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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

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Threat to International Peace and Security: Prevention and Fight Against Genocide

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AS DELIVERED

Madam President

Human progress is evolutionary. It is built on failure and the strength of the positive response to it. Failure always contains lessons.

The UN's inaction in the face of the bloody events of 1994 remains one of the organisation's darkest failures. Despite credible forewarning and despite the frustrated efforts of Council members like New Zealand and some other elected members who tried to persuade the Council to deploy additional UN forces to Rwanda, we all failed. And now, twenty years after we said never

again we are witnessing unspeakable crimes being committed in places like Syria and the Central African Republic. We should need no other reminders that we still have so much more work to do.

The Council's authorisation last week of a new UN peacekeeping mission for the Central African Republic, with protection of civilians at its core, sent a clear message that the savage abuses and atrocities must end. The Council has acted and done the right thing - as have French and African forces. But the situation could so easily have got away from us and descended into even worse chaos. Many of the visible precursors to potential genocide and other atrocities were there. Prevention will always be probably the hardest task we have. Our diligence as a Council must not just be constant. It must be instrumentalised. And quickly. We still have lessons to learn.

The Council must now act to respond to the mass atrocities being committed in Syria – including systematic and widespread torture and the deliberate targeting of civilians by the regime as part of its military strategy. Referral of the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court is long overdue. In this context, France's proposal for Permanent Members to voluntarily renounce their veto powers in cases of mass atrocity crimes is a very good one. We must give it serious consideration with a view to support.

Madam President

The unanimous endorsement by Heads of States and Government of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in 2005 was a resounding acknowledgment that, while States have the primary responsibility to protect their populations from mass atrocities, the international community and this Council must provide protection where national governments have manifestly failed.

On behalf of the Group of Friends of R2P – a group of 45 Member States, including ten members of this Council - we welcome the references to R2P in the resolution just adopted. But while R2P is an essential **normative** response to our past failures, the challenge as always is implementation. We must do everything we can to operationalise R2P.

As we now understand, the genocide in Rwanda did not start with massacres in churches, but with hate speech, discrimination and marginalisation. This underlines the fact that it is possible to identify and implement policy for atrocity **prevention** so that risk factors are addressed **before** a situation becomes a crisis that results in mass atrocities. As the Deputy-Secretary-

General has reminded us this morning, just as genocide is systematic and planned, so the work to prevent it must be deliberate and systematic.

Prevention requires strengthening the rule of law and respect for human rights; building the institutions; ensuring good governance, combatting discrimination, ensuring the participation of women – and, above all, the participation of youth. Youth unemployment – and alienation – is perhaps our most lethal challenge over the next decades. Prevention also requires a robust civil society and NGOs, strong parliaments and open media. National legislation can be instrumental. Education can be decisive.

The designation of a national R2P focal point within countries can help integrate an atrocity prevention perspective into national policies and strategies. Focal points can form instrumental networks – especially across combustible regions – for helping prevent atrocity crimes. Australia co-facilitates the R2P focal points initiative, together with Ghana, Costa Rica and Denmark. We encourage Member States which have not already done so to appoint a national R2P focal point.

We know that effective early warning mechanisms are essential. The Secretary-General's Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on

R2P have a dedicated function to look for signs of the precursors to mass atrocity crimes, sounding the alarm when necessary, and working with States and regional organisations to enhance their prevention efforts. The Council should receive more frequent briefings from *both* of the Special Advisers. We should schedule regular horizon-scanning sessions – serious sessions, uncensored by the Council’s own political dynamics. The Secretary-General’s leadership on this is crucial. The Council should support the vital Rights Up Front initiative – as we now know human rights violations are often the canary in the mine-shaft. We see this in the DPRK – and will be briefed by the Commission of Inquiry in Arria format tomorrow.

We should also support the provision of peacekeeping operations with robust mandates. Protection of civilians must always be at the core of the UN’s efforts to secure peace. The recent use of peacekeeping bases in South Sudan to shelter people fleeing violence shows the type of concrete steps that can make a critical difference on the ground to save lives. It also shows what desperate people fleeing atrocity not just need but rightfully expect from the UN. As Dag Hammarskjöld said, the UN is not here to take people to heaven. **But we are** here to save people from hell. Humanitarian access itself is a vital component in how we must approach peacekeeping.

Finally, Madam President, the Council must continue constantly to support efforts to end impunity for serious international crimes, including the efforts made by the *ad hoc* international criminal courts and tribunals and the International Criminal Court (ICC). We are seeing the evidence that international criminal justice mechanisms can be a powerful deterrent. But to do this, they require strong – serious - international support. It should certainly be axiomatic that this Council provide that support to the ICC where the Council itself has referred a situation to the Court.

In concluding, Madam President

I recall that in his book about the Rwandan genocide titled “*Shake Hands with the Devil*”, UN Force Commander, General Romeo Dallaire – a hero – chillingly describes the mechanics of genocide – and the actual killings every day – of genocide as “**hard work**”. It takes a lot of effort to murder one million people in 100 days. Equally, today, it takes a lot of effort – hard work – from us in the Council to **prevent** genocide and mass atrocities.

Renewed common resolve - through occasions like this debate – is necessary. But it is too easy to give. And it is never enough. As Ambassador Colin Keating concluded in his remarks this morning, and his words deserve repeating:

“If we truly want prevention to work, then we need better political and operational and financial mechanisms for the Council and the wider UN system new mechanisms for improved early warning, better systems for briefing and presenting options to the Council at the early stages of potential crises, enhanced preventive diplomacy, more effective use of Chapter VI tools, quick preventive deployment, and, if all else fails, robust deterrence.”

Madam President

This is a simple linear challenge to all of us in the Council. And there's no rocket science involved in understanding that challenge. We have the conceptual frameworks. And the tool kits. And we see what is happening every day across the world; that's why we're here. What we need to do is work harder, so much harder, to match our response – and the leadership mandated of us by all the peoples of the world through the UN Charter – to meet that challenge.

Thank you.