

Remarks at a UN Ministerial Meeting on the Future of Civilian Protection in Peace Operations: Endorsing and Implementing the Kigali Principles

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New York City
May 11, 2016

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Thank you so much, Simon, for chairing this panel. Let me begin by thanking Foreign Minister Koenders for convening this meeting and for his significant personal efforts over a lifetime, in a variety of roles, to strengthen the institution of UN peacekeeping. I'd also like to recognize the Netherlands for leading by example in encouraging European countries to return to a greater role in UN peacekeeping missions. It's hugely welcome – and needed.

I'd also like to thank Ambassador Gasana for co-chairing this meeting, and of course for Rwanda's tremendous leadership not only in shaping the Kigali Principles and conceptualizing this effort from the outset, but in working tirelessly with his team to persuade fellow troop- and police-contributing countries to support and implement them. I also would note that, for Eugene, this is a deeply personal exercise. And we've seen when crises have transpired here over the last few years, when there is a chance for Rwanda to step up and play a role in civilian protection, along the lines of what he's described in his remarks, Eugene is always at the forefront in urging UN Member States to contribute and to step up, and also in communicating with his president who has been remarkably responsive, again, when time is of the essence for people in need – particularly in the Central African Republic, as was mentioned. I thank the President of the General Assembly for lending his presence to this event and this initiative, and it's great to be up here on the stage with Ian Martin who will forget more about peacekeeping than most of us will ever know, and so I'm really looking forward to hearing his comments which I'm sure will be both thoughtful and provocative – as they should be.

As we all know, the Kigali Principles are so named because they were released at the conclusion of an international conference held in Rwanda's capital a year ago. But the Principles are named symbolically for Rwanda's capital which – like Srebrenica, in Bosnia – has come to stand for the horrific consequences that can result when UN peacekeepers are deployed to places that are dangerous, with vague mandates and little clarity on whether or not they are authorized to use force to protect civilians.

When the killing in Rwanda started in April of 1994, the UN force commander, Major General Romeo Dallaire, cabled UN headquarters in New York with a simple message: “Give me the means,” he wrote, “and I can do more.” In places like the Amohoro Stadium, where 10,000 civilians had sought protection under UN cover, General Dallaire saw that it didn’t actually take many UN soldiers to protect gatherings of terrified people from the Hutu militia who were threatening them. But as we all know, General Dallaire was not given the means to do more, despite his appeals. On the contrary, as the killing ramped up, peacekeepers were drawn down. And in just a hundred days, 800,000 men, women, and children were massacred – most of them killed not with firearms or sophisticated weaponry, but with machetes, knives, spears, and clubs studded with nails.

And yet the name of the Kigali Principles is not only a reminder of the human stakes when peacekeeping fails to stop terrible wrongs, it also honors the role that Rwanda has played in UN peacekeeping since the genocide; going from a country that hosted and was let down by peacekeepers, to a major peacekeeping contributor, whose soldiers and police have demonstrated that standing up, rather than standing by, can save lives when civilians are in peril.

The service of peacekeepers like the Rwandans has been part of genuine improvements in UN peacekeeping over the 22 years since the genocide in Rwanda. Back then, it’s worth recalling, not a single peacekeeping operation had an explicit mandate to protect civilians; today, 98 percent of peacekeepers serve in missions that do, and they are explicitly authorized to use force if necessary to fulfill their mandates. UN peacekeeping has also strengthened its planning, its command-and-control, and its oversight, among other key areas of reform.

But we have to remember where we started. Strengthening is not enough. What matters is overall performance and effectiveness, and we continue to see reports of UN peacekeepers failing to protect civilians.

The reporting mechanism from missions to the Security Council, or even back to troop- and police-contributing countries from the field, are not very transparent. So it’s hard to know what’s actually happening in many missions around the world. And I know that’s a source of frustration for most Member States, who come at this from a very different angles, but share a desire to know what’s actually happening. But a 2014 report from the UN’s internal oversight office found that in 507 attacks against civilians from 2010 to 2013, peacekeepers virtually never used force to protect those under attack. We continue to see units retreat from towns they are supposed to protect, rather than standing their ground as armed attackers approach. And we continue to see units that, despite receiving desperate calls from civilians under attack in nearby villages – or desperate text messages these days – units that stay on their bases instead of going out and trying to perform a rescue role.

The Kigali Principles are designed to address these and other persistent shortfalls. The Principles are not a panacea, obviously, but they’re also not an abstract set of values; they are meant to be a concrete blueprint aimed at shaping the practices of peacekeepers in volatile situations, particularly with respect to the protection of civilians. To give just one example, the Principles call for troop-contributing countries to empower the military commander of a peacekeeping contingent to use force – because if a commander has to wait hours and hours for guidance from

capital, it may mean not being able to react in time to repel a fast-approaching attack on a nearby village. If properly implemented, there is little doubt that the Kigali Principles would make peacekeeping missions more effective, improve security, and save lives.

