Remarks on Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

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I should tell you, Mr. President, that two of our buildings have just been evacuated because of explosions in the transformers, which were to set the scene for me for this meeting. This gives some idea of what post-conflict is like, and it just shows the attention to detail that there is in our institution— that we should create smoke around our building to give a sense of what we are talking about. I have vacated to another building, and I thank you for the invitation to join you.

Let me start by saying that the World Bank—certainly under my incumbency, which will last another five days, and, I strongly believe, under that of my successor, Paul Wolfowitz—is deeply committed to cooperating with the Security Council on the suggestions of the Secretary-General to have a Peacebuilding Commission, with which we would work closely. The reason for this is not just our admiration for the United Nations and for the Secretary-General; it is because all of us here strongly believe that it is essential to change the balance that exists between making peace, in terms of stopping conflict, and building peace, in terms of the creation of hope and viable States. All of us in our institution recognize that, at the moment, the weighting is hugely and substantially on the military side, on the intervention side, on the prevention or the concluding of wars, but far too little is spent on winning the war of peace. The numbers are compelling, as I think the Security Council well knows, maybe better than anybody. Military expenditure accounts for $1,000 billion a year, including, sadly, more than $200 billion by developing countries, and that we spend maybe $50 or $60 billion on development assistance. Separate from that, of course, we still have the problems of trade that will be discussed later in the year in the conclusion of the Doha Round.

Thus, from our point of view, the issue of the transition from conflict to that intermediate zone in which we have worked together in so many countries, to the third area to which the Secretary-General has paid such attention, which is the building of peace, we recognize the interdependence between our institution and the various arms of the United Nations. Last night I read the Secretary-General’s report of a couple of years ago on the prevention of armed conflict. As I read it, I
was reminded again of the closeness of our perceptions of the issues when the Secretary-General pointed out that an effective prevention strategy requires a comprehensive approach and encompasses both short-term and long-term political, diplomatic and economic considerations. It really is this line of thought that permeates the excellent report “In larger freedom”, on issues of want, fear and dignity, in which the Secretary-General pointed again to a precursor to this notion of a Peacebuilding Commission.

To take the mystery out of this, let me say that the way we look at it is as follows. Whether a country is poor and peaceful, or whether, as in at least 50 per cent of cases, a country is poor and in post-conflict, exactly the same considerations prevail as to whether you can bring hope and economic development to those countries. The considerations are always the same. You must have a strengthening of capacity. You must have people in the country who can in fact run the country. In that context, the issue of capacity-building is essential.

Having said that, that particular problem is exacerbated in post-conflict situations because, very often, the people are not there or have been killed or because in-built antagonisms between one side and the other remain. So, putting together that first strand of capacity becomes critically important, and we must deal with that.

The second element, which, again, we often forget, is that you cannot have a viable State unless you have judicial and legal systems that can protect rights. That too becomes very important in post-conflict situations, where rights — whether physical rights, human rights or rights to contract — are very often tremendously weakened in the post-conflict period. But the second issue remains the same: establishing a form of legal order.

The third issue is that of re-establishing some sort of financial framework so that the people in the country can bring about investment, from micro-credit through to financing small- and medium-sized industry or, indeed, attracting outside investment.

The fourth precondition is making sure that you deal with the issue of corruption. I note those four elements — capacity, legal and judicial systems, financial systems and corruption — because they pervade the reports of the United Nations itself, including the recent report, “In larger freedom” (A/59/2005), as well as being raised in earlier reports of the Secretary-General. It is therefore not surprising that we should come back to the issue of taking a comprehensive approach to development in the post-conflict arena.

For us at the World Bank, it has taken some time to recognize that the issues of post-conflict situations are the same as those of non-post-conflict situations. The same preconditions are needed for growth in all countries. We are not inventing something new for post-conflict situations. The problem is that in post-conflict situations, the capacity needed is much greater because of the after-effects of the conflict. Of course, we have the additional issue of calming down the causes that may have generated the conflict.
That is a fifth dimension we must address in our post-conflict work together. What caused the conflict? Was it inequity? Was it a desire for diamonds? Was it a desire for natural resources? Or was it long-term cultural differences? Whatever it is, it belongs to the political side, with which the Security Council is so familiar, but it becomes another condition precedent, exacerbating the problem of the post-conflict situation, as compared to normal development considerations. After that, the issues of country ownership, of a comprehensive approach and of working together - the Council, the Bank and other agencies - to support a strengthened local Government and local ownership, are exactly the same. We must get local ownership. We must try and deal with that. And the issue here, so sadly true, is that the international community’s attention span in bringing about longer-term and even medium-term reconstruction dissipates when the bombs stop going off and the headlines dissipate because no one is getting killed. It is hard to photograph peacebuilding. It is easy to photograph wars. Peacebuilding does not get headlines. It is a long-term, tough, day-after-day activity. It is that issue that I hope that the Secretary-General and those on the Peacebuilding Commission will be able to address in their work. My own judgement is that the solution is not rocket science. It is not something that requires doing doctorates in politics or economics. It is common sense. But it is a common sense that our world does not have. Our world does not give longer-term support to the turgid process of building States. That is a problem we face throughout the issue of development and one that I think we need vigorously to address with respect to the post-conflict period.

In conclusion, very simply, I believe that our analysis and the Council’s analysis are very similar. We welcome the fact that the Secretary-General has identified the need for a Peacebuilding Commission. We welcome the opportunity to participate with the Security Council, and we think that together, we might be able to get your shareholders and our shareholders at the level of heads of State and, hopefully, at the level of the congresses and Governments to understand that what we are putting to them is not some radical new insight. It is common sense, and the world needs to have some of that if we are going to avoid more wars.