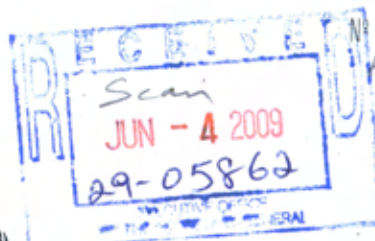


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Date:	4 June 2009	Pages:	2 + 2
Subject:	<i>Annual high-level Tripartite meeting between the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and partner organizations</i>		

1. On 3 June 2009, UNOG hosted the regular, annual high-level Tripartite meeting between the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The theme of the meeting was the prevention of conflict through the strengthening of democratic institutions (*joint communiqué attached*). The Secretary-General's Special Representatives for Kosovo and Georgia, together with representatives of DPA, OHCHR, UNECE, UNDP, UNHCR, UNIDIR and UNITAR were part of the United Nations delegation, headed by UNOG.

2. Mr. Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, Secretary General of the OSCE, and Ms Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, both noted how the events of recent years in Europe had shown that there was **no such thing as a "frozen conflict"**. While action to enhance democratic governance was increasingly used as an essential tool for the prevention of conflict, the **consolidation of genuine democracy took time and required long-lasting commitment** from all concerned. International organizations therefore needed to remain vigilant and monitor fragile situations.

3. The discussions highlighted that well-functioning, inclusive democratic institutions and processes could play a central part in **preventing armed conflict**. International and regional organizations had been successful in supporting the establishment of **democratic structures, including electoral processes, multiparty systems and constitutional protections for minorities**. However, stronger efforts were now needed to **build a collective democratic mindset which favoured compromise and accommodation of differences over confrontation**. The need for a vibrant civil society was underlined, together with the importance of education to enable citizens to take active part.

4. Several participants expressed concern that the value of democracy and its ability to deliver concrete benefits was sometimes questioned. It was noted, in particular, that the **current economic crisis could lead to a curtailing of democratic processes**, which was worrying at a time when accentuated social differences could lead to instability. It was **important in this regard to ensure that democracy not be reduced to its more mechanical aspects** but that the fundamental principles of power-sharing, justice and respect for differences that underlie it be implemented in practice.

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5. While it was agreed that an inclusive democracy provided mechanisms for the prevention of internal conflict by allowing political dialogue, some participants were of the opinion that for some countries this did not automatically reduce the likelihood of inter-State or regional conflicts. There was in certain instances an apparent contradiction between a capacity for "internal democracy" and an "undemocratic external behaviour", as several mature or new democracies were parties to ongoing conflicts.
6. The importance of free, fair and periodic elections was underscored, as was the role of international organizations in election assistance and observation. Several participants, however, cautioned against a "one-size fits-all" approach and saw a need for greater attention to fostering democratic behaviour outside of electoral periods as well. Elections held too soon after the end of conflict could entrench rather than heal divisions and very frequent voting could destabilize certain societies.
7. On the other hand, proportional representation, parliamentary systems and decentralization of authority were cited as helpful elements to build confidence, instil a sense of security in all citizens and avert conflict. The critical role of mechanisms and procedures that enabled meaningful participation of minorities was also stressed throughout the debates. A number of participants, however, also referred to the responsibility of minorities to avail themselves of the mechanisms put in place rather than "opt out" of the political processes.
8. At a time of concern regarding the difficulty for international and regional organizations to assist in resolving long-standing disputes or prevent the flare up of latent conflicts, the usefulness of the Tripartite meeting in providing an opportunity for exchange of information on activities, lessons learnt and best practices was reiterated by all.



**Annual High-level Tripartite meeting between the Council of Europe,
the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe,
the United Nations and partner organizations**

Joint Communiqué

1. High-level representatives of the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations met on 3 June 2009 in Geneva for their annual consultations in the "Tripartite-Plus" format under the theme "Preventing conflicts through the strengthening of democratic institutions: enhancing democratic governance and institutions to reconcile interests and promote non-violent resolution of conflict".¹
2. Recalling the principles of the United Nations Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the Statute of the Council of Europe, the participants reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening security, stability, human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe through practical measures and by nurturing a culture of conflict prevention.
3. *Participants* stated their determination to take specific steps towards reinforcing their cooperation and coordination of activities, including through exchange of information, to address sources of tension and reduce the impact of risk factors. They underscored the paramount importance of strengthening capacity at all levels for preventive diplomacy, the peaceful settlement of disputes and peacebuilding.
4. *Participants* called on Governments to ratify and comply with international and regional legal instruments relevant to the prevention of armed conflict and observed the need to translate normative commitments at global and regional levels into transparent legislation and effective institutions at the national level.
5. *Participants* noted the value of a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention and democratization, and called for increased efforts to realize security and long-term stability through, inter alia, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Expressing concern at the current economic and financial crisis, they reiterated that enhanced democratic governance would help enable the most vulnerable countries to mitigate the impact of the crisis.
6. *Participants* considered the links between political or social exclusion and conflict. They stressed their conviction that inclusive democracy at all levels provides effective and equitable

¹ The meeting was the 18th in a series initiated in July 1993. The annual discussions – which are chaired and hosted in turn by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) on behalf of the United Nations – are intended to share information and improve practical cooperation by drawing on each other's expertise and know-how. Over time, the agenda has widened, from an essentially humanitarian emphasis, to fields related to human rights, conflict prevention, conflict management and post-conflict peace building. The number of participating organizations has also increased, so that consultations are informally referred to as the "Tripartite-plus" process. The European Commission (EC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), who participate as affiliated members, have been joined for this meeting by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). A wide range of representatives from the United Nations system – including Secretariat departments and offices, and the funds, programmes and specialized agencies – also participated.

means for the peaceful management of competing interests as well as the protection of the rights of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities and for defusing tensions within societies. They called on Governments to ratify and comply with international standards on the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. They concurred that effective participation of women and men in political life is fundamental to democracy and encouraged the strengthening of programmes to ensure gender equality, including by addressing structural imbalances.

7. *Participants* stressed that the strengthening of democratic institutions would contribute to reducing tensions and promoting stability in all regions. They reaffirmed that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, separation of powers, democratic elections, the rule of law, transparency, public accountability, and equality in participation remain common features and basic principles of democracy, shared by people irrespective of cultural, ethnic, religious, political, social and economic differences.

8. *Participants* emphasized that free and fair elections held periodically by universal, equal and secret suffrage form the basis for the authority and legitimacy of government. They opined that democratic elections, free of fraud and intimidation, contribute to peace, security and stability by providing an opportunity for diverging political views to be expressed through nonviolent means and enabling the peaceful transfer of power. They further recalled the significance of international election observation for achieving democratic elections, consolidating democracy and building confidence in democratic processes.

9. *Participants* recognized the value of representative bodies at local, national and regional levels and their role in building consensus and reconciling different interests. They underlined that democratic government must be based on the rule of law and a system of checks and balances and that respect for human rights is the indispensable foundation for democracy.

10. *Participants* underscored the important role played by national and local authorities, parliaments, civil society and the media in fostering democratic governance and responsible citizenship. They acknowledged the contribution of civil society actors to conflict prevention and reconciliation processes. They drew attention to the importance of information and education, especially human rights education, in promoting participation, strengthening social cohesion and advancing peaceful co-existence between societies. They noted the particular role of free and independent media organizations in informing and educating.

11. It was agreed that the next Tripartite Meeting would be hosted by the OSCE in 2010.