to the collapse of the Central African Republic a few years ago.

Then there are political obstacles. As we saw over Syria in the Security Council in 2011, it is very hard to get big powers to agree on conflict management strategies early and rapidly. This is one reason that our report emphasizes "framework diplomacy" (efforts to build an international consensus over how to manage a crisis early on) as a priority for preventive diplomacy. In an increasingly complex international environment, diplomats need to spend more time trying to build consensus around crisis management.

Finally, we often do not have the right relationships in countries at risk of conflict to make a political difference. When a crisis is spiraling out of control, diplomats or multilateral officials need to be able to talk directly and frankly to the political or military leaders that are at the center of the crisis. We very often discover that we simply have not cultivated the right people, or that we lack leverage over the most important decision makers. This is why our report places such a strong focus on the old-fashioned and time consuming art of building up political relationships with the decisive actors in potential future crises.

Are there examples of effective preventive action based on, more or less, the areas you lay out?

A great example of effective personal diplomacy involving leaders in a country at risk of conflict was the push by big names such as John Kerry and Kofi Annan to persuade the main contenders in last year's Nigerian elections to stop their followers resorting to violence. Annan, Kerry and others succeeded in persuading President Goodluck Jonathan to stand down gracefully when he lost, sparing a lot of lives.

I would also point to Chancellor Merkel's efforts to handle the Ukrainian crisis with Vladimir Putin as an important case study of political relationship management at the highest level, avoiding a total meltdown.

If you want an effective model for framework diplomacy, you only need to look at Iran. The EU3 (Britain, France and Germany) played a crucial role in building a framework for dealing with Tehran in the mid-2000s, offering a platform for the Obama administration to move towards last year's nuclear agreement.

Photo courtesy of Richard Gowan

Conversely, can you point to cases that demonstrate the price of missed or botched opportunities to use preventive diplomacy?

There are a depressing number – too many to list in full here! If you look at how violence developed fairly gradually in Syria through 2011, it is hard to believe that Russia, the West and Iran could not have found some sort of bargain to end the crisis if they had shared the political will to do so. In Africa, there were very clear signs of the pending Burundi crisis well before last year, but nobody moved to avert it in time.

Perhaps even more strikingly, we have seen a series of cases where the UN and other actors have significant political or military presences on the ground topple into violence in recent years: Libya, parts of the DRC and South Sudan are all obvious examples. This raises some hard questions about why the UN struggles to deliver early action where we already have a clear role and should have some leverage. Is it because officials are too scared of offending the leaders and elites that they are deployed to assist by raising warning signs? Is it because the Security Council and regional powers often fail to back the UN up?

Is there a time for policymakers to acknowledge that, despite the best preparation, a prevention strategy has not worked? If so, what should happen then?

I would put this in slightly different terms. Of course prevention often fails. It is not a science, and sometimes the forces driving a conflict are simply too strong to rein in. But in such cases, we often shift towards conflict mitigation strategies – the delivery of humanitarian aid or even military deployments – without really having a clear vision of what the long-term strategy is.

The UN has invested a huge amount of effort in getting humanitarian assistance into Syria, for example, but while that is morally essential it has also turned aid convoys and UN agencies into pawns in a much bigger political game. In Darfur and Mali, we have peacekeepers on the ground who in many cases appear unable to project security, and are often targets themselves. I wonder whether we should not be more blunt in our assessments of how our conflict mitigation strategies fail. Are we sometimes prolonging conflict rather than resolving it? Do peacekeepers sometimes act as alibis for inaction? These are not new questions. But they are becoming increasingly urgent as we face a period of international tensions.

A Global Response to Rising Conflict

The newly released 2016 Global Peace Index (GPI) Report, from the Institute for Economics and Peace, concludes that the world became less peaceful in the last year, reinforcing the underlying trend of declining peace over the last decade. The report also describes growing "global inequality in peace", with the most peaceful countries continuing to improve while the least peaceful are falling into greater violence and conflict.

The Index explores how the decline in peace could be reversed, introducing the concept of "Positive Peace", described as "the attitudes, institutions and structures which sustain peace." To help explain why some countries are peaceful and others are not, the report proposes applying systems thinking as it has developed in biology and ecology to the study of peace. The report links "Positive Peace" and broader societal resilience. Countries with high "Positive Peace" are more likely to maintain their stability and adapt and recover from both internal and external shocks.

State and societal resilience, and its absence when defined as fragility, have become increasingly important concepts in the study and practice of peace and conflict prevention. Just after the release of the GPI report, we spoke to Under-Secretary-General Jeffrey Feltman about the rise in conflict globally over the last decade and how the international community can work with States to make them more resilient and able to sustain peace.

