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Diplomacy and Peace-Building

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DIPLOMACY AND PEACE-BUILDING ¹

Dame Margaret Anstee, Undersecretary General, United Nations (retired).

Thank you very much. I want to echo the gratitude that has been expressed by earlier speakers for being invited to this important meeting, this important conference. I have to say that, in my case, I feel myself to be doubly overwhelmed. I think Frank Davidson likes to spring surprises on people and it was only last night that he informed me that this was going to be the Nakagawa Memorial Lecture and I was immediately very concerned as to whether the modest contribution I am about to make would really be a suitable tribute to his memory. But the second reason I am overwhelmed is because although during my very long career with the United Nations, I think I lived in about 15 countries and I once calculated that I had visited 130 on official missions, I was never really involved in the Palestine-Israel issue, so I am very far from being an expert on that. So, as a result of that, I hope that you will bear with me if I adopt a rather more general approach to this subject that I've been given of "Diplomacy and Peace-building". I will try, however, to draw some conclusions which might be applicable to the situation which we are discussing, though I must say with all modesty, because I really don't know enough about the details of the subject.

First of all, I wanted to talk about the evolution of peacekeeping and the concept of peace-building in the UN. Of course as we heard from earlier this morning, the Middle East problem goes back to the very early days of the United Nations. In fact, Frank, you mentioned the late Sir Robert Jackson, who was at that point the Senior Assistant Secretary General to Secretary General Trygve Lie, which was the most senior position below the Secretary General in those days, and his untimely departure from the UN was caused by a disagreement with Secretary General Trygve Lie over what was supposed to be the solution at that point over Israel and Palestine because he predicted that it was going to lead to conflict over many, many years- and unfortunately, he was right. But then, he was always right, wasn't he?

And of course some of the earliest peacekeeping missions were in the Middle East. Last year, of course, everyone was enormously shocked when there was this terrible attack on the UN in Iraq in August and the death of Sergio Vieira de Mello. But in actual fact, when one looks back, Count Bernadotte, who one might have thought was perhaps he wasn't called a special representative of the Secretary General, he was a Special Envoy, but he was assassinated in 1948. So, there is a long tradition in that regard.

Diplomacy has always played a large part in the resolution of conflicts. But I think that one of the interesting things that not everybody is aware of because it has become such a common term in the United Nations, peacekeeping, does not appear anywhere in the United Nations Charter. It was something that during the times of Hammarskjöld and under the inspired leadership of people like Ralph Bunche, and Brian Urquhart, which was gradually evolved. And over the years, I don't want to go into all of the history, there has been a gradual evolution into the present multi-dimensional form that peacekeeping takes and to the concept of peace building. During the cold war, of course, the number and the scope of peacekeeping missions were extremely limited because of the problems in the Security Council use of the veto, and so forth. Also, a main characteristic of those conflicts the UN was dealing with at that time with the exception of the first round in the Congo was that they were conflicts between states- interstate conflicts. They were also chiefly military in nature, usually involved in observing and monitoring cease-fires and the implementation of peace agreements.

Then you had the end of the Cold War and there was this great euphoria that now the Security Council was going to work better, there weren't going to be so many vetoes, and there was an explosion of peacekeeping missions being approved. There were excessive expectations of what it was reasonable to assume could be done. Also, there was a difference which made the whole operation more complex in that most of the conflicts dealt with since the end of the Cold War have been intra-state conflicts, that is to say, dealing with civil conflicts. And of course, the whole of the peacekeeping operations have widened in scope. Formerly, I suppose you could say that Diplomacy usually preceded peacekeeping operations. It was involved very much in the negotiation of the peace agreement or the cease-fires on which the missions were based. But now I would say that diplomacy is an integral part of the whole process. That is why of course now in almost every case of these missions, there is a political or diplomatic head of the mission who is called the SRSG, Special Representative of the Secretary General, who has command over all of the aspects of the peace-keeping mission including the military components- That was the job that I had in Angola.

