

THE IMPERATIVE OF EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

Lecture delivered by Air Commodore DE Abdullahi at the 81 Division Officers' Training Week 2009
on 4 November 2009

INTRODUCTION

1. The world has witnessed several wars and conflicts that led to unnecessary destruction of lives and property. These include the 2 world wars (1914 – 1918 and 1939 – 1945), the Korean War (1950 – 1953), Vietnam war (1959 -75), Iran – Iraq war (1980 – 88), the Gulf war (1991), the Kosovo conflict (1998 – 1999) and the Middle East conflicts.¹ Conflicts in Africa include those in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan and several others in which Nigeria committed enormous human and material resources. Conflicts have continued to prevail in many parts of the world. They are also generating millions of refugees and displaced persons.² Generations of young Africans are currently being subjected to violence, hatred, destruction and trauma.

2. A former Secretary General of the then OAU, Salim Ahmed Salim summarized the conflict situation in Africa aptly when he observed in 1996 that the scourge of conflicts has indeed been one of the most destabilizing factors that has severely undermined the efforts of various countries at promoting socio-economic development.³ Its effects and proliferation have thus had severe consequences not only for various nations but individuals and families.

3. Conflict is a phenomenon that is considered an important part of human existence and a natural part of our daily lives. It is conceived as the incompatibility of goals, interests and objectives. The conflicts that take place within a society may be the result of several factors. Explanations for social conflict, whether it is on a small or large scale, resulting from interactions between social groups or caused by external factors, have been an issue of common concern.⁴ It is often difficult to point to a single explanation for the emergence, escalation or protraction of conflict whether violent or otherwise and it is also common that those involved will even find it difficult to remember what led to the initial disagreement.⁵

4. Several attempts have however been made by various bodies to prevent or manage conflicts regionally and globally. In this regard, the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Medecin Sans Frontieres (MSF) and several others have played major roles. It is noteworthy that conflicts do not just erupt without causes or warning signs. Since we cannot exist without conflicts, then an early intervention, to prevent an escalation of crisis and a mechanism to ensure a constructive response is a necessity in attaining a peaceful environment.

5. Conflict prevention, resolution and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing activities. It is no longer news that the world is a global village and conflict in any area could give rise to a ripple effect felt far beyond the shores of the conflict zone. An investment in national and international efforts for conflict prevention must therefore be seen as a simultaneous investment in sustainable development, since the latter can best take place in a peaceful environment.⁶ Conversely, conflicts have the capacity to severely constrain development endeavours by destroying infrastructure, interrupting production processes and diverting resources away from productive uses.⁷ It is in this light that this paper will focus on the need to prevent conflicts through early warning systems.

6. Some relevant concepts such as conflict prevention, conflict management as well as early warning will be clarified. The causes and stages of conflict will thereafter be discussed before giving an overview of early warning systems and major stakeholders in conflict prevention. Attention will be given to the challenges to effective early warnings and strategies to overcome the challenges.

AIM

7. The aim of this paper is to discuss early warning systems in conflict prevention and management.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

8. The key concepts to be clarified here are conflict prevention, conflict management and early warning.

CONFLICT PREVENTION

9. Evans and Newnham defined conflict prevention as “measures which contribute to the prevention of undesirable conflict behaviour once some situation involving goal incompatibility has arisen”⁸. Conflict prevention describes the whole range of development and crisis intervention efforts to reconcile parties and groups with incompatible interests, and to prevent the pursuit of divergent goals from degenerating into armed violence. It also includes the efforts and intervention strategies to prevent relapse into further violence, when the differences between the parties are resolved.⁹ Preventing conflicts works on the same principle as inoculation for smallpox – it has to be done methodically, with proven vaccines, and as a fundamental, properly funded policy.¹⁰

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

10. Conflict management is used to describe any situation where conflict continues but where its worst excesses are avoided or mitigated. The term also refers to the attempt to control events during a crisis, to prevent significant and systemic violence from occurring.¹¹ It is to be noted that the term could also be used to include preventive measures because even if settlement or resolution has been achieved to a certain level, preventive measures are still necessary to avoid a relapse to the conflict or a worsening situation. Among the various approaches to conflict management therefore are such strategies as conflict prevention, preventive diplomacy, control of violence, and conflict resolution.

