Presentation on Armed Violence and Development

This presentation deals with the cross-cutting theme that links the prevention and reduction of armed violence with social and economic development processes.

We begin with the principle that freedom from violence is fundamental to effective development.

At conservative estimates, armed violence has killed more than 740,000 people per annum in recent years. The number of people seriously injured runs into millions, victimizing individuals and entire communities. Armed violence should be seen alongside poverty as a high-level barrier to our common development goals.

Including interpersonal, criminal and political violence as well as conflict, armed violence threatens the realization of human rights and poverty reduction, the effective provision of humanitarian and development assistance, and the achievement of international development targets. Armed violence and development are linked in a vicious circle. On one side, fear and insecurity caused by armed violence undermine human, social and economic development. On the other, lack of development opportunities and persistent inequality are powerful drivers of armed violence.

In non-conflict countries alone, armed violence has been estimated to cost over $163 billion – more than the total global aid budget. Armed violence drains national and local resources by reducing economic productivity and growth potential, and by diverting scarce economic resources from productive social investments such as primary health and education.

Let us be clear, armed violence is not only a problem in places affected by ongoing conflict. In fact, twice as many people are killed each year as a result of armed violence in non-conflict settings. Armed violence is a global problem for which we must all take responsibility.

The reduction of armed violence has clear economic benefits, as well as reflecting military and national security necessities. But armed violence reduction must provide a broader humanitarian and developmental vision of security – a moral affirmation of states’ commitment to protect citizens and civilians at home and abroad.

It is true that part of the problem of armed violence is a problem of weapons.

Globally, the proliferation of small arms contributes to a great proportion of this burden of violence – enabled by an inadequately regulated arms trade. The use of explosive weapons such as artillery, aircraft bombs and IEDs in densely populated areas is a major cause of humanitarian suffering. Cluster munitions and landmines present long-term threats to civilian populations and they have been rightly outlawed.

More than 100 states have pledged through the 2006 Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, to achieve measurable reductions in armed violence by 2015. Earlier this year more than 60 states endorsed the Oslo Commitments affirming that they will measure and monitor armed violence transparently, that they will recognise the rights of victims and survivors of armed violence, and they will strengthen national and international planning and support for armed violence reduction.

Acted upon, these frameworks provide direction towards more accountable efforts to reduce violence.

States, in partnership with civil society, need to build open and efficient mechanisms of annual reporting on rates of armed violence – acting on these existing commitments. International institutions, such as the WHO and World Bank, should ensure that metrics on armed violence are incorporated as a central component of national and regional analysis.
States, in partnership with civil society and representative groups, should work for a clear articulation of the actions required to ensure victims and survivors of armed violence are able to fully realise their rights to justice and full social and economic inclusion.

Working with civil society, states should include armed violence reduction as a priority in their national development plans, supported where relevant by adequate aid. They should ensure full compliance with existing and emerging international norms and agreements to reduce and prevent armed violence, seeking peaceful solutions to conflicts, enhancing peace-building efforts, and strengthening civilian protection.

We also should keep in mind that the most effective armed violence reduction programming is planned and implemented at the local level. Successful examples of such programmes are already underway in urban and rural areas around the world – often carried out through the cooperation of civil society and governments. Here are three such examples:

- In Dhaka, Bangladesh a project, organized by the NGO Changemaker, improves educational and employment opportunities for local youth, thus reducing the incentives for them to become involved in criminal or political violence. This grows out of a community project in which residents identified and designed responses to local security problems.

- In Brazil, in a low income neighbourhood in Belo Horizonte, nine hundred youths now take part in art, sports and culture workshops aimed at lowering the homicide rate in their city. The program, called Fica Vivo! (Be Smart/Stay Alive!) was organized by a local university and the state government.

- Meanwhile, in Croatia, the government, in partnership with UNDP and with the support of several donors, is implementing a 3-year program that takes an integrated approach that links work on arms control, violence prevention and community security, thus bridging several UNDP portfolios and four government ministries.

Civil society organizations look forward to further cooperation of this kind with governments and other institutions in the effort to prevent and reduce armed violence in communities around the world.

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