Summary of the *Report of the UN Secretary-General on a vital and enduring commitment: Implementing the responsibility to protect*

The seventh report of the UN Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) takes stock of efforts to advance and implement the norm. While reaffirming the relevance of the principle in the face of ongoing civilian protection challenges, the report assesses implementation efforts under each of the three pillars of R2P, focusing on both individual and collective responses to prevent mass atrocity crimes. The report also surveys emerging threats and challenges to the advancement of R2P and highlights six core priorities for the next ten years. The Secretary-General produced the report following consultations with member states, regional organizations and civil society.

KEY POINTS

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect would like to highlight the following key points from the report:

- Since the adoption of R2P at the 2005 World Summit, a global consensus that spans all regions has developed and there remains no question that protecting populations from mass atrocity crimes is both a national and global responsibility.
- There has been widespread institutionalization of R2P at the UN, including over thirty-five Security Council resolutions, thirteen Human Rights Council resolutions and six interactive dialogues in the General Assembly.
- There have been notable successes in implementing R2P, such as the response to electoral violence in Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. However, failure to act in time to prevent atrocities in the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Syria, as well as the ongoing situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, continue to affect the norm's standing. Ongoing crises in several regions feature atrocity crimes and are generating immense protection challenges that must be met.
- On the tenth anniversary of R2P, there is a need to continue to shift the conversation from conceptualization of the norm to practical implementation. Consensus has been achieved on the three pillar framework with prevention prioritized. Considerable improvement in understanding risk factors, strategies and tools under all three pillars of R2P must be matched with the resources and political will to make the prevention of mass atrocity crimes an ongoing priority.
- New challenges, such as non-state armed groups and technological advancements, are changing the landscape of mass atrocity prevention and will require modifications in preventive and protective strategies by all actors.
- The UN Security Council has a responsibility respond in a timely and decisive manner to protection crises. The 2011 Libyan intervention and the failure to respond adequately to the ongoing civil war in Syria highlight the urgent need for reform of the Council's working methods.
- While R2P has transformed expectations around mass atrocity prevention, actors at all levels must accelerate implementation in order to realize the high aspirations of the norm and the needs of populations at risk over the next decade.

SECTIONS I AND II

These sections of the report provide a summary of the progress over the last decade.

SECTION III: OPERATIONALIZING THE THREE PILLARS

This section of the report highlights efforts to implement all three pillars of R2P, detailing considerable positive steps, but also outstanding gaps, in action to prevent mass atrocity crimes.

Pillar I: The Protection Responsibilities of the State

The primary responsibility of all states to protect their population from mass atrocities builds upon their existing obligations. Responsibility for strengthening resilience to mass atrocity crimes lies within states and societies themselves.

Advancing participation in key legal instruments
- Member States have made encouraging progress by becoming parties to relevant legal instruments pertaining to the prevention and punishment of mass atrocity crimes and have made important strides towards national implementation.
- However, many states have still failed to adopt or ratify relevant treaties, such as the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Building national resilience to prevent atrocity crimes
- The development of effective, legitimate and accountable state structures - particularly constitutional and legal measures that institutionalize respect for diversity - have been important inhibitors of atrocity crimes.
- However, states must effectively prioritize and explicitly address atrocity crime risks, as well as ensure that obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law are upheld even in periods of crisis or conflict.

Expanding and supporting national focal points
- The establishment of national focal points for the responsibility to protect, most notably via the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, fosters a global "community of commitment" for mass atrocity prevention and its members serve as vital repositories of expertise.
- Focal points must be empowered within domestic structures and more UN member states should

participate in order to enhance the sharing of lessons between regions.

Pillar II: International Assistance and Capacity-Building

Important strides have been made in understanding risk factors for mass atrocity crimes and international assistance to mitigate them. Gaps remain in implementation and in the integration of an atrocity prevention lens into broader conflict prevention work, including development cooperation, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

Encouragement
- The international community continues to under-invest in preventive diplomacy. The UN Security Council and Peacebuilding Commission can be more proactive in atrocity prevention, including through closer cooperation with the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and R2P.
- Encouragement to prevent mass atrocity crimes should be expanded through international human rights bodies, such as the Universal Periodic Review process and Special Procedures mandate-holders at the Human Rights Council. This will help bridge the gap between New York and Geneva regarding R2P and mass atrocity prevention.

Capacity building
- International support to assist states should be tailored towards the seven capacities that play a role in mitigating atrocity risks and towards leveraging the role of women and religious and community leaders.[1] The Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes and forthcoming Compendium of Practice developed by the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect are useful tools for states to draw upon in developing action plans to operationalize R2P.
- Pillar II support must be assessed and adjusted to ensure assistance specifically addresses mass

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[1] The seven capacities are: a professional and accountable security sector, impartial institutions for overseeing political transitions, independent judicial and human rights institutions, the capacity to assess risk and mobilize early response, local capacity to resolve conflicts, media capacity to counteract prejudice and hate speech, and capacity for effective and legitimate transitional justice. *Report of the Secretary-General on fulfilling our collective responsibility: international assistance and the responsibility to protect,* (A/68/947).

atrocity crime risks, builds mutual commitment and respects national ownership.

