

STATEMENT by H. E. Ambassador František Ružička, Slovak Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at a Security Council Open Debate on War, Its Lessons, and the Search for a Permanent Peace, 29 January 2014 New York

Mr. President,

First of all, let me welcome this timely initiative to devote this thematic debate to such sensitive, complex, often painful but extremely important topic.

Allow me to start with some facts and questions:

- Several estimates suggest that there have only been 250 years of peace in over 3400 years of documented history of mankind;
- The 20th century was the most murderous in recorded history. The total number of deaths caused by or associated with its wars has been estimated at 187m, the equivalent of more than 10% of the world's population in 1913.
- Is today our planet a safer place? 100 years from the outburst of WWI, and after 70 years from the end of the WWII?
- We spent more than 13.4 billion of USD on humanitarian relief in 2013 only and expect approximately the same amount to allocate this year. Aren't we paying price for inconsistencies in our approach to processes of building sustainable societies and peace in post-conflict areas?

War is like avalanche – once it picks up full speed, it takes it all, leaves behind destruction, deaths, suffering. But it may not be necessarily the most important thing to keep looking for the snowflake that caused it. Much more important is to learn, how to prevent it, tame it and create a better, sustainable peace on its ruins.

To find the answers for the future we should find the courage to look into the past. This may be the most difficult part – how to handle injustice of the past without creating a new one in the present and future. We have to have the strength to look directly to the cruel face of war and its consequences; we cannot be hiding from it.

It is a fact that time may fix every injustice of the past. But yet again, treating a wound may be relatively fast, but curing the scars in memories and minds of people is much more difficult. The reconciliation may take decades and generations, and always may contain the potential of possible conflict. But will not be achieved without individual accountability.

Tolstoy classic War and Peace indicates that after all, history is not produced by the dramatic moves and postures of leaders, but by complex combinations of large numbers of small actions by relatively unimportant people.

Allow me please, to share with you three observations:

1.) Reconciliation is a sign of strength, not weakness. The Franco-German reconciliation, the understanding of European nations that war is not any longer an instrument of continuation of policy, brought the perspective of longer, more sustainable peace at least in Europe.

Herman van Rompuy said "We (Europeans) do not wish that anybody else, any region in the world, live through such a trauma (as WWI and WWII), before arriving at the conclusion that living peacefully together is by far the best option. Of course, peace might have come to our continent without the European Union. Maybe. We will never know. But it would never have been of the same quality. A lasting peace, not a frosty cease-fire."

2.) Regional cooperation and good neighborly relations is cornerstone for stability. Project of European cooperation can be an example, inspiration. It may not necessarily be a universal model. But it has been working for over 50 years. It shows that national security can be sustainable only if there is a regional stability and cooperation. If the neighbors wish and could coexist and cooperate without prejudices. If they are able to combine efforts for the sake of common interests and face challenges together. Without this basis the progress cannot be sustainable.

3.) Personal security of people, life in dignity and freedoms. When people have basic rights and freedoms, when they enjoy free movement, live in mutual tolerance, when they have access to education and can enjoy economic activities - they may be much more reluctant to start a conflict that may deprive them of these freedoms.

To build a sustainable future and peace in the post-conflict regions, we have to elaborate a comprehensive approach, with the participation of all parts of the society. Slovakia has been for several years a strong supporter of the Security Sector Reform. The need for security sector reform is omnipresent in every post-conflict, war stricken country. The concept of SSR is rather complex and goes beyond traditional understanding of post conflict stabilization of security field only. It is as well a political process that should be state-owned and state-led. Inclusivity and justice within the society, as wide as possible, will guarantee its sustainability.

SSR should step over narrow and simplistic definition and reflect the experience – both good and bad – we (the United Nations) have acquired over decades of Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding.

The main goal is to establish four dimensions of security: civic, legal, social and economic. If we succeed to do so, than we significantly decrease the recidivism of conflict.

Every human is born free, has his or her dignity and should have all the rights to live in peace. That is why we should not only take arms from those, who are fighting, but we should give them the perspective for decent life by providing stability, security, education and sustainable peace.

Where, if not in the UN, we have the capacity to do so?

Mr. President, in conclusion,

Yes, we must learn from the past, we must understand the roots of conflicts and we must be strong enough to overcome differences. We must to do so if we want to live up to the challenges of the 21st Century and to prove that our Civilization can take care of itself and of our, so far the only, Planet we live on.