

USE THE POTENTIAL FOR PREVENTION AND EXPAND THE SPACE FOR MEDIATION!

Joint letter to the incoming UN Secretary-General
from members of the Mediation Support Network¹

After a period of steady decline, armed conflicts have increased at an alarming rate in recent years. Conflicts have disastrous consequences for affected populations, and they create huge burdens for neighboring countries and the world as a whole. We have a common interest in peace and we must therefore strengthen our collective effort to prevent, mitigate and resolve violent conflicts. The United Nations – and thus the UN Secretary-General at its helm – has a key role in this endeavor, going back to its very rationale “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.” As organizations active in the field of mediation and dialogue facilitation we call on the incoming UN Secretary-General to show decisive leadership in conflict prevention and to proactively use good offices to effectively mediate conflicts and support significant mediation efforts of others.

The following actions are of particular importance for the incoming UN Secretary-General:

1. PREVENT CONFLICTS

The High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations emphasized the lead role of the UN in creating a culture of prevention. Based on the UN Charter, we believe the UN Secretary-General should engage in preventive diplomacy impartially, rigorously, robustly and undeterred by vested interests of member states. In addition, the UN Secretary-General has a crucial role in providing accurate information to member states, in offering political bodies options for early action, and in using the resources of the UN Secretariat for conflict prevention. We call on the incoming UN Secretary-General to ensure these tasks are adequately prioritized, funded and coordinated.

2. PROACTIVELY USE GOOD OFFICES TO MEDIATE CONFLICTS

We call on the incoming UN Secretary-General to use the leeway provided by the UN Charter and to proactively use good offices to lead mediation efforts. Where others lead significant mediation processes, the UN should lend its support, providing expertise, resources and political backing and sensibly dividing roles between mediation actors. When UN member states are divided, thereby impeding a mediation process, the UN Secretary-General has a key role to play in promoting consensus and in facilitating political compromise. No other individual is better placed than the UN Secretary-General to facilitate agreement between UN member states on issues of international peace and security.

Good offices, preventive diplomacy and mediation require distinct professional knowledge, experience and skills. We call on the incoming UN Secretary-General to make merit-based appointments, choosing individuals who are specifically qualified and bring clearly added value in mediation. This concerns appointments both of envoys and of special representatives, as well as of experts in mediation teams and senior officials in the UN Secretariat working on conflict prevention and mediation. In this regard, we call on the incoming UN Secretary-General to pursue the commitments recently reiterated in the Global Study on UN Security Council resolution 1325 and increase the appointment of women to senior mediation posts. We further hope that the UN, through the Mediation Support Unit of the Department of Political Affairs, shall continue to play a lead role in promoting professionalization and cooperation in the mediation field.

¹ The signatory organizations are listed with their logo at the end of this letter.

3. CONTINUE AND STRENGTHEN COOPERATION WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN PEACE MEDIATION

Inclusive mediation has a proven positive impact on the legitimacy and sustainability of peace processes. The complexity of conflicts today requires responses at multiple levels and by different actors. We therefore call on the incoming UN Secretary-General to work with civil society organizations in order to promote dialogue and negotiations at different levels – local, national and international – and between different societal actors. Connecting with local mediators and civil society is crucial for the UN, as these persons and organizations create bottom-up support for peacemaking, facilitate dialogue behind the scenes, support high-level mediators through analysis, research and training, and help link different tracks. We call on the incoming UN Secretary-General to continue and further strengthen this engagement.

4. EXPAND THE MEDIATION SPACE

As mediation and mediation support organizations, we understand the importance of including the broadest range of actors in dialogue and negotiation processes, treating them in an impartial manner and respecting their consent. In this connection, we are concerned about regulations, laws and designations that make it politically and practically challenging to engage with some groups, including criminalizing the peacemakers who engage with them. In defending mediation as a tool of conflict prevention, we call on the UN Secretary-General to stand up for the principle that mediators and mediation support actors should be able to operate free from undue political and legal constraints. We urge the UN Secretary-General to advocate for inclusive and impartial mediation processes and to uphold these principles in processes in which the UN is in the lead.


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