

## Open Statement on the Situation in Kyrgyzstan

United Nations (UN) member states must uphold their 2005 commitment to the responsibility to protect and take immediate action to protect populations from crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing in Kyrgyzstan. The last five days have seen echoes of the very atrocities that gave rise to the rallying cry of “never again” in the wake of the Holocaust, Bosnia, and Rwanda: images of burnt corpses, destroyed homes, and hundreds of thousands of people driven from their homes, many stuck at a closed border. Kyrgyzstan’s government has pleaded for assistance to halt the violence and with each passing day lives are lost. There is no excuse for inaction. Failure to act will cost more lives.

Already, at least 170 people are known to have been killed and 2,000 injured, primarily ethnic Uzbeks, with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reporting today that 275,000 have been displaced as interethnic violence has spread from Osh to Kyrgyzstan’s second largest city, Jalalabad. The attacks, carried out by groups of armed men, appear, as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay noted, premeditated and targeted against ethnic Uzbeks. These armed groups continue to terrorize ethnic Uzbek communities unimpeded as there is no robust military or police presence to deter them. While the situation in Osh appears calmer today, violence in Jalalabad continues and the risk of escalating, deadly violence remains.

The Kyrgyz government has the primary responsibility to halt the violence and protect their population. Yet it has already recognized that its forces have been overrun and it is unable to uphold its responsibility and has asked for help. Russia was asked to provide military assistance, yet appears unwilling to intervene. Nor has the regional security organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), offered military assistance. The United States, the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the UN have similarly failed to offer the military or police assistance desperately needed to quell the violence and provide immediate protection to the people at risk.

A multi-pronged international response is now needed to save lives. The priority is for the UN Security Council to authorize a two-phase operation to deter and halt atrocities. The first phase would be a time-limited multilateral force, consisting of both military and police, led possibly by Russia and the CSTO, to assist the Kyrgyzstan forces in halting the violence and creating a secure environment for the provision of humanitarian assistance in Osh, Jalalabad, and at the border crossings with Uzbekistan. This initial, short-term deployment should be followed by a UN, EU, or OSCE mission consisting of a strong international police force and a mandate to strengthen state capacity for good governance, rule of law, and security sector reform, and to provide mediation and dispute resolution assistance.

The UN Secretary-General and high-level officials must take every opportunity to support the call of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser focused on the Responsibility to Protect for the “international community to operationalise its ‘responsibility to protect’ by providing coordinated and timely assistance to stop the violence and its incitement.” They must also urge the government of Kyrgyzstan to ensure that its forces neither participate nor are complicit in the commission or incitement of atrocities. All actors have a responsibility to make clear that those who incite, aid or perpetrate crimes will be held accountable and take measures to ensure that impunity does not prevail.

The atrocities being perpetrated are preventable. As each day passes and the government’s plea for help is ignored, more lives are lost. Member states have a responsibility to protect populations from crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. The time to act is now.