



United Nations
Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

New York

6 September 2016

Deputy Secretary-General's remarks at the Informal Interactive Dialogue on "Mobilizing Collective Action: The Next Decade of the Responsibility to Protect" [as delivered]

I am honoured to open this interactive dialogue with Member States on the responsibility to protect (RtoP). As you know, this is a concept that has been a consistent priority of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and a principle that is close to my heart.

The Secretary-General, who is now on travel, sends you his greetings as well as his appreciation for your contributions to advance the responsibility to protect. He urges you to redouble your efforts to implement it and assures you of his ongoing support.

For my part, as President of the General Assembly in 2005, I was proud to be part of the negotiations and adoption of the historic commitment by Heads of State and Government at the World Summit to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

This commitment was a signature achievement for the United Nations. Much of it was already embedded in the international human rights obligations of States. But the collective responsibility of the international community to act in the face of atrocity crimes, as well as the imperative to protect populations by preventing such acts, strongly needed to be articulated, affirmed, and placed more prominently on the international agenda. Subsequent events have underlined the need to live up to this important principle.

Since 2005, much has been accomplished. This annual General Assembly dialogue has made important contributions to the development of the principle of RtoP. We have over the years seen the initial commitment deepen into broad consensus on its core elements. We have seen concrete implementation plans to make the responsibility to protect a 'living reality'. And we have seen an increasing focus on the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity in the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council.

We have also seen networks for atrocity prevention. A number of national and regional actors are developing prevention agendas, often with the support of the United Nations.

Still, we continue to witness unconscionable brutality against civilians around the world. We see an intolerable disrespect for international norms and standards, including the basic principles of international humanitarian law. Sadly, we have yet to fully operationalize the responsibility to protect principle, agreed with such high hopes and expectations in 2005.

I would like to highlight two points from this year's report of the Secretary-General which will be critical in overcoming the barriers to implementation.

First, we must in practice demonstrate that we are serious about prevention. The call for prevention is not a rhetorical call; it is a call to action to all States, organizations and other stakeholders. Effective prevention requires foresight and serious analysis as well as constant attention, support and political will. It means integrating a prevention agenda into national, regional and international frameworks for action. It also requires additional institutional capacity. I am glad to see that the SDGs also contain elements relevant to peaceful societies and conflict prevention.

We all know that the window of opportunity is wider at the early stages of a crisis. There are more options for preventive action and action is less costly and complicated in the early stages. Yet, we continue to respond to situations often only when the window of opportunity starts to close. We fail to maximize in time the opportunities we have, using the range of preventive tools at our disposal, not least listed in Chapter VI on Pacific Settlements of Disputes of the UN Charter.

Of course, the responsibility to take preventive action is highest for those who have the greatest authority to act and those who have the greatest influence in potential crisis situations. The Security Council would gain much by enhancing its capacity and willingness to respond to early signs of a crisis. Closer interaction and exchanges between the Council and UN human rights mechanisms and mandates are also critical.

To be effective, Member States should exercise their authority in the interests of populations at risk of atrocity crimes. The protection of human lives must not be seen to be in contradiction to national interests. The Secretary-General's report underscores the need for unity of purpose within the Security Council and other inter-governmental bodies of the UN around the Charter obligation of prevention. Look at Article 1 of Chapter I of the Charter.

Second, we need to be more effective in preventing the recurrence of atrocity crimes. Far too many countries, where there is a risk or occurrence of atrocity crimes, have been tormented by them in their past history. Preventing the recurrence of atrocity crimes is related to all three pillars of the responsibility to protect.

Support to national authorities is critical. We need to address root causes and build or strengthen the ways to counter atrocity crimes – such as by inter-communal dialogue, reform of the security sector, and mechanisms for reconciliation and transitional justice.

We need to invest in sustaining peace, with international assistance tailored to strengthen the resilience of States and their capacity to fulfil their responsibility to protect. We should recall the recent historic adoption of identical resolutions in the General Assembly and the Security Council on peacebuilding and the imperative to sustain peace. This is quite an achievement which would not have been possible a few years ago.

I am pleased that today's dialogue includes the two former Special Advisers of the Secretary-General on RtoP, Edward Luck and Jennifer Welsh.

Thanks to Edward Luck, the RtoP was articulated as a three-pillar structure and an agenda was developed for partnership with regional and sub-regional organizations. And thanks to Jennifer Welsh, we developed a Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, which is now being frequently used by national, regional and international actors as a tool for prevention.

Here, let me also welcome our moderator today, Ivan Simonovic, as the next Special Adviser, taking up the position on 1 October. You have a strong record as a champion of human rights and RtoP. We look forward to working closely with you in the time ahead – as we also will with your successor here in New York, Andrew Gilmour.

Finally, I would be remiss if I were not to pay tribute to my friend and colleague Adama Dieng who has for long made invaluable contributions for the respect of international law and human dignity.

In closing, let me say that I, over the years since 2005, have valued highly the fruitful and engaging discussions at these annual dialogues on RtoP in the General Assembly. The time has now come to seriously counter and confront crisis and potential crisis situations. There are millions of people looking to the UN for help in time of dire need, conflict and distress. In the name of humanity and in the spirit of the UN Charter, we must not fail them.

Thank you.