

Rise in violent conflict shows prevention 'more necessary than ever': UN chief

With the number of people killed in armed conflict rising tenfold since 2005, preventive action is "more necessary than ever," United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said on Tuesday.

The UN chief was speaking to journalists in Norway, where he is attending an annual retreat for international conflict mediators and other high-level decision makers.

Mr. Guterres gave compelling reasons why the international community must do everything to prevent and solve conflict.

"The number of countries with violent conflicts is the highest in the last 30 years. If we compare with 2007 and consider the number of violent situations that can be qualified as war according to the number of casualties, they have tripled," he said.

Prevention is more necessary than ever, and the more difficult conflict resolution is, the more important prevention becomes – UN Chief António Guterres

"At the same time, taking as a reference 2005, when we had the lowest number of people being killed in battle, we have now tenfold that level, which means that the situation is indeed deteriorating in the world. That means that prevention is more necessary than ever, and the more difficult conflict resolution is, the more important prevention becomes."

For Mr. Guterres, mediation is "an absolutely fundamental instrument" in this regard.

This includes formal interventions but also what he called "backdoor mediation", as well as initiatives that involve affected communities.

The Secretary-General is among more than 100 participants taking part in the two-day Oslo Forum, which wraps up in the Norwegian capital on Wednesday.

Attendance is by invitation only, and the informal discussions will cover peacemaking issues and challenges, including the situations in Syria, Libya, Yemen and Mali.

Mr. Guterres has made conflict prevention a cornerstone of his tenure and has consistently pushed for "a surge in diplomacy for peace," even before taking office in January 2017.

His establishment of a High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation later that year underlines this priority.

The Board's 18 members—nine women and nine men—include former global leaders, renowned experts and internationally recognized personalities will support the UN in working more effectively with regional organizations, non-governmental groups and others involved in mediation around the world.

Mediation meeting in Finland

The Secretary-General joined members at their second meeting, held in Finland's capital, Helsinki, on Monday.

Mr. Guterres also delivered an address at Kulturantä, the summer residence of the country's President, where he again highlighted his concerns about conflict, including its relation to global terrorism.

He also touched on the issue of nuclear non-proliferation and the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Turning to climate change, Mr. Guterres described it as "a main accelerator of many other problems around the world."

He reported that the level of greenhouse gas emissions rose in 2017: the first time in recent years.

"It is clear that we are far from doing enough in relation to the risks that we face due to climate change," he said.