

Mr President,  
Your Excellencies,

I would like to start by welcoming and thanking South Africa for taking the initiative for organising this debate. I also thank the UN Secretary-General, Her Excellency Mrs Mulamula, and Mrs Vilakazi and Mrs Maite for their introductory remarks.

For Belgium, regional and sub-regional organisations play a crucial role in conflict prevention, in particular in Africa, where the "ownership" of the security challenges on the continent has achieved unquestioned progress over the past decade. When a crisis appears on the horizon, neighbouring States, the sub-region and the continent are often best placed to respond quickly and effectively.

Belgium supports regional integration, our history has shown us that this is the best way to resolve cross-border or regional problems with consensus, to unify regions and create solidarity. I would like to stress once again that it is in all our interests that the African Union strengthens its peace and security tools. Ultimately, African Union peace operations will need to enjoy more predictable, long-term and flexible funding.

In the division of tasks and responsibilities between the United Nations and regional and sub-regional organisations, our approach is guided by the pursuit of the most appropriate model in the specific context.

Two years ago, in Gambia, we saw an excellent example of a subregional organisation taking a leading role. In Guinea-Bissau, complementarity was achieved on the ground through the action of the "Guinea-Bissau P5".

In the Central African Republic, the African Union has seen its efforts supported by ECCAS and the United Nations. These efforts resulted in the Peace Agreement. Joint high-level African Union / United Nations visits - visits in which a representative of the European Union also participates - are also an effective tool for monitoring the situation in CAR.

In Burkina Faso, Niger and Nigeria, the United Nations Office for West Africa is helping to build conflict prevention capacity to prevent conflicts between pastoralists and farmers, as well as community-based conflicts. These questions indeed deserve a regional approach throughout West Africa and we welcome the determination shown by ECOWAS at its extraordinary summit held last month in Ouagadougou.

Mediation is where complementarity makes most sense: regional or subregional organisations bring their local knowledge and expertise to the table, while the United Nations can provide its neutrality, as well as authority and universal norms. We commend the progress made in operationalising the Mediation Support Unit of the African Union and the development of a network of women mediators, FemWise.

Mr President,

Our responsibility is to do everything we can to avoid conflicts before they erupt. We must continue our early warning exercises, including the exchange of information between the Security Council and the Secretariat. But in order for these exercises to be useful, we also need to be as open as possible and not rule out any option or information. Many United Nations entities and agencies, but also research institutes, civil society organisations, and so on, have extremely valuable and detailed information that can inform us about any incipient conflicts. So we must be proactive, listen to them, and include this information in our deliberations.

But we also need to go further: early warning is meaningless unless at the same time we also have the ability for a rapid diplomatic response. This response is not necessarily the preserve of the Security Council. It is also from the good offices of the Secretary-General, his special envoys, his representatives and resident coordinators. It is also the independent initiatives of the United Nations, as is the case in Cameroon at the moment.

One thing is certain: we must go further on this front. Belgium is determined to work in this direction, both within and outside the Security Council.

Thank you.