EARLY WARNING

11. Early warning generally refers to the set of activities that aim to collect, collate and analyse data in order to detect and identify the signs of an emerging crisis before it explodes into uncontrollable violence.¹²

Please note that only in exceptional cases does early warning provide information in a form that is ready for dissemination or immediate use. Data becomes useful as information only when it unveils trends and patterns. This is usually the outcome of an intellectual exercise carried out by analysts depending on the circumstances or peculiarity of the situation under observation. Early warning and conflict prevention are closely entwined and when carried out expeditiously, can be mutually reinforcing.

CAUSES AND STAGES OF CONFLICTS

12. Conflict analysis begins by creating and describing the background to any conflict situation. This is based on the assumption that every conflict has a specific context, history or background. The parties and the issues are emerging from somewhere and from given historical, cultural, political and social contexts¹³ which may be the same or different for the conflicting parties. In other words the assumption that every conflict has a specific context, history or background is the basis on which conflict analyses predicates. Conflicts may therefore stem from a variety of causes and understanding them is the first step in dealing with them effectively or perceiving the warning signs.

CAUSES OF CONFLICTS

13. A few of the most common causes of conflicts are¹⁴:
- a. Perceived breach of faith and trust between individuals.
 - b. Unresolved disagreement that has escalated to an emotional level.
 - c. Miscommunication leading to unclear expectations.
 - d. Personality clashes.
 - e. Differences in acquired values (social, political and economic).
 - f. Underlying stress and tension.
 - g. Combinations of the above

14. Furthermore, the way a society is organized can create both the root causes of conflict and the conditions in which it is likely to occur. Also, any society which is organized such that some people are treated unequally and unjustly is likely to erupt into conflict, especially if its leaders do not represent all the members of that society. If an unequal and unjust society is reformed, then conflicts would be rare.

15. Conflicts also arise for the following reasons¹⁵:

a. When people are competing for the same resources such as territory, natural resources or jobs when they are not fairly distributed or when there are not enough to go round.

b. When people are unhappy with how they are governed. These occur when a particular group wants to be independent from a central government or when their viewpoint is not adequately represented in the government or when the government oppresses them and does not respect or meet their basic needs or expectations.

c. When people's beliefs clash. Religious and political views are particularly sensitive, because people often depend on these for a sense of identity and belonging.

d. Ethnic differences can cause conflict or be made to cause it. Again, people's ethnicity gives them a sense of identity and belonging and it is threats to this sense which can cause violent responses. This accounts for the existence of groups like Ohaneze Ndigbo, Afenifere, Arewa, Ijaw nation and others. In Swaziland for instance, it is the mono-ethnic nature of the society that makes it possible for the monarchical system to survive. For obvious reasons, such a system would not work in Nigeria.

e. When community, opinion, or political leaders seek undue recognition, relevance and political offices in the face of stronger opposition which poses threat to these ambitions.¹⁶

STAGES OF CONFLICTS

16. It is important that in attempting to prevent or manage a conflict situation, the stage of the conflict would have to be identified. This would help in proffering appropriate measures for prevention and management. Most conflicts go through series of stages, which may not occur in any particular order and usually include but are not limited to the stages listed below. They start as latent conflicts, then emerge, escalate, de-escalate and are resolved – sometimes permanently, sometimes temporarily until they emerge or escalate again. These stages are explained as follows¹⁷:

- a. **Latent Conflict State**. There are deep value differences or significant injustices which will potentially lead to an active conflict.
- b. **Emergence Stage**. It is common for significant tensions or grievances to persist over long periods of time without resulting in a noticeable conflict. It could get to a point when conflict will emerge.
- c. **Escalation and Institutionalization Stages**. When a conflict reaches escalation phase, it intensifies quickly. Escalating conflicts can turn into a spiral with each side continually provoking the other to raise the stakes, making the conflict more and more destructive.
- d. **Failed Peacemaking Efforts Stage**. The repeated failure to negotiate an end to a conflict confirms its intractability. Often, these failures discourage new attempts and create a burden of mistrust and loss of confidence which must be overcome. Consequently, the struggle continues. In order to reduce escalations, there may be peace enforcement while negotiations are on.
- e. **Hurting Stalemate Stage**. Once conflicts escalate for a while, the parties often reach a stalemate, neither party can win but neither party wants to back down. At this stage, the parties have 2 options, continue to bleed each other dry or look towards resolution on the basis of give and take or live and let live.