RIGHT: Civilians walk along Tripoli Street in Misrata, Libya.
UNHCR/Helen Caux

LEFT: Residents walk along the main road of Nikishino village in eastern Ukraine.
UNHCR Andrew McConnell

The GPI records a "historically less peaceful and more unequal world." Do you agree?

Jeffrey Feltman: Yes, I agree that, after what was a reduction in conflicts after the end of the Cold War that one hoped would be a permanent trend, we now are seeing increasing levels of violence and conflict globally. From the rise of ISIL/Daesh to the disastrous effects of climate change, I think the challenges the world is facing are tremendous and require that we all work together to face and defeat them.

BELOW:
UN Security Council.
UN Photo

In saying "we", I put much of the onus on States, which remain, after all the basic units of organization in the international system – and of the UN in particular.

How are the challenges States are facing today different than those of a generation or two ago?

Well, first of all, the nature, and manifestation, of violence is changing, as are the tools available to it. Most civil wars now involve a mix of criminality, conflict and extremism. What's more, violence is increasingly transnational in cause and effect. You have cross-border criminal networks, arms flows, ideological narratives, and refugee outflows, for example. We are also witnessing a rise in confrontations between major powers. And then, non-State actors have easier, cheaper access to lethal technologies and to social media, effectively redefining how States wage war.

Secondly, we see growing State fragility, a lack of control over the levers of authority and governing. We have seen on many occasions the hollowing out of the State, leaving it unable to deliver services or security for citizens. In some instances, armed or criminal groups may be the most important providers of public services in many areas. At the extreme, State fragility culminates in State failure.

LEFT: Boys play on the streets of Aleppo,capital of the north-western Aleppo Governorate, Syria. UNICEF/Romenzi

And thirdly, and importantly, challenges are increasingly interconnected. Demographic shifts and resource scarcity continue to create enormous development and political challenges, as do threats emanating from rapid urbanization and climate change. The world is expected to go from 7 billion people today to 9 billion 2050. This will add to already tremendous stresses on infrastructure and resources, as well as a vulnerable pool of disaffected youth.

Today we have more empowered and connected citizens around the world than ever before. They have greater expectations, and can be an enormous force for positive change. But these expectations have to be met and managed, or they could prove destabilizing.

What is the UN, the preeminent State organization, doing to help its members adapt to these challenges?

Quite a few tools have been developed to do just that. I'll touch on a sample of new tools.

First, given the changing nature of violence, the UN has been adopting new approaches to support States to deal with cross-cutting thematic and regional challenges. We have a new Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism. We had a General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem.

At the operational level, we're moving towards regional responses. For the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), that means the opening of regional offices to be closer to the issues and provide more immediate and tailored solutions. These presences help Member States to address issues ranging from transnational organized crime in the West African Coast Initiative, to the terrorism and extremism of Boko Haram in Central Africa, to the politics of regional water management in Central Asia.

Secondly, in response to State fragility, the UN

BELOW: A woman and her children in a camp for internally displaced persons, in Yola, the capital of Adamawa, Nigeria, after members of the Boko Haram rebel group attacked their home. UNICEF/Abdrew Esiebo

RIGHT: Desertification in Niger.
UNEP/Roger LeMoyne

places increasing emphasis on "joined up, whole of system solutions", as exemplified by the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted last year, recognize the need to see development, peace and human rights as inextricably intertwined. Goal 16 aims at helping bring about "peaceful, just and inclusive societies."

There are SDGs that directly address conflict drivers, ranging from inequality to natural resources. Indeed, the SDGs are intrinsically linked to conflict prevention and demand that the different pillars of the UN come together to support them.

Similarly, the General Assembly and the Security Council have recently adopted groundbreaking resolutions on "Sustaining Peace",a term they defined as "preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict." The resolutions do away with a distinction between "post-conflict" peacebuilding and other forms of prevention. Instead, they demand that prevention be mainstreamed across all that the UN does.

We are also striving to update our abilities to deploy UN peace operations, an invaluable tool despite some shortcomings, including occasionally unrealistic time horizons. We aim to establish peace operations that are flexibly configured and deployed to contend with new and irregular forms of violence and lay the groundwork for sustainable peace.

On new and interconnected challenges, the UN has found innovative ways to help Member States cope with unanticipated challenges. For example, the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, drawn up in 2013 and led from the DPA's United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, unites political/good offices engagement with regional development coordination to help Member States of the region affected by a complex, transboundary interplay of challenges ranging from desertification to violent extremism.