Protection assistance

- UN peacekeepers are increasingly called upon to uphold R2P, with ten out of sixteen current UN peacekeeping operations mandated to protect civilians.
- UN peacekeeping operations must more effectively identify atrocity crime risks as outlined through the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes. Missions must be fully committed, equipped and mandated to support host states in protecting civilians.
- Member states must continue to deny perpetrators the means to commit atrocity crimes, including by vigorously combatting the flow of small arms and light weapons and ratifying the Arms Trade Treaty.

Pillar III: Timely and Decisive Response

Timely and decisive response using the range of non-coercive and coercive tools in a flexible manner remains essential to protecting populations if prevention does not succeed. Despite a wide range of non-military options to respond or prevent an escalation of mass atrocity crimes, Pillar III continues to suffer from the misperception that it is solely concerned with the use of force.

There are five prerequisites for the success of an early and flexible approach to acting under Pillar III:

1. The choice of tools need to be better shaped by timely and accurate knowledge of dynamics on the ground and their possible consequences.
2. Actors need to enhance their understanding of which tools are likely to be effective in responding to country-specific cases.
3. The employment of Pillar III measures needs to be integrated into comprehensive strategies that seek to actively prevent the commission of mass atrocity crimes.
4. When military responses are mandated by the Security Council, the goals, duration and procedures for review must be clear and implementation must be fully compliant with international law.
5. The Security Council must be more consistent in effectively responding to mass atrocity situations.

SECTION IV: NEW CHALLENGES IN PROTECTION

This section discusses the changing landscape of mass atrocity prevention, focusing on two emerging challenges: non-state armed groups and new technologies.

Non-state armed groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Boko Haram, have embraced the perpetration of mass atrocity crimes as a strategy for advancing their objectives and are challenging the international community to modify preventive and protective responses in the following ways:

- Early warning mechanisms must be specifically calibrated to anticipate threats to civilians posed by non-state armed groups, including their objectives, ideologies and tactics.
- Responsive measures under the third pillar, including the use of military force, may be less effective against non-state armed groups, and must therefore be part of comprehensive solutions that address "root causes."
- Synergies between R2P and other efforts to counter violent extremism should be explored while keeping in mind the distinct, legal and policy framework underpinning R2P.

New technologies, including the internet, mobile phone networks and social media, have enabled new forms of engagement with both positive and negative consequences:

- _Positive_: Early warning models can benefit from rapidly expanding open-source information and mobile phone networks can act as a life-line in acute protection crises.
- _Negative_: Non-state armed groups are utilizing the internet and the reach of social media to disseminate violent extremist ideology and to incite and publicize mass atrocity crimes.
- _Challenge_: Maximizing the potential of new technologies to prevent mass atrocity crimes and ensuring that the freedom of expression and opinion are upheld.

SECTION V: PRIORITIES FOR THE NEXT DECADE

This section of the report presents six core priority areas for the next decade of the Responsibility to Protect.

1. **Demonstrating political commitment** by engaging in bold institutional change at all levels to make atrocity prevention a policy priority. The UN's *Human Rights Up Front* Action Plan, for example, has improved the organization's capacity to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes.
2. **Investing in mass atrocity prevention** to overcome challenges of translating early warning into early action, embedding prevention within institutions at all levels, and understanding which tools work best in mass atrocity situations.
3. **Ensuring more timely and decisive response** to mass atrocity situations, in particular by the UN Security Council. Permanent members should exercise restraint in their use of the veto in mass atrocity cases. States who use their veto are obligated to publicly propose an alternative strategy to protect civilians from mass atrocities.
4. **Preventing recurrence of atrocity crimes** by providing sustained assistance following conflict and engaging in long-term peacebuilding that specifically addresses mass atrocity risks.
5. **Enhancing regional action** by leveraging institutions and mechanisms within regional bodies to advance atrocity prevention and realize the vital role of regional organizations in implementing R2P.
6. **Strengthening peer networks** by empowering focal points through national strategies that assess atrocity crime risks, identify priorities for action, promote extensive training, more effectively mobilize resources and enhance global cooperation, including with civil society.

SECTION VI: CONCLUSION

This section provides concluding reflections, summarizing the progress made since the 2005 World Summit. However, partial or inadequate efforts to prevent mass atrocity crimes and protect populations continue to affect the standing of R2P.

The report highlights four ways in which the Secretary-General will act to further advance international support for R2P:

1. **Exercising his good offices**, including through the authority granted by Article 99 of the UN Charter, to bring situations to the attention of the Security Council and broader international community.
2. **Engaging in preventive diplomacy** to encourage actors to uphold R2P and warn of consequences of non-fulfilment.
3. **Enhancing mechanisms for cooperation between the UN and regional organizations** to build partnerships for protection.
4. **Implementing the *Human Rights Up Front* Action Plan** to improve the UN's capacity to respond early and effectively to warning signs and better mobilize political support for preventive action.

The report also calls on Member States to:

• Declare mass atrocity prevention a national policy priority and articulate a national strategy.
• Expand and empower focal point networks.
• Expand funding for preventive diplomacy, update early warning systems, regularize atrocity prevention in peer review discussions and conduct lessons learned reviews.
• Include mass atrocity prevention in regional organization discussions and expand cross-regional engagement.
• Ensure UN peace operations are adequately equipped and trained to protect civilians and uphold R2P.
• Place R2P on the formal agenda of the UN General Assembly.
• Tailor post-conflict peacebuilding to prevent recurrence of mass atrocity crimes.
• Expand efforts to counter violent extremism.