

PAM 10th Plenary Session

Tirana, Albania, 18 February 2016

Statement by H.E. Mr. Michael Moller, Director-General of the United Nations Office in Geneva and Secretary General of the Conference on Disarmament

Mr. Speaker,
Mr. Prime Minister,
Esteemed Presidents,
Mr. Secretary General,
Honourable Members of Parliaments,
Colleagues, Ladies and Gentleman, Dear Friends,

I am very pleased to be here in Tirana at the 10th Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. Thank you very much to our generous hosts. Strengthening the collaboration between the United Nations and Parliaments worldwide is one of my objectives in Geneva, where we are working closely with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The presence of so many of my colleagues here today from different parts of the UN System shows that this is indeed a priority across the entire organization, (in line with the strong words by Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in his message (The Secretary-General has been approached for a video-message).

This gathering is much more than the 10th anniversary session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, an important event in its own right. But it comes at a time when the region is facing a number of serious challenges. Ten years ago, at the first session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, most people associated the Mediterranean with a vibrant trade and an economic boom, unparalleled cultural diversity and beautiful sunny beaches. Today, we are reminded of more than 7,000 migrants who lost their lives trying to cross the Mediterranean in just the last two years, accounting for around 70% of global migrant deaths.

We think of political and economic instability from Southern Europe to Northern Africa. We think of the emergence of persistent armed conflicts from Libya to Syria. And when we look at the reality, we also have to admit that the Mediterranean highlights the difficulties of governance at all levels, also faced by other regions, to fully address these complex challenges. Our shared responsibility for sustainable policies for your region has been ignored for too long. This meeting is an opportunity to help turn the tide.

At the beginning of the Arab Spring, when economies in Europe were in crisis and people across the southern Mediterranean challenged their authoritarian regimes, many expressed the view that we had arrived at a fork in the road.

Instead of responding to the interconnected dynamics and challenges that led to the uprising, many leaders and governments instead looked inward, each trying to isolate their country, community or region from problems elsewhere. Today, it is apparent that we took the wrong turn. Fora like the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean have the potential to help strengthen integration and democratic processes. Your words and actions, honourable Members of Parliaments, have an important impact on your constituencies.

Governance across the Mediterranean is too fragmented to come to terms with the complex dynamics across your region. Your efforts and engagement to stabilize the region are essential and

needed more than ever.

As the region went down the path of destabilization, a lot of its strengths turned into weaknesses. The tremendous religious, cultural and geographic diversity, a main driver of economic growth in many Mediterranean countries, has become a source of division. Too many have used religious and other identities to mobilize one group against another in the quest for power.

Similarly, in a region where almost 60% of the population is under the age of 30, this increasingly educated part of society holds great potential for social and economic progress. Yet, young people have lost trust in institutions and leaders, and they are losing hope that they can change their situation, a sentiment reinforced by some of the highest youth-unemployment rates worldwide.

All of these trends have culminated in a situation, where intercultural exchange programs and projects to enhance labour mobility across the region are disappearing in the shadow of a migrant and refugee chaos of unprecedented scale. But while the situation might seem to be close to desperation, there is potential in each of the challenges that the Mediterranean region faces.

Having witnessed much suffering, we have also seen the Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 awarded to a group from your region that, together with the parliamentarians who heeded their calls, helped to sustain a beacon of hope in Tunisia. A good example of how we can collectively reshape weaknesses into strengths if we return to the path of collaboration and integration.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted at the UN General Assembly last September, provides the frame for such an integrated approach. The seventeen goals acknowledge that issues such as rising income inequality, to give just one example, need to be addressed everywhere, in developing and developed countries. This is another way in which our view of the Mediterranean sea, which was often seen as the physical boundary between the global North and South, has changed.

Many of the UN entities that will be helping to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are located in Geneva – the operational hub of the international system. And Geneva is also host to many NGOs, important business players, key academic institutions and think tank.

In an ongoing mapping that my office is conducting, more than 250 organizations across Geneva have highlighted their expertise on the different Sustainable Development Goals.

All of these actors are³ needed for multi-stakeholder partnership to address the fragmented playing field that underlies the challenges in the Mediterranean region and beyond.

I am firmly committed to practice what I preach and we are working to further improve collaboration across International Geneva. This unique network of expertise is at the disposal of all of you to support integration and progress in the Mediterranean region.

To achieve this, we need to transition from emergency and short-term responses to prevention. We are strengthening our mediation capacities to further support processes such as the talks on Libya, Syria, Yemen and Georgia, for example. And the Human Rights Council will continue to engage in favour of the prevention of human rights violations which are often the first warning signs of

impending conflict. Yet, even horrific television images of humanitarian crises and detailed listings of human rights violations unfortunately do not always generate the necessary political will for meditation to succeed.

Another example where political will is lacking is disarmament, which is equally critical as preventive measures. As we see every day the more weapons there are, the more likely they are to fall into the hands of actors that act outside international law. But I would go even further: with technologically advanced weapons, killer robots, for example, will soon decide who lives or dies.

I do not want to live in a world where decisions about life or death are left to robots. Yet, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva has not made any progress for almost 20 years now. This must change, and as parliamentarians, I urge you to encourage your country's leaders to look at the broader picture.

Your constituencies will feel a much greater positive impact if money is invested into development than into arms. We have to see prevention as a central objective of the Sustainable Development Goals.

I am very pleased that in these efforts, we can rely on the close collaboration with Secretary General Piazzini and the very active participation of the Mission of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean in Geneva.

Parliamentarians have a very important part to play in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. You are the crucial link between international agreements, national decisions and local constituencies. As such, each of you can act to ensure a realignment of strategies across the Mediterranean region and beyond, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals - our collective road map for the next many years.

As policy makers you can demand that Ministries collaborate horizontally across issues and even across borders. This is crucial to break down the silos at the national level, where there is not enough cooperation and communication between line-Ministries, and at the international level which mirrors national structures. A stronger focus on the “whole of government” approach is needed more than ever to implement Sustainable Development Goals successfully.

You can increase accountability by promoting transparency and the rule of law, thus restoring the trust that the people, in particular young people, have lost in governance structures. And through your influence on the budget allocation, you have the choice to invest in prevention – even if the benefits of this may only become apparent beyond electoral cycles.

Ultimately, international organizations and particularly the United Nations are at your service and that of your constituencies.

We are there to support you. And to that end, we must become better at opening up to include as many stakeholders as possible in our operational and decision-making procedures at the United Nations. This is why I hope to see an even stronger role of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean across the work that is done in Geneva on human rights, migration and refugees, disarmament, as well as trade facilitation, to mention but a few areas.

International Geneva is closely connected to the developments in the Mediterranean region. We need to shoulder our shared responsibility to make sure that the Mediterranean again stands for

unity in diversity and progress through collaboration. This gathering is a promising opportunity and I look forward to continuing and deepening our excellent cooperation.

Thank you very much.