

**Making Prevention Everyone's Business:
Lessons Learned from Disaster Risk Reduction, Nuclear Nonproliferation, and
Public Health**

Sabrina Stein with Renata Segura

Executive Summary

Prevention is at the heart of the United Nations Charter, which calls on the organization “to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace.”¹ Yet, in the seventy-three years since its inception, getting prevention right has been one of the biggest challenges for the UN. Despite difficulties in figuring out how to define and operationalize prevention, the extent of human suffering as a result of crises and conflicts today is testament to the urgent need to rethink how the UN and member states do prevention.

Renewed interest in getting prevention right stems from Secretary General António Guterres' vision for the UN, influenced by the 2015 and 2016 reviews, which complements the sustaining peace approach. The SG has introduced a set of reform proposals to the UN peace and security architecture, the UN development system, and UN management that were designed with prevention and sustaining peace at their center.

This paper argues that prevention would do well to follow some of the lessons learned from disaster risk reduction,² such as the need for *multistakeholder and multilevel engagement*; from public health,³ including the *importance of targeted and individual prevention*; and from nuclear nonproliferation,⁴ namely the need for *permanent prevention*. These three fields were chosen because of the diversity of what they aim to prevent and how they conceptualize and operationalize prevention, and considering these three issues in conjunction can shed new light on how prevention is thought of. While these fields do not have perfect track records on prevention, they do show that **prevention needs to be permanent, intentional, and everyone's business**.

As the UN system focuses on the SG's reforms and member states focus their attention on negotiations concerning the future of the UN architecture, there is a danger that discussions on prevention and sustaining peace will be put on the backburner and lose much-needed momentum. With this in mind, this research hopes to continue the discussions on prevention and sustaining peace by bringing a set of different perspectives from these three fields.

¹ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations* (October 24, 1945), available from <http://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/>.

² References to and examples from the field of disaster-risk reduction are drawn from the paper produced by Colin Walch for this study, titled “Prevention in Disaster Risk Reduction.”

³ References to and examples from the field of public health are drawn from the paper produced by Alana Kolundzija for this study, titled “Prevention in Public Health.”

⁴ References to and examples from the field of nuclear nonproliferation are drawn from the paper produced by Karim Kamel and Lovely Umayam for this study, titled “Prevention in the Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime.”

The report argues that examining other fields that work with prevention at their core might help bring new ideas to the prevention agenda and contribute to the discussion on how to make prevention a concrete and actionable reality for both the UN and member states.