

United Nations General Assembly holds Ninth Informal Interactive Dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect

On 6 September 2017 the UN General Assembly held a successful Informal Interactive Dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). A record number of states spoke at the Interactive Dialogue addressing the UN Secretary-General's ninth annual report on R2P, entitled "Implementing the Responsibility to Protect: Accountability for Prevention."

During the dialogue 73 member states, two UN observer missions and the European Union delivered statements on behalf of 98 states. The Netherlands delivered a statement on behalf of the 50 members of the Group of Friends of R2P. In addition to member states, observer missions and the European Union, five civil society organizations, including the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, also delivered statements.

The President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Peter Thomson, opened the dialogue followed by introductory remarks by UN Secretary-General António Guterres. Speaking about his first report on R2P, Secretary-General Guterres remarked "The report reflects my conviction that the United Nations must give far greater attention to addressing problems before they escalate and spiral out of control. Prioritizing prevention means setting an agenda that must include practical measures." The Secretary-General's remarks were followed by a panel including the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng, UN Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, Mr. Ivan Šimonović, and Administrator of the UN Development Programme, Mr. Achim Steiner.

Participants at the dialogue underscored the importance of strengthening practical efforts for preventing atrocity crimes and protecting vulnerable populations. As in previous years, while a minority of states challenged application of the principle of the responsibility to protect, the discussion was generally positive and constructive with many states voicing strong support for placing R2P on the formal agenda of the UN General Assembly.

Member states reiterated their concern for populations around the world who continue to endure war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing as a result of the failure to consistently implement the responsibility to protect. Acknowledging the recommendations of the Secretary-General's report, member states discussed the need to hold one another accountable for failures in prevention, including through upholding the ACT Code of Conduct regarding Security Council action against mass atrocity crimes.

Dr. Simon Adams, in his statement on behalf of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, emphasized that, "the inability of the international community to consistently uphold its responsibility to protect in conflicts across the globe has contributed to a historic weakening of the norms that bind and safeguard humanity."

Dr. Adams emphasized that R2P "is a promise to those people for whom crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, or genocide are not abstract words... It is incumbent upon the states gathered here to honor that promise, to uphold that principle, and to take proximate preventive action, wherever and whenever these crimes may be threatened."