

Co-Chairs' Summary

United Nations Group of Friends of Mediation

10th Ministerial Meeting

New York, 26 September 2019

Introduction

The Group of Friends of Mediation held its 10th Ministerial Meeting on the margins of the 74th General Assembly of the United Nations on 26 September 2019 under the theme of “New Technologies for Peace and Mediation as Tools for Inclusion: Celebrating the 10th Ministerial Meeting and Looking Ahead”. The Meeting was co-chaired by H.E. Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, and H.E. Mr. Pekka Haavisto, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland. 26 members of the UN Group of Friends of Mediation were represented in the meeting.

Opening Speeches

In his opening speech, H.E. Mr. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu summarised the achievements of the Group in the field of mediation since its establishment in 2010. He welcomed Latvia to the Group as the 59th member. Minister Çavuşoğlu went on to underline the importance of incorporating digital technology in diplomacy with reference to Turkey’s own initiatives like the “Digital Diplomacy” at the 11th Ambassadors’ Conference and the focus on the matter during Istanbul Mediation Conferences. Minister Çavuşoğlu stated that technology presents opportunities and risks for the field of mediation as stressed in the 5th Istanbul Mediation Conference in 2018 and the subsequent “Digital Mediation Toolkit” prepared in cooperation between the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) and the Geneva-based Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD). Additionally, Minister Çavuşoğlu cautioned that it is important to take note of the fact that whilst new technologies provide mediators with new tools, terrorists and armed groups may use them

for propaganda, hate speech and recruitment. Minister Çavuşoğlu underlined the need for inclusivity in the area of technological development and noted the role of the UN Technology Bank established in Turkey for the Least Developed Countries.

H.E. Mr. Pekka Haavisto, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, started by welcoming the new members to the group. He saw the potential of new technologies for increasing global connectivity as a positive challenge also from conflict prevention and mediation perspective. Foreign Minister Haavisto raised examples on how new technologies can support peace processes and mediation. New technologies can be used as a tool for inclusion for the often-marginalised groups such as women and youth. They can also support mediation in accessibility and reaching out for example people located in distant regions. The use of artificial intelligence can provide new opportunities in peace processes. New technologies can also be used as a tool for supporting democratic processes and promoting transparency for example in election processes. Minister Haavisto welcomed the Digital Toolkit and its concrete implementation. Finally Minister Haavisto mentioned the UN Technology and Innovation laboratory located in Finland and aiming to provide innovative solutions to global problems including peace and security.

Keynote Remarks

Ms. Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the EU Commission, stated that mediation and digital technologies are included in the areas covered by the Global Tech Panel. Although the need

for mediation is associated with weakness, the High Representative stated that it takes more courage to sit down and talk with your adversary than to fight. With regard to the inclusivity of mediation processes, the High Representative mentioned the EU projects focusing on the women mediators in the Middle East and North Africa and social media as an agent to attain inclusivity. She also stressed the importance of using the benefits of technology while mitigating the risks associated with it.

Referring to the aim to analyse the nexus between technology and peace/security as one of the priorities of the UN DPPA, Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, the Under-Secretary General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs of the UN, noted that although mediation is still a human-centric endeavour, there is now more political discourse online describing how conflicts start, evolve and end. In her remarks, she also emphasized the importance of inclusivity as it leads to more legitimacy and ownership in peace processes. Moving from the experiences during preparations for a National Conference Process in Libya, she touched upon the potential of Artificial Intelligence in assisting peace processes.

Ms. Sima Samar, member of the UNSG's High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation, stated that wars and peace processes are affected by digital technologies; technology has rendered the problems of the world more complex and multi-dimensional which makes it necessary to develop new tools for conflict resolution. She underlined that digital technologies are used to report human rights abuses and gender-based violence more effectively. She also made the case for making digital tools accessible for women and victims of a conflict in peace processes. She emphasized that it should be noted that even those who are traditionally opposed to technology are using social media with reference to the actions of the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Findings of the Meeting

The participants touched upon the tangible contributions of the Group to the field of mediation in their interventions. The participants underlined:

- the growing power and reach of technology in peace and mediation efforts.
- new technologies may provide mediators with additional tools.
- emerging technologies may increase inclusivity in peace processes which will bring more perspectives and build local ownership; help mediators interact with people and regions hard to reach; improve communication, verification and monitoring systems; prevent misinformation and disinformation; assist mediators in collecting and analysing information from the ground; and provide new negotiation platforms.

Although it was underlined that the positive implications of new technologies for peace and mediation efforts outweigh the negative ones, the negative implications should also be scrutinised. The participants mentioned:

- the possibility of the principle of confidentiality may be jeopardised with the use of technology in peace processes
- social media may increase and speed up the spread of hate speech, misinformation and disinformation which would risk peace and mediation efforts.
- it is necessary to take legal precautions to eliminate and/or mitigate the negative implications of new technologies for peace and mediation efforts.

The participants also underscored the importance of improving technological/digital literacy of mediators. Additionally, they

pointed at the absorption capacity of the target population while utilising technological tools in mediation. It was argued that new technologies cannot replace humans as the principle actors in peace and mediation, and they should be used as additional tools to assist mediators.

The participants emphasized the importance of women/youth participation in peace and mediation processes. More women should be represented in decision-making mechanisms. Additionally, the involvement of local leaders and religious figures was brought to the fore.