

Speech by H.E. Ambassador Karen Van Vlierberge, Deputy
Permanent Representative

at the UN Security Council

**Open debate: "The role of States, regional arrangements
and the United Nations in the prevention and resolution
of conflicts"**

New York, 6 December 2018

Mr President,
Your Excellencies,

First of all, I would like to acknowledge and thank Côte d'Ivoire for taking the initiative to hold a debate on a subject which is so vital to the work of this Council in the exercise of its responsibilities.

For Belgium, the importance of regional and sub-regional organisations in conflict prevention is unquestioned, especially in Africa, where "African ownership" of the security challenges on the continent has achieved undeniable progress over the past decade.

Our position, our credo, is simple, and it is shared: when a crisis looms on the horizon, or when a crisis erupts, neighbouring States, the sub-region and the continent are often better placed than the United Nations to act quickly and effectively.

As a matter of principle, Belgium supports regional integration, as this is the best way to resolve cross-border problems with consensus, to bring regions together and create solidarity.

I am convinced that the European experience is a "success story": indeed, the European Union has brought about the longest period of peace in modern Europe.

In addition, I would also like to reiterate our commitment to support the African Union in reinforcing and implementing its policies, procedures and capacities, but also in making the funding of peace operations led by the African Union more predictable, sustainable and flexible. For Belgium, this principle is a given; it is now a question of working out the practical details.

In the division of tasks and responsibilities between the United Nations and regional and sub-regional organisations, our approach is guided by two core principles: **complementarity** and **subsidiarity**.

Subsidiarity

Recently, in The Gambia, we saw a good example of the principle of subsidiarity being put into practice: decisive action by ECOWAS, under the auspices of the AU and the UN, facilitated the transition to democracy in a largely peaceful manner.

Complementarity

- a. Guinea-Bissau is a textbook case in which complementarity is demonstrated on the ground: the main commitment of the international community in support efforts to end the crisis is in the form of the "Guinea-Bissau P5", which brings together the UN, the African Union, the European Union, the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries, and ECOWAS.
- b. The success of an election sometimes makes it possible to avoid or resolve a conflict. Electoral processes are another example of complementarity: although the United Nations is often involved in preparing and holding elections, electoral observation is regularly ensured by the AU, SADC or ECOWAS.
- c. An operational commitment, such as the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, helps reduce tensions by implementing an independent monitoring capacity, thereby supplementing the political process.
- d. Finally, in mediation, regional organisations can bring to bear their local knowledge and expertise, and the United Nations can provide their neutrality, as well as authority and universal standards.

Beyond these principles, we must also recognise that every situation is different and changeable: laying down strict rules in advance would not be effective. What is certain, at any event, is that the different levels each have their own usefulness and legitimacy, and must overlap and be combined in a coherent and effective manner.

Mr President,

Regardless of the colour of the helmet, it is essential that the basic rules of international humanitarian law and human rights law are not subject to any exceptions, and are fully respected in operations. Personnel are deployed with the aim of achieving peace and ending crises; their behaviour must be exemplary.

Belgium welcomes the Secretary-General's efforts within the United Nations to unceasingly fight against sexual violence. The Council must set standards which are as strict as those of the regional operations it authorises.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our support for the work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the African Union Commission, in establishing a compliance framework for respecting human rights and international humanitarian law.

Thank you.