Given the real-life implications, which Ambassador Gasana and Minister Koenders have spoken to, the United States urges the UN – the institution of the UN – to attach considerable weight to a country’s commitment to implement the Kigali Principles when it is selecting units for peacekeeping operations – particularly those operations deployed to volatile environments with these civilian protection mandates. The surplus of troops and police – which is new for the UN – the surplus generated at last September’s Leaders’ Summit on Peacekeeping should give the UN a much greater capacity to align the demands of a particular peacekeeping operation with what different countries’ military and police units are willing and able to do. It is incumbent on the UN to take advantage of this, to select units that are trained, equipped, and prepared to protect civilians.

And we know, of course, that the United States and other advanced militaries have an important responsibility in helping support TCCs and PCCs who move out into these incredibly dangerous environments. And we intend to work with you to make sure that we are delivering on that responsibility adequately.

To be clear, I think the United States is now adopting a similar approach to the one we’re calling for the UN to adopt as we think about our support to these peacekeeping operations. Last September, President Obama directed the U.S. government to prioritize peacekeeping support for those troop- and police-contributing countries that, as he put it, “have demonstrated the will to implement UN Security Council mandates, including those for the protection of civilians.” And in that spirit, again, as we continue to implement programs to train, equip, and build capacity – and we’ve heard the demand signals from so many of the countries here in the UN – we will look increasingly to work with partners who support the Kigali Principles and who are making good faith efforts to implement them responsibly out in the real world.

As we meet today, as Ambassador Gasana has indicated, 29 countries have so far announced support for the Kigali Principles. That accounts for more than 40,000 troops and police who serve in UN peacekeeping operations; or, put another way, well over one-third of the uniformed personnel who are out there. And I want to just pay special thanks to the permanent representatives at the missions who have signed onto the Kigali Principles. Any of us who have gone through the process of seeking the support of our capitals for these Principles know that these processes are never short, they’re never without complication. And I think it is very fair to say – not knowing each of your individual sagas – but that it was truly the support of individuals here in New York who put this issue on the map in their capitals.

And of course there are a lot of people in capitals who are extremely supportive of this agenda, but it takes someone lobbying and the use of action-forcing events like today’s panel to get commitments like this across the finish line. And so I really want to pay tribute – on behalf of everybody up here – to those of you who made that effort and the members of your team who did so as well. And I want to pay additional tribute to those who are still trying, and I know there are

quite a few of you out there who had hoped to be with us today and who we look forward to recognizing at a future event.

Give what I've just said, I'm especially pleased to announce that the United States is among those countries supporting the Principles, as expressed in a *note verbale* to the government of Rwanda. We are very proud to be a member of this group. We are also humbled. We know and tip our hats to the countries who are providing huge numbers of peacekeepers – whether infantry, or police, or engineering, or aviation – out in really dangerous environments. And we really, again, are just humbled and proud to be a member of this ever-expanding club.

We know that, again, there are countries that are still studying the Principles and assessing the implications of supporting them for their units who are out there in harm's way. And even though we have very few uniformed personnel in UN peacekeeping, this process for us required a lengthy and careful analysis. And we know that for some countries as well, actually signing onto these Principles would require a shift in the approach that has been taken in terms of military doctrine or tactics in peacekeeping missions. And so, again, we have the greatest respect for those who are pursuing this commitment.

We welcome the seriousness, we welcome the long overdue discussions that are now happening on various and varied approaches to UN peacekeeping. And, again, we look forward to more countries announcing their support for the Principles, and the positive effect that's going to have in the real world, on real lives of people who count on us and, as Minister Koenders said, count on that flag as meaning something.

Let me conclude where I started, in a way, back to Rwanda in 1994. In one of the many chilling incidents that comprised this horrific 100 days for the people of Rwanda, approximately 2,000 Rwandans, including 400 kids, took shelter in the so-called ETO, the *École Technique Officielle*, in Kigali, under the protection of 90 UN peacekeepers. Outside the school's gates, armed militiamen waited – drinking beer, chanting, and threatening the civilians inside. Yet despite being able to see and hear the mob that awaited those civilians, the UN peacekeepers were withdrawn from the school, as they were in so many other places in Kigali and across Rwanda. As the peacekeepers pulled out – and some of you have seen the footage to this effect in various documentaries – several of the civilians in the ETO chased after the jeeps, screaming, “Do not abandon us! Do not abandon us!” And shortly afterwards, as you all know, nearly all of the civilians in that school were killed.

The Kigali Principles are designed to make sure that civilians are not abandoned by the international community again. It's sort of that simple. And we look forward to seeing the Kigali Principles used to inform future peacekeeping missions, to make transparent debates that are really important about how to go about protecting civilians – because Lord knows it's not easy, and these environments are extremely difficult for the brave men and women who are out there in the field. And we hope that more countries will make this set of Principles part of their practice. And I thank you.

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