One of the first extra dimensions that was added to the peacekeeping process was the carrying out of elections. In the beginning of the 90's - it was a big mistake - they were seen as the end of the process. When I went to Angola, our mission was supposed to leave the day after the elections. The elections were enormously successful, but it was a case of the operation being successful and the patient dying, because very shortly after the side that lost under Savimbi decided to resort to bullets rather than ballets. And that was a problem of lack of commitment

and lack of funds on the part of the international community and of course lack of commitment to democracy within the country itself.

I think it's a cliché to say that "peace is more than the absence of war", but it is certainly very true. And what we see now with our peace keeping operations is that the basic purpose must be to assist the country and its people with which we are dealing to develop conditions that are conducive to sustainable peace. People talk a lot nowadays about sustainable development, but I think we should also talk about sustainable peace, which involves that other concept as well. What we have to do is try to convince people who have known nothing but war and have always taken up arms, that they have a stake in peace and that there is a tangible peace dividend, that it is going to be better to live in peace, their lives will be better than continuing in warfare. There are two key principles that usually apply. The first one is that force must be the last resort, so that you must try to reach political rather than military solutions - that involves both diplomacy and peace-building. And to do that you have to work through a mixture of built-in incentives and deterrents to the parties to the conflict.

The second key principle is, of course, that peace is homegrown. So, It's no use just trying to impose this peace, it has to be the local people and the local communities must be involved and convinced that this is the right way to go.

So against that background, what do we mean by peace-building? Well, it's self-evident, I think, that each case with which we have to deal with a conflict issue is unique, the history, the military, the political features, the culture, everything is particular to that specific situation.

So, again, I come back, I'm sorry to repeat this, but I think it is so important, the process must be homegrown. That means that there must be political will and commitment on the part of the main players and also public pressure within their constituencies of these countries for peace so as to persuade their leaders in that direction.

But although I say that each conflict is unique, there are some general principles which we find from the experience - especially over the 90's when there were some successes and also some failures, but lessons have, unusually, been learned. So I would like just to mention some of these general principles, some of them of course are just absolutely self-evident. The first one I would mention is that you must have a firm agreement between the parties to the conflict. And that of course is where diplomacy comes in. And hopefully, as a result of all of those actions, you will

have not only a peace agreement, but a plan of action or a strategy that has been based on a thorough analysis of the situation and also of course a very careful negotiation, probably over a long period of time.

The second thing that comes to mind when one is talking of peace-building is that does involve action on many different fronts at once, and often as I said, simultaneous action. The political and diplomatic front is very important of course. But so is the military because of the security aspects, the military and the police. Then there is the humanitarian aspect, which usually there are awful humanitarian disasters that are related to the conflict. Then, too, you have to start work on the economic and social aspects in order to try to bring about a situation of normality. And last, but not least, the importance of institution building.

Security, of course, is a major concern, something that has to be dealt with. But when I use the word security, I use it not only in the narrow or the military sense, but also in the wider concept and context of what we call human security. Now, of course there are a lot of very military related activities that have to be taken. One the things we are most concerned with in peacekeeping operations is what we call DDR, which is Disarmament, Demobilization, and Rehabilitation. And often in very many characteristic conflicts, the formation of joint armed forces. Most of that is military, but if you think about DDR, the "R" bit is not. That is related to providing jobs. Because if you don't provide jobs and training for the people who have been fighting all along, then you will not bring and end to violence and you will not have proper security. Then, of course, there is the question of law and order. And there, of course, we are often involved in trying to bring about the formation of a neutral police force (we're seeing some of the difficulties of that nowadays in Iraq).

But if we come now to the case of Palestine and Israel, the process is obviously infinitely more complicated. I have been talking about general things we are trying to do in many of these other countries. How can you stop the brutal round of violence, retaliation, and revenge? Another critical point of peace building is the development of democratic principles and institutions. You have to develop respect for human rights, an equitable justice system, free and fair elections are part and parcel of this, though as I said earlier they are not necessarily the end of the problem, sometimes they can be the beginning of the problem. But there must be fair representation and acceptance of different cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds in all aspects of civil life. Again, important is this question of bringing about economic and social programs, job creation, so that you have that peace dividend in a very tangible form of improved living conditions for

the people that have been at war. And the last point that I want to make under this heading is the need to involve, it's self evident from what I was saying before, the need to involve civil society- where it exists. (It doesn't always exist. (In Angola, there was no civil society when I went there in 1992. It's very encouraging now to find that there are all sorts of civil organizations that have grown up. So where it doesn't exist, you have to try to encourage it to do so. Basically, what you're trying to do is build up a strategy from the ground involving the local communities.

