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**Speech by**

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**" Mediating Today's Conflicts for Tomorrow's Peace"**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

I am delighted to be here. This 'Mediators Retreat' is a terrific joint effort of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. Norway knows that building peace can feel like a Sisyphean task: a punishment from the Gods. Sometimes your hard work done over years is unravelled in weeks. Still, we can all take inspiration from the fact that the number of armed conflicts is steadily going down.

Peace building requires creativity, resources and above all commitment. Thankfully, Norway has these qualities in spades. You have a great reputation as a tireless campaigner for peace. I want to pay tribute to those efforts, of all peace makers: the government, NGOs, researchers and others.

It is important that this conference brings together a wide range of people. Practitioners and researchers; mediators and peace builders; from national and international administrations. The central question you are debating is the right one: what can we learn from our experiences to improve our collective efforts?

You have invited me to speak about the role of the European Union in conflict resolution. But I came here today as much to learn from you, as to share any thoughts which might help you in your work. Hopefully, we will have some time to debate these complex issues.

So what about the role of the European Union? It has become less fashionable to describe the European Union and its previous incarnations as a peace building project. Many say this is a terrible cliché. Maybe so. But that is how we started, and what we still are today.

The challenge for the Union is to translate the lessons we learned in our daily work, including enlargement, into tools and expertise in the external arena. In essence the Union is a big mediation and conflict resolution machine, based on law and non-stop negotiations.

As in any negotiation, we are not always successful. But ultimately, we always find a way forward. It is this lesson, and Europe's long tradition of consensus politics, that puts us in a position to not only advocate preventive diplomacy crisis but also implement it.

In foreign policy, what is different and better compared to only a few years ago is our progress in terms of doctrine and operational effectiveness. This has been translated into a much greater presence on the ground, through our ESDP operations.

We often forget how young ESDP is. Our first mission started only a little more than three years ago. But we now have more than 12 in the field, on three continents, from 'classic' peacekeeping, to police training, from border monitoring, to security sector reform. The linking of civilian and military elements, at both the conceptual and operational level, is probably our most important contribution to conflict resolution. All are concerned with conflict prevention, resolution and stabilisation.

I strongly believe that being on the ground has helped to European Union to play a greater political role, including in preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution. This is also a natural growth area for more work. If you don't like preventive wars, you must develop preventive policies. Sometimes, like in Aceh or Bosnia, our interventions came at the end of a mediation process conducted mainly by others. In other cases - Israel-Palestine but also Moldova and elsewhere - the EU is working with others to solve these long-running conflicts. In yet other cases – FYROM, Ukraine, Iran – it has been the Union that has lead efforts to prevent crises from exploding.

For a variety of reasons it would be difficult for the Union to take on the role of Norway in Sri Lanka or Denmark in Nepal. We are not a state. And we must accept that others use historically-shaped prism, just like we do. So, the history and current state of bilateral relations of our member-states can colour people's view of the Union. On the whole, however, acting under the banner of the European Union, has benefits. We are seen as active but non-threatening. The call for Europe to become more involved is there, around the world.

The case of Aceh is interesting. It was at the parties' insistence that the monitoring of their peace agreement be done by the European Union, together with ASEAN, rather than others. It is often elites who drive conflicts. So it is with them that we get peace agreements signed. But at some point ordinary people have to see the benefits. It is not enough, as Tacitus put it and Byron echoed after him, that 'they make a solitude and call it peace'.

We all know the dynamic. In the face of escalating violence, calls go out for outsiders to stop the carnage. They push, cajole, bully and bribe the parties into signing an agreement. The news is proudly announced on TV and in the papers. But only then does the tough work begin. How to make it work? How to stop the spoilers? How to prevent the 'you go first temptation'? How to rebuild a war-torn society? In short, how to make peace self-sustaining?

In the beginning outsiders have leverage, commitment and resources. But that wears off. If peace is to endure, it should rest on the parties themselves, at the level of both elites and ordinary people. It should be their peace, not ours. Too often when we negotiate an end to a conflict we do not do enough to negotiate the peace.

Take Darfur. We have now an agreement – imperfect perhaps but an agreement nonetheless. But if we do not make every effort to ensure its implementation between those who have signed, then there is no prospect of including the others who have not. We can and must all do better in this follow-up phase. Ensuring that monitors or peacekeepers are on the ground in sufficient numbers and as soon as possible. Quick delivery of aid, so that people feel the benefits of peace in their pockets. Help to those who want to return home. Support for demobilisation and re-integration of fighters. Technical help to build effective and accountable state institutions.

It does not sound like rocket science but we collectively are not doing as well as we should. My hope is that the UN Peace Building Commission will help us improve our success rate in the post-agreement phase.

Thus far I have spoken about 'classic' conflict resolution where the parties and boundaries of the conflict are easy to identify. There is another type of conflict we should discuss. It involves a toxic brew of group identities, a sense of alienation, resentment, the use and misuse of religion and so on. It is a global conflict in which our values are tested. It is a borderless conflict, taking place also in our cities and societies. Some of the flashpoints are Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Kashmir. But also London, Madrid, Amsterdam and Copenhagen. The cartoon crisis was just one manifestation.

Part of the answer lies in more dialogue with Muslim world. A dialogue in which we seek common ground while upholding our values, if they are attacked. It is not easy to conduct this dialogue.

There are no two cohesive 'camps'. We should not reduce people to just the religious dimension of their multi-layered identities. It also involves difficult questions on who to engage. Should we talk to radical Islamists and up to what point? And what about those who have justified or used violence, now or in the past? These are intensely difficult moral and political questions. But all conflicts have ended by talking to 'the other' at some point. As Yitzhak Rabin rightly said: You don't make peace with your friend. You make it with your enemy.

I see all the pitfalls, especially for governments. But my sense is that this larger conflict will not be resolved if we talk to ever fewer people. Private mediators, Track 2 or other initiatives in which many of you have experience, can do things that governments can't.

Dear friends,

I have looked at your programme and must say that I would have liked to participate more fully. As the craft of mediation is becoming more sophisticated, retreats like this help guide our efforts to prevent conflict; end those that still persist; and promote self-sustaining peace around the world. That surely, is our collective task.

Thank you very much.

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