

**Group of Friends of Mediation
8th Ministerial Meeting
New York, Thursday, 21 September 2017**

Co-Chairs' Summary

The Group of Friends of Mediation held its 8th Ministerial Meeting on the margins of the United Nations 72nd General Assembly High-Level Week on 21 September 2017 with the theme of “Enhancing the Role of Mediation in Conflict Prevention and Sustaining Peace”.

The meeting was co-chaired by H.E. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, and H.E. Timo Soini, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland.

H.E. Çavuşoğlu started his opening remarks by welcoming the rise of international awareness on mediation in the recent years as well as the present efforts by the UN Secretary-General in the field of mediation. After underlining the need for a comprehensive approach in mediation for further progress in conflict prevention, management and resolution, he stated with reference to the outcomes of the 4th Istanbul Conference on Mediation that such an approach calls for "mediation for sustaining peace" as opposed to a more limited understanding of "mediation for conflict-resolution". Expressing that mediation has a role to play across the whole conflict cycle, H.E. Çavuşoğlu stated that prevention of conflicts and sustaining peace should be among the priorities of the peace efforts of the international community. In addition, drawing attention to the urgent need to address discrimination-based tensions and conflicts which stem from political, social and religious hostilities, H.E. Çavuşoğlu identified mediation as a strong instrument, centred on greater communication and interaction. He concluded his remarks by emphasizing that mediation practice must take account of cultural and contextual peculiarities and underlining the need for greater capacity building in the field of culturally sensitive mediation.

H.E. Soini stated in his opening remarks the strong support the UN Secretary-General has for his work to make the UN more integrated, efficient and capable of responding to the challenges through mediation. In this context H.E. Soini welcomed the Secretary-General's new High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation; it is important that the UN now has eighteen global leaders in its use for mediation. He challenged the participants to think how to strengthen the mediation capacity of the UN and how to improve the participation of women, young people and religious leaders in peace processes in order to achieve sustainable peace. Specifically H.E. Soini underlined the need to continue advocating for women's full and effective participation as an urgent priority in mediation and expressed his content to see that women mediator networks are emerging in many regions. Enhancing mediation capacities and building partnerships are crucial; there is a need to advocate and act on mediation not only within the United Nations but also outside the UN framework. In this context H.E. Soini brought out the usefulness of exchanging lessons learned and experiences with, for example, regional and local organizations.

Both co-chairs also welcomed in their opening remarks Canada, Hungary, Oman and the United Kingdom as new members which have joined the Group since the last Ministerial Meeting in September 2016.

Further speeches were delivered by H.E. Miroslav Lajcak, President of the 72nd General Assembly of the UN, H.E. Maria Angela Holguin Cuellar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Colombia, and H.E. Michael Keating, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Somalia.

In his remarks, H.E. Miroslav Lajcak underlined the significance of mediation on the grounds of its humanitarian consequences, relevance for the UN's primary task of maintaining peace as well as for the sake of cost-effectiveness. H.E. Lajcak pointed to the need for maintaining the quality of the existing mediation resources and better use of the tools and mechanisms across the three pillars of the UN. Highlighting the importance of nationally-driven mediation and reconciliation processes, H.E. Lajcak emphasized the need for encouraging local or national actors to use their mediation or prevention tools – for the common goal of peace. Regarding the principle of inclusivity, he underlined the significance for greater involvement of women and youth in mediation activities. H.E. Lajcak also addressed the role of regional and sub-regional organizations in mediation processes. Praising the efforts by the UN Secretary General in the field of mediation, H.E. Lajcak welcomed the establishment of the High-level Advisory Board on Mediation.

H.E. Maria Angela Holguin Cuellar shared her observations and insights on the basis of the experiences from the peace process in Colombia. H.E. Holguin Cuellar emphasized the significance of humanitarian aspects of the peace process, commending that the success was largely influenced by the fact that victims were put at the centre of the peace process. She also explained that having good relations with the neighbouring countries and the role played by the Armed Forces also made a positive impact on the process. H.E. Holguin Cuellar also expressed their dedication to sustain efforts with the prospect of maintaining peace in Colombia.

