

Mr. Lomaia (Georgia): I should like first to thank the President of the General Assembly for having organized this important debate. We value it as an opportunity to discuss how best to pursue the responsibility to protect (R2P) in ways that are consistent, effective and, above all, in the original spirit of this foundational principle of international affairs. While Georgia has aligned itself with the statement of the Swedish Presidency of the European Union, I would like to take this opportunity to make some additional points.

R2P as a principle has been accepted by the international community, a fact which has been underscored during this debate. Representatives of Member States have followed the Secretary-General's counsel not to "change the subject or turn our common effort ... into a struggle over ideology, geography or economics" (A/63/PV.96). All in this Hall have been up to the task of not reinterpreting or renegotiating the World Summit's conclusions, focusing instead on ways to implement its decisions in a fully faithful and consistent manner, as the Secretary-General urged.

Perhaps the most important priority that has emerged during this debate is the urgent need to pay closer attention to the proper implementation of the R2P. The potential to misuse this principle could lead to its perversion and subversion. We would therefore like to join our voice to those that have highlighted the perils associated with the insidious or even cynical misapplication of the principle.

This is something known all too well in our part of the world where, last year, the noble logic of R2P was turned on its head. A neighbouring country used it as a false pretext to actually carry out the ethnic cleansing of entire provinces of our country through a unilateral, large-scale military invasion. Hundreds of lives were lost as a consequence. Tens of thousands of innocent civilians were forced from their homes and are still unable to return. This painful experience can help lead us to a better understanding of how to develop safeguards against similar abuses of R2P.

I should like to share a few points we have come to understand about when R2P is likely to be abused — early warning signs, if you will. One ominous sign is when a State turns on its propaganda machine to instigate ethnic hatred. Another is when it begins to invoke quasi-legalistic justifications for unilateral military action. Red flags should also be raised when, in the wake of ethnic cleansing, aggressor countries are able to exploit the international system to banish international monitors, preventing them from observing what is taking place on the ground, or when they ban humanitarian access to afflicted areas.

The roots of this tragedy go back a decade to that moment when it was declared that the collapse of the Soviet Union, an event almost all of us would hail as a historic victory for liberty and a dream come true for millions of those oppressed, was in fact, "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century". The liberation of the Baltic States, Ukraine, Georgia and other States had been, according to that assessment, a disaster. The subsequent moral rehabilitation of the communist regime that claimed the lives of 20 million human beings in the gulag camps is the flipside of the equally reprehensible ideological goal of restoring "zones of privileged interests", which, to put it bluntly, replicates the infamous Soviet doctrine of limited sovereignty for nations like my own. Motivated by this ideological goal and the desire to circumscribe the sovereignty of its neighbours, Russia designed strategies to weaken and, ultimately, to undermine the newly independent States.

As 22 internationally renowned public figures from Central and Eastern Europe put it last week in an open letter, “our hopes that Russia would accept our full independence have not been fulfilled. Instead, Russia is back as a revisionist Power”. In Europe, these leaders continued, Russia “uses overt and covert means of economic warfare, ranging from energy blockades and politically motivated investments to bribery and media manipulation in order to advance its interests and to challenge the transatlantic orientation” of these countries.

To that list of nefarious tactics we would add an innovation that has proved to be especially potent, namely, so-called passportization. The passportization project was launched unilaterally in 2000, focusing on enclaves in newly independent countries. In doing so, Russia breached the national laws of these countries. According to media reports, as many as 2.9 million Russian passports have been disseminated. Shortly after this subversive strategy was initially deployed, several of the Governments in the newly independent States warned the international community of its dangers. One day, they warned, the so-called interests of these newborn citizens would be cited as a pretext for aggression.

Unfortunately, these warnings were not heeded. It took a full-blown war, the occupation of 20 per cent of the territory of a United Nations Member State and, last but not least, the ethnic cleansing of the occupied territories to make the scale of the menace clear. The passports were disseminated simply to create a quasi-legal justification for claiming that R2P had to be applied “to protect the interests of newborn citizens”.

Were other early warning signs ignored that could have helped to predict that last year’s invasion of Georgia and the subsequent ethnic cleansing were being planned? Yes, there were. Perhaps the most obvious was a State-orchestrated campaign of ethnic hatred, accompanied by unprecedented mass deportations based exclusively on ethnic criteria.

The leader of the country responsible for these actions coined the term — to which I call the Assembly’s attention — “ethnically contaminated places”. This leader was referring to the marketplaces where, historically, there has been a predominance of traders from Central Asian and South Caucasian countries. Within days, several thousand ethnic Georgians and Georgian citizens were illegally deported. Some died in detention centres. The European Court of Human Rights has recently ruled to hear the claims of those deported citizens against the State of Russia.

Then, of course, what followed was the invasion. Thirty-six cities and villages across the country were shelled, 600 citizens killed, and important economic, military and civil infrastructure, far beyond the military theatre, destroyed. The regime that invaded under the cynical pretext of protecting its citizens in a neighbouring country then completely cleansed one of the provinces of that country of the citizens of a particular ethnic group.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, over 130,000 people were forced to flee and their houses bulldozed and levelled — an action labelled effective ethnic cleansing by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). International Crisis Group recently determined that the perpetrators “systematically looted, torched and in some cases bulldozed most ethnic Georgian villages”. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe called those abuses “ethnic cleansing”. In a cynical

move, occupational military installations are being built in place of the emptied villages.

Now, having succeeded in effectively restoring a sphere of privileged interest or, perhaps more accurately, a sphere of violent occupation, that country has determined to get rid of any inconvenient witnesses, international monitors and observers. Within the past two months, Russia used its veto powers in the OSCE and the Security Council to terminate two important international missions in Georgia, the OSCE Mission to Georgia and the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia.

In conclusion, I would like to support the initiative of the Hungarian Government to establish the Budapest Centre for the International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities. We stand ready to cooperate with the Centre by providing materials and documents that would help us to better understand a variety of early warning indicators on the possible misapplication of the noble doctrine of the responsibility to protect.