“Representatives of the United Nations and regional organizations call for stronger efforts for conflict prevention and democratization”

Today, over 50 representatives of the United Nations and European-based regional organizations came together to discuss how to prevent armed conflict through the strengthening of democracy. The meeting took place as part of the “Tripartite” process between the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Under the title Preventing conflicts through the strengthening of democratic institutions: enhancing democratic governance and institutions to reconcile interests and promote non-violent resolution of conflict, the participating organizations explored how to enhance their collaboration to advance security, development and human rights in the European region.

In his opening remarks, UNOG Director-General Sergei A. Ordzhonikidze, who chaired the meeting, stressed the need for the international community to strengthen its resolve and capacity for the prevention of armed conflict. He emphasized that inclusive democratic governance allowed the political dialogue necessary to ensure that tension did not escalate into open conflict. He also pointed to how democratic structures countered exclusion that could be exploited by extremists, and facilitated compromise and accommodation of different interests. Observing that international assistance had often focused on the legal frameworks needed to protect democracy, Mr. Ordzhonikidze suggested that efforts must also be directed towards meaningful civil society participation. He warned that the economic crisis could lead to curtailing of democratic options exactly when political dialogue was most needed. “We need to ensure that the democratic processes that are, in fact, vital to an effective response to the crisis do not become a victim of it”, he concluded.

OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut noted that the promotion of democratic institutions had in recent years become increasingly seen as an essential tool of conflict prevention. Highlighting the fragility of peace, he cautioned that the consolidation of democracy took time and required long-lasting commitment from all concerned. Likewise, the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms. Maud de Boer-Buquicchio remarked that so-called frozen conflicts had a tendency to flare up. She underlined that the protection of human rights, the rule of law and pluralist democracy are the foundation on which any conflict prevention policy or action should be based.

In a joint communiqué, participants concurred that strengthening of democratic institutions would contribute to reducing tensions and promoting stability in all regions by providing effective and equitable means for the peaceful accommodation of competing interests. 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 in the democratic process remain common features and basic principles of democracy.

Background

Initiated in 1993, the “Tripartite” process provides a forum for informal consultations among the participating organizations on issues of common concern. The original partners of the group – the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – have grown to include, on an “affiliated basis”, the Commission of the European Union, the Council of the European Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration, the North-Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Commonwealth of Independent States. The chair of the process rotates among the three original members.

For more information on the “Tripartite” process, please see the UNOG website at www.unog.ch or call 022 917 1321.