The third panellist of the meeting, H.E. Michael Keating expressed the pleasure of the UN Secretary General regarding the expansion and diversification of the membership of the Group of Friends of Mediation. He then pointed out that mediation, especially the role of women mediators, is among the priorities of the UN Secretary General. Referring to the conflicting messages by the UN Security Council regarding the case of Syria, he underlined the role of the Security Council in the resolution of conflicts and expressed that successful results can be obtained only if the Council manages to give the message of unity. He concluded by saying that the Group of Friends of Mediation should use its position in the UN to further encourage and promote mediation and should guide the UN in its work in the field of mediation.

Out of the 56 members of the Group of Friends of Mediation, 47 delegations were present at the meeting, contributing to the work of the Group as well as actively participating and delivering statements on the role of mediation in conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

The participants of the meeting expressed their pleasure that mediation is among the priority issues on the UN agenda and for the efforts of the UN Secretary General. Identifying the Group of Friends of Mediation as a leading platform for policy-making and implementation in this field, many participants referred to the instrumental role the Group played in the ascendance of mediation on the UN agenda.

It was also emphasized that mediation, among the methods of peaceful resolution of conflicts enlisted as such in the UN Charter, has not been used sufficiently as yet. Some participants emphasized the need for more use of mediation and cultivating the demand for it on the ground.

Greater use of mediation in all phases of the conflict continuum was also underlined. Participants particularly emphasized the importance of conflict prevention with humanitarian concerns as well as on the grounds that it is less costly than conflict-resolution. Some participants referred to the applicability of mediation in extreme conditions, such as the cases of Syria, Ukraine and Yemen. The appropriate training of mediators, for mediation to be applied in all phases of a conflict, was mentioned accordingly.

Mediation was identified as a significant tool for sustaining peace. Participants underlined the need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to realize the role of mediation in this regard.

Observing the principle of impartiality and addressing justice concerns were counted among the conditions that increase the chances of success of mediation efforts. Participants highlighted the significance of sustaining mediation efforts with a long-term perspective and a dedication for success. Some participants underlined the role of norms in mediation practices. UN Guidances are identified as a valuable source which enable sharing of knowledge and best practices. Accordingly, arguing that familiarity with the socio-cultural context raises the chances of success, the need for preparing a guidance on culturally sensitive mediation was also mentioned at the meeting.

In their interventions, participants emphasized the significance of inclusivity, especially the involvement and role of women and youth in mediation processes. It was stated that raising awareness on the role of women mediators as well as training women mediators to take an active role in peace processes would be important.

As in the previous years, the role of regional and sub-regional organizations and the need for greater capacity-building, including *inter alia* the area of early warning, were addressed at the meeting. Participants also mentioned the significance of better and sustainable financing, particularly that of the UN Mediation Support Unit, and increasing the role of mediation in Special Political Missions.

Arguing that misinformation and propaganda might exacerbate conflicts and hinder mediation efforts, some participants pointed out to the role of information resources in conflict management. As such, they emphasized the need for more research on the role and management of knowledge and information resources in mediation efforts and peace processes.

Following the statements and interventions by the participants, the meeting came to the end with the closing remarks by H.E. Çavuşoğlu and H.E. Soini.

In his concluding remarks, H.E. Soini referred to statements heard around the table and noted that permanent and sustainable solutions to conflicts can only be achieved by addressing the underlying political, economic and social problems. He stated that since its formation, the Group of Friends of Mediation has been the platform for promoting mediation as a critical tool to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts. The Group has also generated fresh ideas for the wider and more effective use of mediation. In the context of the rising momentum for mediation the work and activities of the Group have become much more significant, relevant and appealing.

At the end of the meeting, H.E. Çavuşoğlu thanked the participants for their insightful comments and underlined that, in order to enhance the role of mediation in both preventing conflicts and sustaining peace, international community needs a new way of thinking and acting in mediation, which includes: being active in all phases of the conflict cycle, adding mediation to all our efforts along the peace continuum, dealing with broader spectrum of conflicts or tensions, greater gender and youth inclusion, greater capacity-building including at regional level, as well as collaboration among regional organizations. H.E. Çavuşoğlu expressed that, acting with such comprehensive perspective and making mediation a part of our wider peace efforts, international community can hopefully get results on the ground and achieve its objectives in conflict prevention and sustaining peace.