

*OPENING REMARKS*

**6<sup>TH</sup> EDITION OF THE ROME 2020 MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUES –  
CONFLICTS, PANDEMICS AND PEACEBUILDING:**

**NEW PERSPECTIVES ON SECURITY SECTOR REFORM  
IN THE MENA REGION**

Dear Excellency, Seniora Sereni,

Dear Mr. Magri,

Dear Mr. Guerber,

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the United Nations, I would like to congratulate the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Italian Institute for International Political Studies and the Geneva Center for Security Sector Governance for convening the sixth edition of the Mediterranean Dialogue (MED). I am impressed by the MED which has indeed become a global hub for high-level dialogues on the broader Mediterranean engaging prominent leaders of Mediterranean governments, business, civil society, media and academia.

I sincerely thank you for inviting me to today's virtual regional forum and to deliver the opening remarks. As Head of the United Nations' Office for the rule of law and security institutions, I am particularly delighted to see that the 2020 MED is also dedicated to the importance of SSR in the Middle East and Northern Africa region. Let me also express my sincere gratitude to Italy, ISPI and DCAF for their invaluable support to UN SSR efforts.

Allow me to begin by quoting my good Slovak friend and dear colleague, Ambassador Lajčák, who stated during his Presidency of the UN General Assembly in 2018, "**Security sector reform is key to sustaining peace**".

SSR has become a core element of the UN prevention and sustaining peace agenda as well as of the Agenda 2030: it features prominently in the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly on SDG 16 to promote peaceful and inclusive societies and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. Against this background, I argue that:

- 1) SSR should be a critical part of peace processes and early mediation, and;
- 2) SSR processes must be nationally led and owned with full and inclusive participation of the civilian population at national and local levels.

We are witnessing around the world how popular movements for a people-centered rule of law approach can be powerful drivers of change. Let me recall that the ‘Arab Spring’ a decade ago provided hopes for a better future to many of the 400 million people in the MENA region. It was an impressive, widely supported call for democratic transitions and accountable governments. Yet, many of the aspired ideas and ideals have not yet materialized. With a few encouraging points in the region, the general state of play looks grim:

- Devastating conflicts in Libya, Syria and Yemen are causing vast losses of lives and human right abuses.
- Arms imports within the region remain sky-high.
- The growing power play of regional and global actors is of deep concern.
- Continued authoritarian rule leads to widespread nepotism and corruption, and fosters impunity.

We are reminded **of the urgent need in most parts of the region for governments that better service the needs of people and respect fundamental rights.** Undoubtedly, improved security sector governance is long overdue: enhancing civilian management and oversight of security institutions that are effective, accountable and inclusive, with security actors capable of promoting security and stability to the people.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The ongoing pandemic is first and foremost a public health crisis. Yet, we must not lose sight of related challenges that will be consequential for containing the pandemic and for a quick and sustainable recovery. The struggle to uphold the rule of law is one of them. As elsewhere in the world, the pandemic has significantly impacted on the security in the MENA region, where a sky-rocketing unemployment, coupled with a collapse of remittances and increased food insecurity has highlighted how disruptive the pandemic can be with far-reaching political and security consequences. Border closures and travel bans have *inter alia* severely constrained the deployment of good offices and conflict prevention capacities. But the United Nations have continued mediation efforts to the extent possible, including in Libya and Yemen.

**In Libya**, the UN Mission has provided critical support through the coordination of international assistance to SSR and development. UNSMIL has supported capacity building, particularly through the UNSMIL-UNDP Policing and Security Joint Programme, including community policing, judicial police training, and the empowerment of women. The Mission is further supporting the peace talks to agree on a ceasefire and setting the conditions for Libyan-led transitional security arrangements.

**In Yemen**, the security sector reform team of the Office of the Special Envoy has supported mediation efforts undertaken in an active conflict setting where the parties, so far, have failed to engage in traditional security sector reform. Our Office there is actively opening channels for communities and citizens to participate in shaping security institutions, building experience with accountability and oversight mechanisms, and dialogues on creative options for managing weapons. Our Yemen SSR team, in collaboration with UNDP, is engaging in professionalizing police and other security forces in support of a peace agreement.

*Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Moving forward, international actors engaged in support to the security sector in the region will have to pursue a holistic approach anchored in historical and socio-political awareness. It should factor in national and regional power dynamics and take national ownership as a central point of departure.

Most importantly, maybe now more than ever – in the midst of a global crisis – **governments including security providers will *have* to understand that societal trust is the greatest capital for sustained peace and prosperity**, and that it remains in their interest to put the needs of their populations at the core of their actions. **Let me reiterate that we at the United Nations stand ready to continue to support those efforts.**

I thank you for your attention and wish you fruitful discussions in the dialogue.