Talking Points: UN-AU Partnership in Peacemaking and Mediation

The challenges facing the continent and beyond are complex and need our collective and joined up approach. The entire focus of the UN Office to the African Union is to foster continuous dialogue and joint action between the UN and the AU from the earliest signs of conflict through the entire conflict cycle, including support to mediation and peace operations.

The recent findings of the High Level Independent Panel review of peace operations, and the subsequent report of the Secretary General, emphasize the importance of prevention and mediation and stronger regional-global partnerships in addition to new ways of planning and conducting UN peace operations.

The AU Summit decision in Kigali also re-committed the Union to prioritizing the financing of preventive diplomacy and mediation through operationalizing Window 1 of the Peace Fund. I understand the AU Heads of State and Government were most seized of this component to the Peace Fund precisely because it focused on political solutions; it focused on African political solutions to potential and ongoing conflict.

The UN has learned that operationalising and supporting a mediation effort is similar in many way to operationalizing a peace support mission:

- There are a lot of logistics involved;
• There are a number of different technical components and you need a variety of specialists;
• You need good situational awareness - you need to take the time to systematically update your political analysis throughout a mediation process;
• Leadership is important but it’s not a job for one person alone;
• Increasingly conflict has a multitude of actors – it is not two conflict parties sitting across the table from one another – and this requires mediation at a number of levels requiring a complex array of actors and resources;
• Moreover, there are a multitude of external players, including mediators that need to be coordinated and working together in genuine partnership – not in competition – to ensure a coherent and successful approach to peacemaking.

Perhaps above all, the UN has learned that successful mediation must be well coordinated between partners involved in supporting a peace process. It is the minimum we can do as external actors, to partner effectively, as it is something within our control. We may not be able to determine the course conflicting parties will take during a peace process but we can control how we collaborate.

Selecting the right mediator. There is no question leadership is a key question. However, just like the UN, the AU may not always be in the lead, and on the continent the UN and AU are more likely to be in a supportive role to the first responder which may be a neighbor or a REC. While the mediator must have access and possess the required seniority and gravitas he or she must be humble enough to step back and support the lead mediation rather than undermine it.

Mediation has become a crowded field and there are many risks to having too many cooks in the kitchen. And this is where the principle of partnership is critical. The UN, AU and REC must develop a practice of developing joint analysis and
strategies for approaching the political resolution of conflict and guiding the selection of mediators and the process of mediation so all organisations’ comparative advantage can be maximised.

I believe the UN and AU now understand the need to focus more strategically on harmonizing our approaches to conflict prevention and mediation through building stronger regional-global partnerships in collaboration with member states, civil society and individual practitioners.

It is my wish that your discussions over the coming two days will enrich your collective knowledge of effective practices on which you can build a sensible and achievable capability within the AU Commission which will ultimately contribute effectively in achieving durable political solutions to conflict in Africa.

My Office and the wider UN system are prepared to partner the AU Commission in any way that we can to ensure mediation is strengthened to meet the current challenges on the continent.