

**Statement of H.E. Jānis Mažeiks,  
Permanent Representative of Latvia to the United Nations  
On behalf of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania  
at the eighth UN General Assembly Informal Interactive Dialogue on the  
Responsibility to Protect  
New York, 6 September 2016**

Mr. Moderator,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. We align ourselves with the statement on behalf of the European Union.

We thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting and all the panelists for their contributions. Special thank you goes to Dr. Jennifer Welsh for her strong and tireless advocacy. We look forward to work with you, Mr. Šimonović, in your new capacity as the Special Adviser.

We applaud the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his personal commitment to mobilize collective action for the principle of the responsibility to protect during his tenure, which again is demonstrated in his latest report. We strongly encourage the next Secretary-General to prioritize this commitment.

Mr. Moderator,

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are strongly committed to the responsibility to protect and mass atrocity prevention. We recognize the progress achieved over the last decade in advancing the notion and implementation of the responsibility to protect. The concept has been incorporated into the mandates of most UN peace operations, and the protection of populations from atrocity crimes has become more central in the work of the Security Council and Human Rights Council.

However, difficulties to the implementation of the responsibility to protect remain considerable. Over the past five years, the scale and frequency of atrocity crimes has increased. In Syria alone, 400 000 people have been killed and more than 11 million displaced by a civil war. International norms are being challenged with impunity in conflicts across the globe, including closer to home, in the occupied parts of Ukraine. Actions by non-state and terrorist groups such as Taliban, Da'esh, Boko Haram, Al-Shabab, and various offshoots of Al Qaida continue to claim more and more human lives through brutal slaughter and barbaric abuse of even the most basic of human rights. Atrocity crimes have contributed to the global crisis of forced migration and displacement.

Far too often action is not taken, and the world sadly witnesses the failure of upholding the core purpose of the responsibility to protect.

However, the challenges only reinforce the urgent need to uphold the responsibility to protect.

We concur with the UN Secretary-General that in order to establish sustainable systems that are able to prevent and deal with atrocity crimes, we need to ensure that all three pillars of the responsibility to protect are mutually reinforced and well balanced. Use of force must remain as a measure of last resort.

We must increase the use of preventive tools at our disposal, first and foremost addressing the root causes of the conflicts. Committed implementation of the 2030 Agenda will help us advance peace, security, development and human rights. Human rights, good governance and the rule of law are central in conflict prevention and early warning of potential conflicts. Civil society and media increase public awareness about human rights violations and crimes against humanity.

Early action of the UN is crucial. On many occasions the Security Council has not been able to take timely and decisive action to prevent the outbreak of brutality against innocent people. The privilege of the veto has been abused and left the Council paralyzed. We therefore support the proposal to voluntarily restrain the use of the veto at the Security Council in situations involving mass atrocity crimes. We also support the Code of Conduct for any member of the Council not to vote against any action designed to end and prevent mass atrocity crimes.

Ensuring accountability is of utmost importance. Criminal accountability mechanisms can provide important assistance under the second pillar both as prevention measures and for transitional justice. We strongly support the work of the International Criminal Court as the legal arm of the responsibility to protect and hope for swift activation of the Kampala Amendments to the Rome Statute on the crime of aggression. Referrals by the UN Security Council are necessary when there is evidence that atrocity crimes are being committed with impunity.

Mr. Moderator,

The protection of populations from atrocity crimes must be a collective priority. We must improve the implementation of the responsibility to protect at the national, regional and international level by translating the commitment into concrete actions.

Thank you.