

Initiatives on Mediation and Preventive Diplomacy at the UN

Mediation and preventive diplomacy were both topics of diplomatic discussions at the United Nations in 2011. On 22 June, the General Assembly approved by consensus a resolution affirming the importance of mediation as a tool for conflict prevention and resolution. The strong support for this resolution was, in part, generated by a newly formed Group of Friends of Mediation, which has been co-chaired by Finland and Turkey. The resolution highlights the work of the Department of Political Affairs— which backstops all of the UN’s political missions except that in Afghanistan - and its Mediation Support Unit.

The resolution calls on other organizations to enhance their mediation capacities, in addition to encouraging governments to invest more in mediation. This General Assembly resolution reflects a growing focus on diplomatic crisis management across the UN system, which has also resulted in increased attention to the role of political missions. This link was made explicit in a report by the Secretary-General to the Security Council on preventive diplomacy, published in September 2011. The report highlights the role of political missions in preventive diplomacy, and underscores the importance of regional political offices, i.e. UNOCA, UNOWA and UNRCCA. In outlining the UN’s role in preventive diplomacy, the report uses both UNOWA’s involvement in averting election-related violence in Guinea and UNRCCA’s contribution to avoiding a full-blown ethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan as examples.

The Secretary-General’s report situates political missions among the UN’s other preventive tools, including the Security Council’s leverage, the work of individual envoys and peacekeeping operations. The report illustrates how recent preventive diplomacy engagements by the UN and its partners have made a difference on the ground in a range of different contexts. It highlights some of the challenges preventive efforts continue to face and makes general observations on the future of preventive diplomacy, highlighting the need for better information-sharing between the UN and other organizations and improved training of the UN’s staff.