- f. **De-escalation Stage**. Conflicts do not escalate indefinitely; they reverse direction eventually decreasing in intensity until they are forgotten or resolved. In this stage, there is uneasy calm and the crisis might go into dormancy and could erupt again.
- g. **Negotiation Stage**. Parties search for mutually beneficial ways of resolving their conflict. This stage must be timed and executed carefully in order to avoid a return to the escalation stage.
- h. **Settlement Stage**. This marks the end of the active conflict. For instance, with the end of apartheid in South Africa, the South African identity presently incorporates all the people of South Africa instead of just black or white. This was a sign that the settlement stage was successful.
- i. **Peace-building and Reconciliation Stage**. In long-running inter-group conflicts, after successful negotiation, peace-building and reconciliation, it is necessary to prevent a return to the conflict. At this stage, the disputants begin to heal and to rebuild relationships, slowly putting their society back together.

OVERVIEW OF EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

17. Although early warning systems are not new, they have mainly been developed for predicting climate changes, natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts and floods as well as their effects on people. As early as the 1880s, the British introduced nutrition codes in India, a system of information for the purpose of being able to predict food shortages in time.

18. Early warning systems have been used for an even longer time by the military. There are military intelligence systems which during the Cold War, were designed to trace hostile nuclear attacks in time, on the basis of satellite information. Communication Intelligence systems have also been used to gain intelligence on the activities of adversaries with a view to carrying out pre-emptive attacks on the adversaries strategic installations and incapacitating them. More recently, there has been a growing interest

in early warning systems which are designed to detect and signal impending conflicts for the purpose of making possible, preventive intervention instead of reactive action as has been the case over the years leading to the establishment of peacekeeping and peace-enforcement missions. Today, the interest in early warning has extended as far as those responsible for shaping policy. Thus, its importance in conflict prevention is being increasingly recognized.

19. Five reasons can be adduced for the growing importance of preventive measures. These are¹⁸:

a. Increased communicative opportunities and the growing sophisticated means of gathering, processing and analyzing information. The increasing capacity to gather information on the sources of conflict and analyse them, gives the international community, policy makers and NGOs increasing chances of acting in a conflict preventive manner.

b. The effects of the end of the Cold War have brought about new perceptions on international security. The increasing number of internal conflicts also threatens world security thus leading to increased roles of international organizations such as the UN.

c. The State's monopoly of power over its territory and its inhabitants is another issue. This includes sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.

d. What begins as a national problem can quickly become a regional matter, especially as refugee problems will emerge.

e. The rising costs of conflicts and the very limited success of peace-keeping and peace-enforcing operations is changing the focus to preventive measures.

EARLY WARNING INDICATORS

20. The primary measure of the effectiveness of an early warning system is its ability to “trigger” rapid reaction to a degenerating crisis situation. For

such a reaction to be possible, analysis of early warning signals of impending crisis should combine several indicators. They include the following¹⁹:

- a. **Political Indicators**. Political indicators include internal political dynamics, the political actors, institutions, processes and issues related to identity and citizenship. A trend in which elections are preceded by murders, assassinations and kidnappings or post-election conflicts, such as the ones that erupted in Kenya, Zimbabwe and Iran, is indicative of possible future reoccurrences. Preventive measures become necessary before elections take place in such places.
- b. **Economic Indicators**. Economic indicators include the cost of living, inflation rate, unemployment, food security and opportunities for access to critical resources.
- c. **Personal Security**. Issues concerning Law and order, civil-military relations, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons are viewed as personal security factors.
- d. **Military Build-up and Expenditures**. Official discourse on national or group security, the proliferation of militia and paramilitary forces leading to illegal stockpiling of military arsenal are major indicators based on the perceived threats. It is therefore necessary to check arms trafficking.
- e. **Social Indicators**. Demographic makeup, population changes and movements as well as population density are issues that require monitoring because they could reveal some trends that may lead to violence.
- f. **Environmental Indicators**. Environmental indicators include Water security, natural catastrophes, epidemics and pandemics. The struggle for survival, particularly in the face of scarcities could lead to conflict.

MAJOR STAKEHOLDERS IN CONFLICT PREVENTION

21. The need to prevent, rather than merely react to conflicts through peacekeeping and enforcement has been an on-going challenge for the UN and its Member States. In more recent years, the UN's efforts in this area have been backed up by international, regional and sub-regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, and civil society groups. Academics and policy-makers have begun to view conflict prevention as preferred instrument for the creation of peace thus setting the stage for development to take place. The role of these organisations will be discussed.

