The 13th session of the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development

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Implementation of the mandate and programme of work –
Consideration of thematic studies
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Peace and security and the right to development

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Unofficial transcript of the oral statement by Mr. Michael Collins,
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We were invited to comment on the draft study, and the first thing that I did was to bring up the original language, essentially bring up the original Declaration and compare these two things side by side in a way. Obviously, there's a lot of elements from the study that is taken directly from the Declaration, and there's a lot of stuff in the Declaration that obviously couldn't fit. But it struck me very quickly the difference in language between the two. It struck me that the older version, Declaration in 1986, was in many ways more inspirational in a sense, and perhaps because we were going into that phase of modern globalization and excitement about all of the opportunity that lay ahead. Obviously now we're coming off the back of that, along with all the disappointment that posed.

Forgive me for making light of a very serious circumstance, but the best analogy that I have found for those of you who may have children, you may relate to this when we have our first child and they're very young, we're trying to explain how the world works. You know, we say something like, "Oh, darling, you know, that pointy stick that you have, you know, that might hurt someone else, you need to be careful with it, okay?" Of course, by the time your child gets older or alternatively, you're onto your third child, your immediate response when you see that is "put that stick down". So those two differences really strike me as the same differences that we see between the original Declaration and the study that we see today.

When I say the study, I'm not picking on the study per se, but broadly the UN language as well and how that's changed over time, similar to parenthood. I'm not really too sure which of these two approaches works best. I mean, fundamentally, both of those have failed in a sense, right? It also depends on what you look at. As we know, a number of development metrics have actually improved significantly around the world, right? Healthy life expectancy, education, connectivity, etc. But obviously from a conflict perspective, things have also deteriorated very significantly as well. The layout of that is, of course, the militarization component, which features quite intensively in the study as well.

The other sort of note of caution that I'd like to raise there, maybe using another analogy, is, you know, militarization really is in many ways a logical response to threat, right? In terms of trends, we've seen this reduction in overall militarization around the world for 10, 15, almost 20 years now. That's changed over the last couple of years. But that increase in violence is something that we have seen grow progressively over time. This is really a response to that increasing level of conflict that we have seen. The analogy essentially is that when we feel a threat, we feel the need to get a gun, and maybe keep a gun in our bedside table. The challenge with militarization is that it's very insidious because whereas one makes the decision to get a gun, getting rid of that gun becomes a lot more complicated. If we look at it through the data, demilitarization is exceedingly rarer than militarization in many ways.

Part of that is also due to the fact that as a society, we're also becoming a lot worse at being able to resolve conflict. If you look at numbers across a whole set of streams, our ability to be able to generate peace agreements has deteriorated significantly, from 25% of all conflicts resolved by peace agreement in the 1980s, essentially when this Declaration was formed, to 5% today. Overall conflicts ending resoundingly went down from 50% to 10%. As a consequence of all of that, and also this increase in internationalized conflicts that we're seeing around the world, we're seeing this massive latent conflict in many ways. We are seeing unresolved conflict around the world, which then makes it significantly more difficult for Member States to take on decisions related to demilitarization. I think that that's going to be a core challenge there.

Perhaps reflecting some of the comments from Dr. Aziz as it pertains to peace and development. Yes, I think in that sense, we very much agree as well. We often talk about how peaceful or conflict, I should say, impacts development. Alternatively, how the right to development and development is necessary for peace. From the data perspective, probably we could speak about some of the underlying drivers here, more related to terms such as equitable distribution of resources, acceptance of the rights of others, sound business environment, just to name some of these underlying aspects. The benefit of framing things in those terms, such as sound business environment or acceptance of the rights of others rather than peace and conflict, is that it just allows that slightly more programmatic and flexible approach from an individual Member State or from a nation as well. And it allows you to be able to show how you're working towards both of these things. You're working towards development, and you're working towards peace as well.

In terms of immediate opportunities, I think they were very well identified by Ms. Da Silva. If we look at it from a data perspective and look at some of these underlying drivers of both peace and development, low levels of corruption, that indicator, that aspect has deteriorated significantly over recent years. Well-functioning government, particularly as it pertains to openness and transparency, has deteriorated significantly as well, as have press freedoms around the world, as have more broadly good relations with neighbours around the world as well. These are some of those core factors that either the Expert Mechanism, alternatively the UN and alternatively individual Member States can focus on to be able to generate improvements in peace and development. A number of these are actually included in the study, which is fantastic to see.

Before I get more contentious, just to reassure the audience that at least as it pertains to our research, all of the fundamentals are there. All of the stuff that we think contribute to improvements in peacefulness and reduction in conflict over time kind of does. It does. The challenge we see as it pertains to the UN perhaps is that the UN has built a normative house that it can't maintain in many ways. One of the challenges that we're just with this normativity, we're really not offering the flexibility the Member States require. I noted in the earlier conversation just about AI, how some conversations from Member States were distinctly in relation to minority communities, indigenous rights, whereas other States, for example, would focus a lot more on issues related to what we talked about land regulation, we talked about sound business environment and aspects related to growth as well. It just shows how you can have some of these underlying messages or underlying joint priorities, such as the acceptance of the rights of others, but you have very different ways of being able to get there. That's something that perhaps the study should also consider, perhaps harking back to this idea of going back to some of that older language. One of the noticeable things in that older language was the use of "may" rather than "must". So, I thought that that was quite interesting as well.

Lastly, and closing on my end, perhaps being able to identify in the study as well, mediation as a core value added not only of the UN, but of course, of every individual Member State. We see that especially today with the rise of what we call the middle powers and this increasing mediation capacity. We think that that has fantastic value added. We definitely think that it's something that can and should be incorporated in the study, and more broadly as well. We think that the UN has the bona

fides to be able to regain its respect in many ways, particularly with regards to this item, with the added benefit that it adds that neutral tone, which then provides that flexibility that Member States need to be able to operate and make progress on these things.

Thank you.

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