Now, the last section that I would like to deal with is some important elements of the process that when I was thinking about what I was going to say I thought I could relate to the Palestine-Israel situation. The first element that I think is absolutely crucial, and obvious, but it doesn't always happen, is the need to define and address the sources of the conflict. It's self evident, as I say, but it is much more difficult than it seems, because usually in these conflicts, the causes are extremely complex. But you can usually be fairly certain that a large component is in general terms economic and social in nature. I think something that is common to most of these conflicts is the problem of marginalization: Marginalization in the sense of lack of access to resources; marginalization in the sense of lack of access to participatory power.

Land is very often a factor, particularly where there are high population crèches. Land, for instance, was a major factor in the conflict in El Salvador, It was not easy, but easier to resolve than the case that we are discussing. And sometimes, of course, the problem, as in Angola, was not lack of land or lack of riches, it was excessive resources, so therefore the struggle was for those who felt left they were being left out of that to achieve power and have access to the resources. And of course, while you have some of these basic concerns which often affect the everyday lives of people, they are overlaid in most cases with elements related to culture, religion, to ethnicity, and so forth. If we look at Palestine and Israel, well, land as we heard this morning, is obviously a central issue. But, I think this came out of what Mr. Sabbagh was saying, it's not, if I can put it in rather colloquial terms, "any old land", you have not only the quantity of land, as he was talking about, but also all of the historical and the traditional claims and all of this linked to religion and the sacred nature of many of these sites.

There is also a word I want to inject now, and I don't think it's been mentioned before, but it's water. Water is one of the major sources of conflict there. And I was very glad to find last night that we have a number of very distinguished water experts here, so I hope that they will be able to contribute something on that subject.

I have six points under these elements. The second point is leaders. And leaders, I don't know whether this is a very controversial remark to make, but they are often the stumbling block to sustainable peace – even when the majority of the local population is just longing for peace. That's especially the case, I think, when there are personal animosities between the leaders, or whether there is a desire for power at all costs. I will go back to Angola. Someone rather incautiously asked me during the coffee break what I thought of Savimbi, I will spare you that, but he had a tremendous lust for power at any cost and would stop at nothing. There also was a tremendous animosity between him and the president of Angola, who was not an angel. They were not angels, either of them, there are never any angels in this process, but some are more angelic than others. I think it's interesting, Angola is considered one of the great failures of the UN, of course when I was there we didn't have the right mandate or the right resources, later we had missions that did – they still didn't succeed, and it's interesting to see that peace has only come to Angola when Savimbi disappeared from the scene. You might say the same about Milosevic in the Yugoslav context. And if you look at Cyprus, you find that a long-standing leader Denktash, the Turkish Cypriot leader is still very much an opponent any solution to that particular problem.

So that brings me to a question, to which I have no answer, of “Can there be a solution while Arafat and Sharon remain in power? I was encouraged this morning when Professor Sawoski said that there is now a new generation coming up. That is the sort of change you need in these long-standing situations is to have a new generation which will bring a different perception to bear on the situation.