THE UNITED NATIONS

22. There is a growing understanding, with the UN leading the way, that there must be greater cooperation among the different actors if a culture of conflict prevention is going to be inculcated into the international community's collective security agenda.²⁰ The Carnegie Commission on the Prevention of Deadly Conflict estimated that in the 1990s, the international community spent approximately \$200 billion US on 7 major interventions – Somalia, Bosnia, Haiti, the Persian Gulf, Rwanda, Cambodia, and El Salvador (this does not include Kosovo and East Timor). In order to avoid such huge expenditures that should have been used for developmental purposes as well as loss of lives and property, the international community has to be prepared to pay up-front for prevention, even if the benefits lie only in the future. The human cost of war – death, injury, destruction, displacement and the cost of post-conflict reconstruction far outweigh the cost of prevention.²¹

23. Close observers commonly interpreted the Rwandese context to mean that large-scale ethnic violence against civilians was likely if the civil war was renewed, as seemed likely in early 1994. However, in the higher echelons of state and international agencies, the early warning signals were hardly heard or heeded at all, and news of the genocide was an even greater surprise. But pieces of information were available to enable policy-makers at different levels to draw the more radical conclusion that genocide

might occur on a scale quite different from past patterns. The legal right of the UN and its obligation to act to prevent genocides according to the Geneva Convention, and the enormous cost of a miscalculation, made contingency planning clearly imperative.

24. States, international organizations and other parties who had assumed some responsibility for regulating conflict and had the capacity to act could not draw the appropriate conclusion in the Rwandese case. The failure to respond adequately was in part influenced by the failure to collect and analyze the data that was available and to translate this information into strategic plans. Information and analysis are critical, not only in assisting in anticipating a crisis, but in determining the appropriate response in a particular situation. In the case of Honduras where President Zelaya tried to prolong his stay in office by arranging constitutional amendments to allow for a third term in office, the UN could have warned him of the consequences knowing that tenure extension has always generated problems.

25. A UN Early Warning system must go beyond simply developing a network; it must develop, both at headquarters and in the field, a high-level capability for collecting and analyzing information in particular crisis areas and translating this information into strategic alternatives.²² Furthermore, the head of the early warning system must have direct and regular access to the chief executive as delay could render the available information obsolete. The UN therefore needs to build or support expertise in each region.

THE AFRICAN UNION

26. The AU has an established early warning system. In June 1995, the then OAU Council of Ministers meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, endorsed the establishment of a continent-wide early warning system with its headquarters within the Secretariat. The AU's Constitutive Act and the Protocol on Peace and Security Council (PSC) mandated the AU and its PSC to fulfil a substantially enlarged and much more robust role in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts in Africa. One of the

instruments through which the AU is to operationalise this mandate is the Continental Early Warning System. It is linked with regional Economic Communities such as ECOWAS, Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), as well as research institutes and civil society organisations.²³ The AU needs to adequately fund the system and train analysts in order to make it functional.

ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES

27. Chapter IV of the ECOWAS Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security contains details of the Sub-regional Peace and Security Observation System. The System is elaborate and consists of an Observation and Monitoring Centre located at the Secretariat that is responsible for data collection, analyses and preparation of reports as well as 4 Observation and Monitoring Zones within the sub region. The Centre collaborates with the UN, AU, research centres and all other relevant international, regional and sub-regional organizations. Zone 1 consists of Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania and Senegal with the Zonal Capital at Banjul. Zone 2 consists of Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Niger with the capital at Ouagadougou. Zone 3 consists of Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone with capital at Monrovia while Zone 4 consists of Benin, Nigeria and Togo with the capital at Cotonou.

28. Data obtained from reports of the zonal bureau, after due analysis and processing are forwarded along with the appropriate recommendations, to the Mediation and Security Council and to the Heads of State of the countries concerned.²⁴ The successes recorded by the ECOWAS Commission in its Early Warning System has inspired the East African Community to start developing a similar mechanism as its contribution towards a more stable and peaceful African continent.²⁵ An 18-man delegation from the East African Community visited ECOWAS Commission in June 2009 where Mrs Florence Iheme of the Early Warning Directorate presided over a meeting on the establishment of the East

African Conflict Early Warning System. The need for a paradigm shift from reaction to prevention is therefore gaining ground.

