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Remarks by Ambassador Elizabeth M. Cousens, U.S. Representative on the UN Economic and Social Council and Alternate Representative to the UN General Assembly, at the UNGA Interactive Dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect

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AS DELIVERED

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me first thank the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General for organizing this interactive dialogue. Let me also warmly welcome you, Mr. Chair, as the new Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide as well as acknowledge the contributions of your predecessor, Francis Deng, and express particular thanks to Mr. Ed Luck for his dedication and leadership over the past four years to develop and promote the Responsibility to Protect.

Seven years ago, all member states of the United Nations came together to endorse and accept a shared responsibility to protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. The United States remains a strong supporter of the Responsibility to Protect and is committed to working with international partners to advance this concept and put it into practice.

The recent report of the Secretary-General makes a valuable contribution. It reminds us that all States at all times have "an inherent responsibility to protect." The report also clarifies that R2P's three pillars are mutually reinforcing, not strictly sequential, and reaffirms the idea that "an informed and calibrated response can serve prevention goals as well." We all agree that our goal is for states to live up to their sovereign responsibilities to protect their own populations. However, if they cannot, or will not, we need to rely on a full panoply of tools, and as the Secretary-General's report underscores "coercive measures should neither be left out of our comprehensive strategy nor relegated to use only after other measures have been tried and found inadequate."

Last August, in establishing the new U.S. Atrocities Prevention Board, President Obama affirmed that "preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States." Through this initiative, the United States seeks to increase our own capacity to prevent and respond to mass atrocities through better coordination at home and stronger partnership abroad. A core goal of this initiative is to strengthen the capacity of the UN itself. For example, we will update U.S. training programs for UN peacekeepers to focus on enhanced techniques for civilian protection, including prevention of sexual and gender-based violence, and we will work to help strengthen the UN's capacity for conflict prevention and crisis management, including through preventive diplomacy and mediation.

Mr. Chair, we would like to note several recent actions undertaken by the international community, with active U.S. support, where we did prevent atrocities, we did protect civilians, and we are holding perpetrators accountable.

Last year, the international community prevented the Qadhafi regime from carrying out threats to massacre Libya's citizens through the passage of UN Security Council Resolutions 1970 and 1973, and by mobilizing a coalition that prevented imminent slaughter, saving countless lives.

In Cote d'Ivoire, regional and international partners—including UN peacekeepers—collaborated to protect civilians during a post-elections crisis that turned violent. While the international community's work is not finished in Cote d'Ivoire, these common efforts were essential in preventing a more dangerous outcome.

And in Libya, Cote d'Ivoire, and also Syria, the Human Rights Council established commissions of inquiry to investigate alleged abuses and violations of human rights.

Unfortunately, today, throughout Syria, civilian deaths continue to mount as the regime pursues an unrelenting campaign of violence against its own people. Regional and international partners are continuing their efforts to increase pressure on the Assad regime to hasten an end to the senseless bloodshed. These efforts include the United States' own national sanctions, European Union sanctions, and those levied by the Arab League against members of the Syrian regime. Our responsibility to protect is clear as we encourage all parties to focus on a peaceful transition of power. Moreover, those responsible for committing crimes against the Syrian people must understand they will be held to account.

There are no easy solutions, and no two situations are the same. Difficult judgments will always need to be made about options, actions, and consequences. What we cannot do however is condone inaction in the face of atrocity or mass violence. We welcome the opportunity for ongoing dialogue and intensified work together with all partners so that the international community can fulfill our

responsibility to protect, and when necessary and appropriate, to take timely and decisive action to protect the most vulnerable from the gravest crimes. Thank you.

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