

Summary Report

Informal High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on “The Role of Member States in Mediation”

New York, 23 May 2012

Introduction

This report summarizes the discussion at an informal high-level meeting organized by the President of the General Assembly on 23 May 2012. The full-day event consisted of two sessions: During the morning session on the “*Role of Member States in Mediation*”, H.E. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly, and H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, delivered the opening remarks, which were followed by speeches from senior representatives from Member States.

The afternoon session consisted of a panel discussion on “*The Challenge of Coherence, Coordination and Complementarity among Various Actors in Mediation Processes*”. Moderated by Dr. Edward C. Luck, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General, the panel included H.E. Mr. Erkki Tuomioja, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland; H.E. Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey; H.E. Mr. Youssef Amrani, Minister Delegate for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Morocco; and Mr. B. Lynn Pascoe, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. Panel presentations were followed by an interactive session with Member States and civil society organizations.

The value of mediation

Participants underscored the historic significance of General Assembly resolution 65/283, and highlighted the increased use of mediation as an effective and flexible means for conflict prevention and resolution in the spirit of Chapter VI of the UN Charter. Also emphasized was the significance of the forthcoming United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation.

The recent strengthening of the UN mediation capacities, especially the establishment of a Mediation Support Unit (MSU) in the Department of Political Affairs, was widely commended. While Member States noted the important progress made by the UN in supporting mediation efforts, some current challenges were highlighted. Particular reference was made to the lack of predictable and secure funding for mediation processes, and the need to develop the next generation of UN mediators.

Key elements of mediation

With the view of contributing to the development of the Guidance, participants highlighted some key elements for effective mediation. These included the requirement for strong leadership and coordinated action; the need to keep a fine balance between principles and vision; the mediator’s need to have good knowledge of the conflict, the history and the cultural values; and the requirement to focus on sustainability and inclusiveness. There was agreement that while some degree of confidentiality is needed in mediation efforts, transparency towards the parties and the public is of paramount importance. A sustainable process, it was noted, will only be possible if it has been genuinely inclusive.

Mediation processes are recognized to have become increasingly complex and thus require professional teams, political engagement as well as adequate and timely resources. Mediation is a tool to be used throughout the conflict cycle, not only during peacemaking, but also during the highly volatile and sensitive implementation phase of agreements.

Member States underlined their commitment to support mediation efforts in a manner that is impartial, enjoys the consent of the parties to the dispute or conflict, and respects national sovereignty as well as the principles of international law. The Security Council, some suggested, should further support and utilize mediation in its work.

Coherence and complementarity

Member States stressed the need for the international community to speak with one voice and rally behind a common objective and a single mediator to avoid competition among mediators and forum shopping. The United Nations brings legitimacy to the mediation process and should play a coordinating role among partners even though it may not necessarily be in the lead. Several participants commended the progress already made in building coherence among the UN, regional organizations, Member States as well as civil society partners. Moreover, the Guidance for Effective Mediation is expected to provide some further parameters to enhance coordination and coherence among mediation actors.

Successful practices of knowledge sharing among partners, including civil society, academia, national authorities and other actors, include the experiences of National Mediation Coordination Groups. At the international level, International Contact Groups have proven to be an effective forum for coordination.

Mediation partners

Member States are the most active actors in mediation and they are crucial in supporting mediation processes. Besides their multilateral engagements through the UN and regional arrangements, States have an important role to play as donors and, in some cases, as neighboring countries.

Turkey announced its proposal for a United Nations Mediation Centre in Istanbul and that it would continue to host the Istanbul Mediation Conference on an annual basis. Morocco and Spain announced a joint initiative for the promotion of mediation in the Mediterranean region. Together with Saudi Arabia and Spain, Austria has founded the International King Abdullah Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue in Vienna to provide a permanent platform for exchange and dialogue among the major religious communities. Qatar underlined the importance to consolidate the partnerships and capabilities between the UN and regional and sub-regional organizations. Finland suggested the establishment of national coordination groups that would bring together all the main actors in a country.

Participants highlighted the role and the value added that regional organizations bring to mediation processes in their regions. Regional organizations should strengthen their mediation capacities.

Several participants also stressed the need to involve civil society organizations in mediation and conflict prevention efforts and to ensure the local and national ownership of those

processes. Civil society organizations, especially at the local level, can bring expertise and innovative approaches as well as entry points which may be difficult to find for States or intergovernmental organizations. Interreligious and cultural dialogue represents an untapped potential that needs to be further explored. Other actors such as youth, women and grass-root organizations need to be engaged in a given environment. Through effective networking and collaboration, civil society organizations and other actors can play an important role in early warning as well as in the implementation phase of a peace agreement.

Women's Participation in Peace Processes

Participants noted the important role played by women in peacemaking and the need to ensure adequate representation of women in peace processes. Although in many countries women have been agents for change, they have not been systematically included at the negotiation tables in formal peace processes. The UN Secretary-General has appointed a female facilitator in Malawi and the organization is making every effort to include women as senior UN representatives in peace processes.

However, more systematic consultations with women's civil society organizations and the consistent inclusion of women in negotiating teams are areas of potential improvement. In this regard, Finland is exploring a partnership with the Department of Political Affairs on "Gender and mediation for mediators and mediation teams".

Capacity-building

Member States reiterated their support for capacity-building and the need to ensure a pool of qualified, professional and dedicated personnel to support mediation process. They also stressed the need to provide the Department of Political Affairs, and the UN system, with sufficient financial and human resources to fulfill its mandate and to strengthen its collective ability to prevent and resolve conflicts. MSU was called on to assist in building the mediation and conflict prevention capacity of other international, regional and subregional organization as well as of Member States.

Conclusion

Participants agreed that General Assembly resolution 65/283 illustrated the way forward in the field of mediation. It was repeatedly noted that, as a cost-effective and non-coercive instrument for the peaceful resolution of disputes and conflict, mediation requires greater and sustained attention and support. Member States confirmed their willingness to continue the efforts to strengthen the role of mediation and made some proposals in this regard. It was also noted that other possible tools and mechanisms should be explored to better address the challenges for successful mediation. Among them, the role of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations could be strengthened as a mediation tool of the international community.

The discussions proved that the United Nations has come a long way in recognizing the potential of mediation. Throughout the high-level meeting, there was also considerable convergence on the key elements of effective mediation. Clearly emphasized was the centrality of the unity of effort, at the international and regional level, for effective mediation.