29. Of recent in Guinea, over 157 people were killed and 1250 wounded due the crisis that followed Mousa Camara's declaration of his intention to contest election after taking over government through a military coup. ECOWAS would need to take more drastic measures to avoid deterioration of the situation. Camara should be advised to retire fully from the military before contesting election. Just like the case of Honduras, President Mamadou Tanja of Niger Republic has been nursing ambition for a third term in office and has made moves to amend the constitution. Fortunately, ECOWAS has reacted appropriately by suspending Niger Republic from ECOWAS.

PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTES

30. Several institutes are involved in conducting research into conflicts. Some of their efforts are in the area of conflict prevention. At the National Defence College in Abuja, the African Centre for Strategic Research and Studies conducts series of researches and publishes its findings in its journal, 'Africa Peace Review'. Various contributors to the journal provide some form of data that could form the basis for analysts to draw some conclusions. Additionally, the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Abuja is actively involved in researches into conflicts. With the recent achievements recorded in the Niger Delta Area through the granting of amnesty to militants who surrendered their arms, it is necessary for these institutes to focus on researching into consolidation of the gains and preventing a relapse to conflict.

31. The research efforts of these institutes could directed at monitoring arms movement in the area and the rehabilitation programme of repentant militants, matching physical infrastructural developments with funds made available by government, monitoring social responsibility by oil companies operating in the area and the performance of the Niger Delta Development Company (NDDC) as well as the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs. Data should also be collated on environmental issues affecting the people,

particularly pollution and its effect on farming, fishing and the provision of potable drinking water. Prompt information on these issues could assist government in taking appropriate decisions to prevent a return to use of arms.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY

32. One proactive development of the ECOWAS Early Warning System is the involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in its activities. The AU has also called for training support for civil society organizations in Africa. Two CSOs considered in this regard are the West African Network for Peace building (WANEP); and the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOFF). The International Crisis Group (ICG) is another body whose analysts produce regular analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key decision takers. Its goal is to warn governments, international organisations and the world community about impending deadly conflicts. The ICG publishes 'Crisis Watch', a 12-page monthly bulletin providing updates on conflicts or potential conflicts around the world.²⁶ WANEP covers the 6 geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

THE MILITARY AND OTHER NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCIES

33. It is to be noted that early warning and conflict prevention are different from the concept of traditional intelligence and state security. This is because military intelligence operations are shrouded in a lot of secrecy. The military and other national security establishments carry out monitoring activities with the use of electronic systems through which reliable data can be obtained. Monitoring facilities for the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM), Thuraya, INMARSAT and others were used in USA to detect plans by Rod Blagojevich, the former Governor of Illinois to sell the senate seat vacated by President Barack Obama to the highest bidder.²⁷ He was eventually removed from office thus preventing corruption from being perpetrated.

34. Similar systems were used by Iran to monitor messages sent over internet and other satellite systems to BBC World and CNN's iReport and twitters in the wake of the crisis that followed its last elections. These were

done despite efforts made by Iran to block Internet services and text messages via GSM phones. Such monitoring systems are also useful in conflict prevention. An important role of the military however in conflict prevention is early deployment to forestall crisis situations from degenerating to major conflicts. There is therefore the need for early warning reports to be sent to military authorities to enhance preparation for such deployments, in liaison with the civil police that has the responsibility of inviting the military when a crisis situation goes beyond police capacity.

THE MASS MEDIA

35. Investigative journalism by some well established media houses are very important in conflict prevention. The Cable Network News (CNN) does not only investigate and report impending crisis situations; they follow up issues and constantly remind us to make use of the news. They do this through the advertisement that says: “Impact your world – use the news to do something, it is up to you to make use of the news to impact your world”, and in case you do not understand English, they say it in other languages such as French; “*Affecte votre monde*”. The Chief International Correspondent of CNN, Christiane Amanpour for example, has performed very well in this area. However, inadequate media coverage of the genocide in Rwanda is a separate and serious matter of concern. The media should retrospectively examine their coverage of Rwanda to explain and draw lessons from both the overall failure to report early and accurately on the events that led to the genocide.²⁸

CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE EARLY WARNING IN CONFLICT PREVENTION

36. The obstacles to the operation of early warning systems include the following²⁹:

- a. General lack of theoretical knowledge and practical experience. The efforts being made by some establishments like the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Ghana and WANEP have contributed immensely to training people for conflict prevention.