What do you see as the way forward to ensure States are fit for the challenges of the 21st century? What is needed over the next decades to strengthen the State system for the benefit of people, not just institutions?

I think the UN needs to continue to provide global leadership to ensure norms and principles continue to evolve to reflect the fast pace of change. Our actions must take into account these new challenges to States, while continuing to keep attention on conventional and long-standing threats. For conflict resolution, the UN must protect the right to speak to everyone, while being mindful of normative obligations, including human rights and international humanitarian law, and international law more broadly.

The UN must also coordinate global risk management, helping Member States to recognise the prevailing trends and to adapt cooperatively rather than competitively.

We also have to recognize the magnitude and longevity of the challenge. Avoiding relapse into conflict is, still, fundamentally about strengthening institutions (national and regional).

Lastly, we inevitably return to one of the biggest of the challenges: the character of the State really matters. I believe the multilateral system will only be resilient if built up from citizen-oriented, accountable States. Alas, we do not see that recognition everywhere. States with strong rule of law and accountability, States that have effective delivery of safety and security, States with strong human rights records and so forth are best placed to withstand the challenges of the 21st century. But responsible statehood also must evolve to take into account an ever-more interconnected world, where opportunities and risks alike easily transcend national boundaries and affect citizens' expectations and aspirations.

See also our article from January, which includes a conversation about the Global Terrorism Index with Audrey Fox, of the Institute for Economics and Peace.

The New Secretary-General: The Centrality of Prevention

The Security Council's selection of **António Guterres** to be the next United Nations Secretary-General was broadly welcomed within the organization and outside, even if there was some disappointment that a woman did not get the post. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called Mr. Guterres, a former UN High Commissioner for Refugees, a "superb choice", saying his past experience as Prime Minister of Portugal, among other qualities, would serve him well in leading the United Nations in a crucial period.

ABOVE: Incoming UN Secretary-General António Guterres addresses the General Assembly, October 2016. UN Photo

Mr. Guterres is expected to be formally appointed by the General Assembly next week, a decision that will cap a long process - shepherded by the Assembly's President – that broke new ground in terms of transparency and accountability. For the first time ever, candidates for the post of Secretary-General defended their platforms before UN Member States and the public. Mr Guterres took part these "hustings", presenting in April a "vision statement" laying out what he saw as the challenges and opportunities for the United Nations. Here we look again at that document, and specifically what it says about prevention, a core part of the UN's mission and DPA's daily work.

The Centrality of Prevention

The world spends much more energy and resources managing crises than preventing them. Thus the UN must uphold a strategic commitment to a "culture of prevention", pledged in 2005 but yet to materialize.

First, we need a surge in diplomacy for peace. Under the guidance of the Security Council and in accordance with the Charter, the SG should actively, consistently and tirelessly exercise his good offices and mediation capacity as an honest broker, bridge builder and messenger of peace. Full use should be made of the Organization's convening power, as a forum for dialogue, to ease tensions and facilitate peaceful solutions.

Second, the reviews on peacekeeping, peacebuilding and on women, peace and security create a unique opportunity to develop a comprehensive, modern and effective operational peace architecture, encompassing prevention, conflict resolution, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and long-term development - the "peace continuum".

Those reviews should not be artificially treated as a package, but strategies and policies must converge. The UN should ensure the primacy of political solutions at all stages, promote preventive approaches, mainstream human rights, and foster inclusive engagement and empowerment of women and girls. Full participation of women is essential to the success of any peace process.

People in need of protection are not getting enough. The most vulnerable, such as women and children, are an absolute priority. We must make sure that when someone sees the Blue Flag she or he can say: "I am protected".

Third, further investment in capacity and institution-building of States is another central element of prevention, promoting inclusive and sustainable development, overcoming fragilities and strengthening the ability of Governments to address the needs of their people and respect their rights.

Fourth, prevention is also crucial to combating terrorism. Force must be used when necessary and in accordance with the Charter, but let us not forget that it is also a battle for values; our common battle. Terrorist attacks target not just their direct victims, but all who subscribe to the purposes and principles of the Charter. The international community has the legal right and the moral duty to act collectively to put an end to terrorism "in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and for whatever purposes". In doing so, we shall neither concede to fear nor abdicate our values.

Fifth, values are, indeed, the defining argument and the vital strength in our collective mobilization against intolerance, violent extremism and radicalization. To prevent them, we need to foster inclusion, solidarity and the cohesion of multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious societies. This is also the best antidote to racism, xenophobia, islamophobia and anti-semitism.

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