Preventing War

as a whole over narrow sectional interests. Sadly, we know that this is often not the case in practice. Indeed, many of the requirements of good governance that are central to prevention stand in stark contradiction to the survival strategies of some of the most conflict-prone Governments.

While providing incentives for progressive change can sometimes help, it is not something that the international community does well or often. The prospect of closer association with the European Union has served as a powerful tool for promoting tolerance and institutional reforms in several East and Central European countries, but few if any counterparts exist at the global level.

The fact that even the best-prepared prevention strategies can fail means that we can never completely escape the scourge of war. It follows that for the foreseeable future the international community must remain prepared to engage politically—and if necessary militarily—to contain, manage and ultimately resolve conflicts that have got out of hand. This will require a better-functioning collective security system than exists at the moment. It will require, above all, a greater willingness to intervene to prevent gross violations of human rights.

Demonstrable willingness to act in such circumstances should in turn serve the goal of prevention by enhancing deterrence. Even the most repressive leaders watch to see what they can get away with, how far they can tear the fabric of human conscience before triggering an outraged external response. The more the international community succeeds in altering their destructive calculus, the more lives can be saved.

International security is, of course, the responsibility of the Security Council and responding to crises and emergencies will always be a major focus of Council activity. But, as Article 1 of the Charter reminds us, the Council is also charged with taking "effective collective measures for the *prevention* and removal of threats to the peace". Yet, reaction, not prevention, has been the dominant Council approach to dealing with conflict over the years.

Recently, however, the Council has shown increased interest in addressing prevention issues. This has been evident in the Council's extensive debate on post-conflict peace-building, and in its response to my report on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa, which endorsed a range of conflict-prevention measures.

I greatly welcome these developments, and during the coming year I intend to continue the dialogue on prevention with Council members that started with the first Security Council Retreat, which I convened in June this year.

Conclusion

Today no one disputes that prevention is better, and cheaper, than reacting to crises after the fact. And yet our political and organizational cultures and practices remain oriented far more towards reaction than prevention. In the words of the ancient proverb, it is difficult to find money for medicine, but easy to find it for a coffin.

The transition from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention will not be easy for the reasons I have outlined in this report, but the difficulty of our task does not make it any less imperative. War and natural disasters remain the major threats to the security of individuals and human communities worldwide. Our solemn duty to future generations is to reduce these threats. We know what needs to be done. What is now needed is the foresight and political will to do it.