- b. The limited extent to which operational early warning systems are able to identify areas of tension in sufficient time for effective preventive action to be taken.
- c. Missing link between giving the signal and the response to it.
- d. The opportunities for acting preventively are limited by a number of national and international laws and regulations.
- e. Lack of political will on the part of government to act decisively.
- f. Improper political conduct associated with a must win attitude in elections; winner takes all, greed and various undemocratic attitudes.

STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES

37. The strategies to overcome the challenges to effective early warning in conflict prevention and management include the following:

- a. **Education on Non-Violence.** For non-violence to become effective, education and support will be required to make it a household word. Sensitizing or educating young people to reject violence as a means of problem solving is the key to any sustainable resolution of conflict. This will have to start at the beginning, in families and schools. Non-violent communication training – the brain child of Marshall Rosenberg – is being used to great effect in Israeli primary schools. Also, in the United States, more than 50,000 schools now use a programme on ‘Teaching Tolerance’³⁰.
- b. **Detailed Analysis of Conflict Situations.** Understanding the background to a conflict is critical to understanding the conflict itself. Thus analysts must be employed to critically study conflict situations and advise relevant bodies as necessary. Proffering solution without addressing the issues that led to the conflict can worsen the situation.
- c. **Reconciliation of Parties and Dialogue.** Trauma counselling, truth and reconciliation are important to allow the parties

to air their grievances and prevent them from pursuing divergent goals.

d. **Training**. The training of stakeholders in conflict prevention (data collection, collation, analysis and reporting) is very important.

e. **Effective Communication**. It is necessary to put in place a practicable Channel of Communication with effective communication system to enhance speedy reporting of events. An integrated system is preferable to facilitate sharing of information among the major stakeholders.

f. **Political Education**. Prior to any election, it is necessary for participants to be educated on the need to imbibe democratic culture, accept defeat and congratulate the winner or resort to legal means only to address issues. The resort to legal means has gained ground in Nigeria even though the cases take too long to resolve.

g. **Preventive Deployment**. Deployment of appropriate security personnel based on early warning reports can help to douse tension and prevent conflict. This should be a temporary measure to allow the main issues to be addressed.

h. **Good Governance**. Good governance and democratic system is a necessity in bringing about peace and development.

CONCLUSION

38. Conflict prevention describes the whole range of development and crisis intervention efforts to reconcile parties and groups with incompatible interests, and to prevent the pursuit of divergent goals from degenerating into armed violence. Even if settlement or resolution has been achieved to a certain level, preventive measures are still necessary to avoid a relapse to the conflict or a worsening situation.

39. Early warning generally refers to the set of activities that aim to collect, collate and analyse data in order to detect and identify the signs of an emerging crisis before it explodes into uncontrollable violence. Early

warning is usually the outcome of an intellectual exercise carried out by analysts depending on the circumstances or peculiarity of the situation under observation. Early warning and conflict prevention are closely entwined and when carried out expeditiously, can be mutually reinforcing.

40. More recently, there has been a growing interest in early warning systems. Preventive action is preferred to reactive action as this will help to eliminate or reduce losses to lives and property as well as avoid other issues associated with conflict such as refugee problems and the huge costs of post-conflict reconstruction. The interest in early warning has extended as far as those responsible for shaping policy thus its importance in conflict prevention is being increasingly recognized.

41. The need to prevent conflicts has been an on-going challenge for the UN and its Member States. In more recent years, the UN's efforts in this area have been backed-up by regional and sub-regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, and civil society groups.

42. Some of the challenges to early warnings in conflict prevention include inadequate knowledge on preventive measures, limited extent to which operational early warning systems are able to identify areas of tension in sufficient time for effective preventive action to be taken, inadequate response to warning signs, lack of political will on the part of governments to act decisively and undemocratic attitudes.

43. Among the strategies to overcome the challenges are sensitizing or educating young people to reject violence, understanding the background to a conflict, trauma counselling, training of stakeholders in conflict prevention and establishing practicable Channel of Communication to enhance speedy reporting of events. Others are political education, early deployment of appropriate security personnel based on early warning reports, good governance and imbibing democratic cultures.

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- ²⁶ International Crisis Group, Early Warning Resources, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3397&l=1>, p.1, accessed 12 Oct 09.

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²⁸ Global Impact Vulnerability Alert System: A New Early Warning Initiative, **Op Cit**, pp 34-35.

²⁹ Vlassenroot, Ruddy DK, **Op Cit**, P. 11.

³⁰ Scilla Elworthy & Gabrielle Rifkind, **Op Cit**, p.58.