

United Nation High-Level Event on Peace, Diversity and Our Common Humanity

Peace and security in a changing world

United Nations

**Remarks by
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Geneva, 4 October 2021

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to take part in this discussion on peace and security in a changing world.

The speed of change

The world has always been changing – indeed, it would be strange if it didn't.

But what seems to be different now is the speed of that change. Look at the collapse of the international presence in Afghanistan ... the spread of COVID-19 ... climate change

Coping with this velocity requires at least two things. One is better anticipation; the second is closer cooperation.

Let me briefly address both of these points.

Anticipation

Nowadays we are informed as never before. One reason why the world seems to be changing so quickly and dramatically is that technology enables us to know what is going on in most parts of the world – usually in real time.

We also have unprecedented data and tools to enable us to track things like the weather and flows of people, money and goods. And big data allows us to analyse and predict as never before.

The problem is that short election cycles and even shorter news cycles mean that politicians and the media are focused on the issues of the day. So we are stuck in the present without learning from the past or preparing for the future.

At the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), where I am the Director, we carry out strategic forecasting and provide today's and future leaders with the mindset, skills and tools to anticipate and understand risks – and to cope more effectively with complex challenges.

But we need more of this. Current and emerging challenges are too complex to be tackled by diplomats and politicians alone. We need to bring together people from different backgrounds – and to combine their knowledge: diplomats, yes, but also the private sector, civil society, youth and experts. We need to strike a creative spark to generate new ideas and more effective approaches, and to focus on prevention and sustainability rather than reactive firefighting.

Cooperation for a common agenda

My second point is the need for cooperation.

In a rapidly changing world where states are concerned about risks to their security, the tendency is to harden borders, erect walls and seek national solutions. However, most current and emerging threats to security do not come from other states: they come from transnational threats – what Kofi Annan once called “problems without passports”.

You cannot call out an airstrike against a virus. You cannot have a national solution to transnational organised crime or terrorism. You cannot close the

drawbridge against climate change or a pandemic – even if you are a great power. Quite simply, transnational threats require multilateral responses.

I am therefore encouraged to read UN Secretary-General Guterres’s report on *Our Common Agenda*. In an interconnected world, states must work together. Cooperation is not altruism and, indeed, solidarity is a form of self-interest.

Developing and implementing a common agenda requires *cooperative security*. This term is seldom used, and even less often defined – so allow me to explain briefly.

What is cooperative security?

Cooperative security is an approach for improving relations between states, both bilaterally and multilaterally, that is based on the premise that we need to have “security *with* each other, rather than *from* each other”.

By its nature, cooperative security is a wide tent that enables inclusive dialogue and joint action among a wide range of stakeholders.

Through cooperative security, states can work together to the same end in a constructive, collaborative way. Instead of a zero-sum game, the outcome can be win-win.

Cooperative security promotes consultation rather than confrontation, reassurance rather than deterrence, transparency rather than secrecy and prevention rather than coercion.

Therefore, cooperative security is well suited to – indeed essential for – a common agenda designed to deal with global challenges. Ultimately, it is the only way forward.

Cooperative security in practice

Closer to home, I would argue that security in Europe will only be restored if the Russian Federation and the West can agree on a common agenda.

You may say this unrealistic. But look at how the United States and the Russian Federation *because of their differences*, not despite them, have agreed to a Strategic Stability Dialogue here in Geneva as a follow-up to the June summit between Presidents Biden and Putin.

The key is to follow up openings and opportunities by implementing confidence- and security-building measures, identifying issues of common interest, and promoting military-to-military dialogue.

Cooperation doesn’t just happen; it needs to be fostered. Therefore, *process design* is a key – and often overlooked – element of managing international relations and sustaining peace.

One final thought: how do we develop a common agenda or promote cooperative security among states that do not share the same values or are all not democracies?

We need to rediscover the art of dialogue – of constructive engagement – of agreeing that we can talk to each other respectfully even if we do not agree with each other.

The GCSP, and more broadly Geneva, is a safe place for inclusive dialogue – even – or perhaps especially – among non-like-minded people or groups. As Desmond Tutu said, “If you want peace, don’t talk to your friends, talk to your enemies”.

In conclusion, working for peace and security in our rapidly changing world will require anticipation and cooperation.

If we are to achieve the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, slow climate change and end protracted conflicts, we will need to talk to each other and work together.

As a species, our common agenda should be survival. This can only be achieved through cooperation.

Thank you for your attention.