

**Speech of Kemal Dervis, UNDP Administrator, at the DPA-UNDP workshop on
building national capacities for conflict prevention and transformation
Istanbul, 6-8 March 2006**

Professor Gambari, Excellencies, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I. Introduction

1. It is truly a great pleasure to be here among so many colleagues, and our national partners, who have taken among themselves the difficult task of translating into reality the agenda for the prevention of armed conflicts and violence. I hope that we will reflect deeply on what we have accomplished and what we have learned from those accomplishments.

2. Let me first say a few words about the connection between development and conflict prevention. The best way to understand this connection is to see how thinking about development itself has evolved over the past three decades.

II. The Relationship Between Development and Conflict Prevention

3. At one point in time, under-development was understood as solely being a function of poverty and lack of resources. Based on this thinking, billions of dollars were poured by donors into the development enterprise. Today, we find that many developing countries that received such assistance are not much better off, or even poorer, than they were two-to-three decades ago. At the same time, countries that sought and used development assistance only sparingly, such as South Africa, Chile India, or the countries of South-East Asia, have forged ahead.

4. Many development practitioners now accept that the key element in development is not the level of available resources, but the degree to which a society is able to organize its political and economic processes to be accountable and responsive, and build consensus around national goals and strategies, so that available resources are utilized in the best manner possible.

5. In the same way as development was once equated with the availability of resources, analysts now link conflict to poverty or lack of resources. This may be true in some instances. But we also have instances where some of the world's most intractable conflicts have taken place in relatively well developed areas such as the former Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, the former Soviet Union, or Lebanon. Other resource-rich countries such as Sierra Leone and the DRC have seen nothing but violent conflict. At the other end of the spectrum, Botswana has done very well managing its diamond wealth. Clearly, there is no obvious correlation between resources or lack thereof, and violent conflict.

6. Many students of conflict, including colleagues present in this room, now accept that violent conflict or its absence has less to do with resources and lack thereof, but the ability of a society to organize itself on the basis of consensus and inclusion to manage and grow its available resources in the best possible manner.

7. In other words, both sustainable development and sustainable peace result from the same common variable: the social and political infrastructure of a society through which consensus is built across religious, social, or ethnic lines on the best use of that society's assets, and in a manner that allows for the inclusion and participation of different groups. Several colleagues in this room have used the term "infrastructure for peace" to describe this common variable.

8. In my view, when naturally-occurring conflicts within a society threaten to turn violent, it is because this infrastructure has deteriorated or collapsed. The process of development inevitably causes conflicts between different groups in a society, especially in multi-ethnic societies, as it involves the re-assigning of significant resources. Where a society no longer has the infrastructure to manage these conflicts, they inevitably overwhelm the quest for both peace and sustainable development, and lead to mass violence.

III. The Complementary Roles of the Political and Development Arms of the UN

9. Conflict prevention, therefore, involves two critical tasks. The first is to provide, where feasible and where we are invited, the external mediation necessary for preventing current conflicts from turning violent. My colleague, Prof. Gambari, has spoken about his department's role in providing this support. The second is to assist national actors in creating or re-building the infrastructure necessary for the successful management of future conflicts, to build national capacities for conflict prevention. The first task is clearly a more political one, and the second is clearly one for the development community.

10. Yet, the two tasks might in fact be closely related. In several situations, like Haiti and Nepal for instance, we have found that even where we are able to bring different groups to the dialogue table, these processes became deadlocked or collapsed because the participants lacked the skills or aptitude for constructive bargaining. In other situations, the preference of the different groups is clearly to have mediation by their own institutions rather than by an outside actor like the UN. Relevant national institutions or processes may therefore have to be strengthened before potentially violent conflicts can be successfully managed.

11. Given how closely related these tasks are, it is of critical importance that the political and development arms of the UN, and the Secretariat and the agencies, work together in an integrated manner to perform them. Indeed, the experiences that will be shared at this gathering are testimony to our growing ability to work together. Several of the African country experiences that will be shared at this meeting owe their origin to a

joint programme of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Africa and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) that was started in 2001. This programme subsequently provided the model for wider collaboration between UNDP and DPA, the Joint Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention launched in 2003, through which many of the initiatives that will be discussed in this meeting have been supported. DESA has again been an important partner in implementing this programme

IV. National Experiences

12. Important as intra-UN collaboration is, it is only an annotation to the significant national experiences and leadership that are represented in this room today. In Guyana, the chairs of the two of the most significant Regional Development Councils, or provincial governments, have taken important steps with UN support to build the skills and capacities of local authorities, civil society, and political parties for resolving disputes before they lead to violence, and are here with us today to tell us about their work. These capacities, if continued to be built, should help prevent electoral violence during national elections next year.

13. Ghana, with UN support, is now putting in place an "architecture for peace," through which provincial and local authorities, working closely with civil society, will be able to anticipate and resolve disputes relating to land and chieftaincy before they lead to violence. This architecture will include a national network of mediators, located in communities throughout the country. Parties to ongoing conflicts such as the violent chieftaincy dispute in the Dagbon area have already begun to receive training in skills for compromise and constructive negotiation through this programme. These efforts draw on the successful collaboration between Ghana and the UN to anticipate and prevent electoral violence in Dagbon during national elections in 2004, and in preventing the conflict in that area from impacting national politics. The Interior Minister from Ghana will be here tomorrow to talk to us about this, and other senior Ghanaian leaders are here with us today.