My third point is on interlocutors and mediators. In most of these places, the people have been at one another's throats for many generations, they need someone from outside, a neighbor, a friend to come and help. And it works best if that outside party has influence. But acceptability, of course, is also important. It is quite obvious, to everybody, that the only country that is likely to have influence with Israel is the US. And of course, we have the American road map, which I'm not sure if it's run into a complete dead end, but it certainly seems to be stuck in some mire at the present time. The problem there, of course, is the fact that this country is so acceptable to Israel immediately arouses suspicions on the Palestinian side. Europe is also showing now a great interest in resolving the situation, because people do realize it is not just a problem between Palestine and Israel, but rather a problem with enormous repercussions throughout the whole area. Then there is the UN. The United Nations, of course, has been involved in one way or another all along since 1948. And now of course, there are some people who are advocating a

larger involvement, especially if a 2-state, rather than a 1-state solution is adopted. People have even been talking about some form of trusteeship for a period if there was a state for Palestine. But, would the Security Council buy that? Would the General Assembly buy that? Perhaps not, I mean, this is a very complicated mode. And then there are other players coming onto the scene - there is something called the Middle East Initiative Forum.

My fourth point relates to the regional context and in nearly all these problems nowadays is important especially in the shrinking world. It is very important, for instance, in all of the things that we are seeing happen in Africa, in the Congos. Here, one would say, that it is especially important in the Middle East. A very important element in all of this is the attitude and the involvement of other allied states. Also, the problem of Islamic Fundamentalism and the impact of the whole Iraq conflict and the interpretations that are given to that.

My fifth point is the role for diplomacy. Obviously, as the previous speaker said, the role for diplomacy is absolutely immense. But, I would stress here the need for quiet and secret diplomacy. The Norwegians managed this in 1993, quite spectacularly - it was quite amazing what they managed to do - that culminated in the Oslo Accords, of course they have not been fully implemented. But I would say that quiet and secret diplomacy will be even more difficult today because we live in a world that has a total obsession with transparency. I think transparency is a good thing, but sometimes it can be very dangerous, especially if it leads to judgment and speculation by the media. And the judgments of the media then preempt logical discussions. They also provide a forum for leaders of different sides of a conflict to strike public posturings and attitudes that make conciliation and compromise extremely difficult, and as Mr. Sabbagh said, there must be compromise. If you don't have compromise, you are never going to have a solution. I remember when I was desperately trying to get a ceasefire after the war had erupted again in Angola and the first meeting when I had finally managed to get everybody together, we reached an agreement. After each meeting, these meetings are secret, we will work out a joint communiqué, agreed on by everybody here, we will issue that communiqué, and nobody will say anything to the press. Everybody agreed. After the first meeting I went outside and went downstairs in the hotel where we were staying, and there were both sides, briefing different groups of the press. So, its very hard to win on this, but I think that with the kind of proposal that we are now discussing, it is important to try.

My last point is on institution building, And that, I think is particularly, and I think Mr. Sabbagh will agree, I'm treading on dangerous ground here, important, it seems to me, for Palestine to

have this institution building because there might be a danger of creating a failed state there, which would be an absolute disaster. But, I think that would depend very much on what kind of solution eventually, as one hopes, was arrived at. If it was a 1-state solution, it would obviously, in my mind, be difficult as to how you develop Palestinian human and civil rights if they were still under Israeli rule.

My conclusions, those were the points that I had wanted to bring to you. I'm afraid that I may have posed more questions than I have answered. I hope I haven't appeared negative. I have to say that if you have worked 41 years for the United Nations and afterwards continue to work voluntarily for, you must be an optimist, or maybe just stupid, I don't know. But, I think the main conclusions I want to leave you with is this: That every practical proposal that can ease tensions, that can build confidence, and address some of the causes of the conflict is very welcome grist to the mill. But, it is essential that such proposals, in order to be successful, must be developed as part of a wider, integrated approach and with a full cognizance and understanding of the broader issues. In other words, this Land for Peace proposal could be a very important part in the whole peace-building process, in the way that I have tried in very few words to describe it. But there are no magic solutions, as we know. But I think that this conference is extremely important because it brings all of the relevant aspects together, and I am terribly impressed. Our missions now are always multi-dimensional, but I think that this is very much a multi-dimensional conference. So, I hope that at the end of this we will have some useful, specific conclusions to make and I hope that I have helped in the process and not discouraged it. Thank You.

Notes and References:

1. Transcription of the Nakagawa Memorial Lecture given at the 1st Annual Conference of the Center for Macro Projects and Diplomacy at Roger Williams University on April 15, 2004