

SPEECH BY GUEST OF HONOUR

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I would like to begin my remarks by warmly welcoming you all to the 13th International Seminar on the Challenges of Peace operations into the 21st century. I am confident that this seminar will provide opportunity for a most fruitful discussion on a highly pertinent and important subject matter for the entire international community. I hope that all attending will benefit from this initiative of the Centre for Strategic Research of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organized in cooperation with Turkish National Police Force, Bilkent University and the Folke Bernadotte Academy of Sweden.

We also pay tribute today to the memory of those who have lost their lives in the service of peace. We remember the late Sergio Vieira de Mello, Under Secretary General of the United Nations and his colleagues, who fell victim to terrorism during their mission to Iraq. Similarly, we honour the memory of the late Anna Lindh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, who was tragically slain less than three months ago. This meeting is taking place as we in Turkey also mourn the tragic loss of innocent civilians at the hands of terrorists in Istanbul last Saturday. This horrendous act of terror has unfortunately claimed many lives and left hundreds of citizens wounded. Terrorism committed in any part of the world is in fact an act directed at humanity as a whole. We condemn this hateful crime in strongest terms. We must fight against it as a united front, if we are to eradicate this scourge from face of the earth.

Ladies and gentlemen, during the course of the next three days, this seminar will address the issue of the changing nature of peace operations especially in the phase of new threats and challenges to international peace and security in this new century. These discussions will cover just about every aspect of peace operations, the need for constant reform in international policy, police, military, civil rights as well as academic, legal human rights and coordination perspectives. Lessons drawn for a wide range of operations in the Balkans, Africa, the Gulf, near and far Asia will shed light on the problems encountered and solutions that need to be found.

The world has undergone fundamental transformation in the post- Cold War period. The potential today for large-scale warfare has been greatly minimized. However, our search for peace persists as many regions of the world continue to suffer from tensions and conflicts. Moreover, just as the world has changed, so has the nature of threats to global security and stability. Yet, despite all these changes, the United Nations remains central to our efforts in the maintenance of international peace and security. Peacekeeping is an invention of the UN that has brought stability to many areas of tension around the globe. Today, peace operations continue to serve as an important tool for the organization in fulfilling its mandate to preserve peace and security.

The new threats and challenges that we face in the 21st century require a renewed commitment to peacemaking and enforcement efforts. In the same way we need innovative thinking and solutions for the challenges confronted in the area of peace operations.

Certainly conflict prevention should be at the top of our agenda. The best contribution of the international community to peace and security is still avoiding the outbreak of

hostilities by means of preventive diplomacy. Prevention is always better than a cure, but it is equally important to improve our peacekeeping capacity to save more lives when preventive diplomacy fails and conflict proves inevitable.

In times of crisis, speed is of essence. Experience has taught us that delayed action is costly both in terms of human suffering and resources. The ability to act quickly often makes the difference between life and death, failure and success. An important aspect of modern peacekeeping is better planning, preparation, coordination and maintaining capabilities for rapid deployment of both military and police. Additional steps need to be taken to increase the United Nations' capacity for, and speed of, intervention. In the framework of the efforts to enhance the UN's rapid deployment capacity, Turkey joined the UN Standby Arrangement System and the military "on-call list". We indicated our intention to provide a battalion to this system in 1997 and also informed the UN that the Ministry of Interior would assign an additional contingent of 100 personnel. The Declaration of Mutual Intent regarding our participation in this system was signed in June 2000.

Another important issue associated with peace operations is providing safety and security for the forces and personnel serving in Blue Helmets, who place their lives at risk and in harm's way for the noble cause of peace and security. Regrettably, many who are in conflict zones to save the peace and provide humanitarian assistance often become the targets of aggression themselves. More than 1500 admirable men and women have lost their lives in such missions under the UN flag. Turkey has therefore recently taken steps to become a party to the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

Training of peacekeeping personnel is also a vital component of successful operations of this nature. Turkey established a Partnership for Peace Training Centre in Ankara in 1998. We are at the disposal of the UN to enhance its training capacity for peacekeeping with the centre.

We should also not forget that no nation can be fully at peace when its neighbour is not, nor can conflicts be contained to one region as they have spill-over effects that affect a much larger geography. More countries must therefore be prepared to contribute their fair share to the maintenance of international peace and stability by participating in peace operations. Turkey has always been aware of this responsibility and its forces, both military and police, have served to secure peace and stability worldwide within the UN and NATO. We have placed our resources at the disposal of peace operations in a wide geography ranging from the Balkans to Africa and Asia. Our commitment to peacekeeping efforts dates back to the Korean War where the heroic service of Turkish troops is remembered to this day. Turkey currently takes part in several UN peacekeeping operations around the world. Turkey's active policy in this field has been demonstrated in its involvement in various operations and missions in Somali, the former Yugoslavia, Bosnia – Herzegovina, Kosovo, Georgia, East Timor, North Korea, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Turkey's command of ISAF-II in Afghanistan is one more recent example.

Turkey is therefore in a position to make substantive contributions to the discussion on the need for continuing reform and the future course of peace operations with the vast experience gained from these missions. Some of the conclusions we have drawn are the need for a clearly defined mandate, the consent of the parties to the conflict, transparency, limited duration of mission, impartiality and credibility. These are factors that make for successful peacekeeping operations.

The United Nations and its Security Council are the key actors in the peace effort when international stability is at stake. For example, evolving conditions in neighbouring Iraq point to the need for greater involvement of the United Nations in the reconstruction of Iraq and humanitarian assistance as well as in the restoration of security and stability.

We believe that the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations can be greatly increased. This can be done through a more transparent functioning of the United Nations Security Council. An efficient consultation mechanism with troop-contributing countries can be instrumental in this regard. Close consultation and coordination among countries participating in these operations is also of importance. The new procedures adopted by the Security Council that expand the range of its consultation mechanism have been useful. We hope that further steps to this end will follow.

It takes just one glance at the world map to see that Turkey is in close proximity with many of the current conflict spots and potential new threats that are high on the international community's agenda. This has placed a special responsibility on Turkey. As one of the founding member of the United Nations, Turkey has always been committed to upholding the noble goals and principles enshrined in the UN Charter. Its record in actively contributing to the preservation of regional and global peace and stability speaks for itself.

Yet, Turkey has not been represented on the Security Council for almost half a century. Turkey believes that it will be better equipped to bring further contributions to international peace and security as a member of Security Council. This is precisely why it has announced its candidacy for election to a non-permanent seat of this important body for the term 2009 – 2010.

On this note, I complete my comments and wish the seminar every success in elaborating on the ways and means of reform required so that the international community maybe better equipped to meet the peace operations challenges of our century.