

UN Security Council Recommends António Guterres to Become the Next UN Secretary-General

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect welcomes today's vote by the UN Security Council to formally recommend Mr. António Guterres to the General Assembly for appointment as the next UN Secretary-General. The leadership displayed by Mr. Guterres as former head of the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and as former Prime Minister of Portugal, demonstrate his capacity to lead the UN in a time of unprecedented crisis.

With 65 million human beings currently displaced by war, persecution and atrocities, the UN faces an existential challenge. During 2016 the UN had to respond to four "Level-3" emergencies in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and South Sudan. In each of these situations mass atrocity crimes have been committed, inflicting enormous misery and displacing millions of human beings.

The indiscriminate killing of civilians has almost become routine as governments and armed extremist groups blatantly defy international humanitarian and human rights law. But under a committed Secretary-General, the UN has unique political and institutional capacity to prevent mass atrocity crimes, mediate conflict and promote universal rights. Halting atrocities and the resulting humanitarian crises they create also remains essential to advancing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Historically, no single issue has done more to undermine the credibility of the UN than the failure to halt atrocities. From Rwanda and Srebrenica during the 1990s to Syria today, the failure to meaningfully protect vulnerable civilians strikes at the very idea of an international community and undermines the principles upon which the UN was founded.

Mr. Guterres has consistently emphasized the need for a stronger and more innovative UN to address these challenges, including through mainstreaming the Human Rights Up Front initiative. As Secretary-General Mr. Guterres will need to ensure that the UN is able to consistently translate early warning into timely action.

If it is to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century the UN must work with governments and civil society to advance, rather than retreat from, its core values and mission. This is why as Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres must focus, above all else, on upholding humanitarian and human rights norms and mobilize the international community to consistently uphold its responsibility to protect wherever and whenever people face the threat of mass atrocities. Countless lives, and the future of the UN itself, may depend upon his ability to do so.