14. In Ecuador, national authorities, with UN support, are building the capacities of local government to deal with the tensions generated by the spill over of conflict from Colombia in its border regions. Last year, as the crisis over the Supreme Court unfolded, Ecuadorean authorities and civil society worked with UN support to resolve the crisis on the basis of negotiation and compromise, and are now working together to ensure that capacity exists within Ecuador itself to resolve future such crises on a similar basis.

15. In Mauritania, a forum for civic dialogue launched with UN support prior to last year's coup has now provided the basis for a national platform for dialogue on the country's transition to democracy. A key participant in this process is here today to tell us more about it. The constraint of time keeps from going through all the national experiences represented here today. We will hear from countries as diverse as Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and others.

16. I had said earlier that development inevitably leads to conflicts that, if not managed in an inclusive and participatory manner, can turn violent. The management of conflicts, and hence the prevention of *violent* conflict, is therefore the sovereign responsibility of all Member States, and part of the day-to-day business of governments. The national experiences that will be shared at this meeting point to four competencies that all governments should have, as part of their repertoire for ensuring sustainable development:

- a. First, the ability to analyse and anticipate potential areas of dispute and engage in a truly collective process to develop appropriate responses.
- b. Second, to understand and employ dispute resolution principles and practices, such as mediation, interest-based negotiation, conflict impact assessments, and other tools in the every day work of government.
- c. Next, the ability to strengthen their national institutional capacity for managing diversity. This may be through constitutional means; by strengthening branches of government like the judiciary; through the creation of new institutions such as ombudsman offices, and the development of human resources, for example training for security forces in key areas such as human rights standards and conflict prevention and resolution techniques.
- d. Finally, the capacity to use development aid to mitigate, and not exacerbate, structural and proximate conditions which create tension or disparities that can lead to violent conflict.

17. This is a tall order. No individual country can do this alone and no country has succeeded completely, but it is what we should strive for. And, certainly every country, at every stage of development and in every relationship to violent conflict, could benefit from such assistance. To me, these competencies constitute essential elements of a national “infrastructure for peace.”

VI. The Evolution in the UN Approach to Conflict Prevention

18. The experiences that will be discussed here also point to the many ways in which the UN’s own understanding of this subject is also changing, so that we can better work with our national counterparts to build this infrastructure. I congratulate especially the Department of Political Affairs for recognizing that prevention is no longer exclusively in the domain of the political or peacekeeping departments, but has evolved into a multi-disciplinary task which must include the social, economic and developmental aspects. Also, we have evolved from a headquarters-driven approach to a field-based approach that headquarters can support. From one that has been externally initiated, or driven by outside experts, to one that is internally-derived, locally-analysed, and collaboratively developed. And most importantly, we are moving away from what has been called “early warning,” which suggests responses to the imminent start of violence, to developing longer-term interventions that build capacities for dialogue and negotiation,

so that national plans and strategies for sustainable development are based on consensus and inclusion as opposed to conflict and division.

19. Important as these changes are, a lot of work still has to be done in strengthening and replicating some of the positive experiences that will be discussed here. How do we know, for instance, that protagonists to disputes have acquired the skills and attitudes necessary for the peaceful resolution of future disputes? How do we concretely measure the reductions in tension that such skills might lead to? More broadly, how do we determine the level of capacity that a society might need in order to be able to mediate successfully the conflicts generated by the development process? I hope that the discussions over the next three days will shed light on these critical questions.

VII. Future Directions: The Role of UNDP

20. UNDP has provided, and will continue to do so through its Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery and in close collaboration with DPA and DESA, support in three areas:

- a. Building national and local capacities, for both individuals and institutions, for consensus formation, compromise, and the peaceful settlement of disputes;
- b. Convening and facilitating, as appropriate, forums for civic and multi-stakeholder dialogue through which consensus can be built among different groups in a society on longer-term approaches to political and economic reform;
- c. Ensuring “conflict sensitivity” in development assistance so that such assistance helps to ameliorate, instead of exacerbating, existing tensions and divisions.

21. I hope that the sharing of experiences here, from which I personally hope to learn, will help us further define and refine this assistance, and establish even better modalities for working in collaboration with our UN partners and national counterparts.

VIII. Conclusion: From Conflict Prevention to Conflict Transformation

22. As I indicated at the beginning of my remarks, both sustainable peace and sustainable development require an ability on the part of key actors and key sectors to engage each other on a constructive basis, on the basis of positive competition, as opposed to hostility and mistrust, so they can develop common strategies and plans to promote peace and growth. More than altering their physical circumstances, therefore, conflict prevention and sustainable development both require a change in attitudes, mind-sets, and skills. While we may be able to help resolve specific conflicts through outside intervention, negative attitudes and hostility will continue to obstruct both lasting peace and development.

23. To the extent that both violent conflict as well as under-development begin in the minds of those most affected by them, the challenge for all of us is to transform these minds, to move from resolving specific conflicts to a transformation in the way that

conflicts in general are viewed by the protagonists, so that instead of leading to violence, naturally-occurring conflicts provide an opportunity for progress and reform.

24. I hope that our discussions over the next three days provide pointers on how to achieve this transformation, and I wish you the best in these discussions, and in our future endeavours.