



New York, 23 September 2011 - Secretary-General's remarks at Breakfast Roundtable with Foreign Ministers on "The Responsibility to Protect: Responding to Imminent Threats of Mass Atrocities" [as prepared for delivery]

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your kind introduction.

I thank the Netherlands, Guatemala and the Global Centre for organizing this annual discussion.

This is a critical moment in the life of the Responsibility to Protect. In the six short years since its endorsement by the World Summit, this doctrine has gone from crawling to walking to running.

Our job is to keep it moving and on track as we move from words to deeds.

As my Special Adviser on these issues is fond of saying, the Responsibility to Protect faces the risks of relevance. However, I would far prefer the growing pains of an idea whose time has come to sterile debates about principles that are never put into practice. The world has seen too much of the latter and too little of the former.

By now it should be clear to all that the Responsibility to Protect has arrived. This can be seen not only in our collective actions in Cote d'Ivoire and Libya, but also in our diplomacy.

Our challenge now is to keep all Charter-based options open, and all of our collective tools sharp.

We need to strengthen ties with our regional, sub-regional and civil society partners.

We need to share information and assessments about States under stress. Effective prevention requires early, active and sustained engagement.

We also need to look at our development, capacity-building and peace-building programmes through the lens of atrocity prevention to be sure they are healing fissures within societies, not deepening them.

Prevention does not always work. So our strategy must also include ways to generate the kind of "timely and decisive" response the Summit called for and our people expect.

No doubt our record has been mixed.

Yet it is a sign of progress that our debates are now about how, not whether, to implement the Responsibility to Protect. No government questions the principle.

Tactics, however, will – and should – be the subject of continuing scrutiny.

In Libya, the international community found the will and the means to respond. Too often, however, that has not been the case.

In Syria, the Human Rights Council called on the authorities to meet their Responsibility to Protect. The Security Council has not yet done so.

In my private and public diplomacy, I will invoke these principles as consistently and as vigorously as possible, as will my Special Advisers, Francis Deng and Edward Luck.

Their office has joined with other UN partners to conduct training sessions on genocide prevention and the Responsibility to Protect in South Sudan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Colombia and Cambodia, among other places.

In July, the Security Council called for assistance to the new government in Juba to meet its Responsibility to Protect its civilian populations.

There is growing demand from Member States for these preventive services, especially from those that have suffered such traumas. To meet the demand, the small joint office of my Special Advisers needs much greater extra-budgetary support.

And let us remember and stress again: Human protection begins with prevention, whether through training, capacity building, dialogue or mediation. We want States to succeed and prevention to work. We far prefer early engagement to late intervention.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You are gathered to help chart the way forward, not to celebrate how far we have come.

Nevertheless, you should be encouraged by the remarkable progress to date and by how much your efforts have contributed to this momentum. The tide of history is with us.

I commend your efforts to make the Responsibility to Protect a living reality for the peoples of the world.

This is a noble undertaking. Let us do our utmost to ensure that this umbrella of protection covers all who need it.

Thank you.