

General Assembly Informal Interactive Dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect Statement by Mr. Gus Miclat, International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect

1. Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to convey my gratitude for the opportunity to speak. I would like to also thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Mr. Ivan Šimonovic, for moderating this meeting and the panelists for their interventions.

2. My name is Gus Miclat and I am the Executive Director and Co-Founder of the Initiatives for International Dialogue, a regional advocacy and peace-building organization based in the Philippines. I am also a Steering Committee member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) which, with its 90 plus members working in over 40 countries, is the only global civil society network working to protect populations through the implementation of RtoP.

3. First, I would like to welcome the Secretary-General's latest report and applaud the progress that has been made in advancing the Responsibility to Protect. Like the Secretary-General, I believe that informed and coordinated collective action is one of the most important and potentially powerful tools available to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes. For example, this can be seen in the strides that the Mindanao Peaceweavers (MPW) and the All-Out Peace (AOP) movement, two of the broadest civil society peace networks in my country that my organization anchors, have made towards the peace process there.

4. The MPW developed a Mindanao Peoples' Peace Agenda (MPPA) that reflected the aspirations for peace from the point of view of grassroots citizens directly affected by the conflict, which served as a framework for our collective action and engagement in the peace process. It goes without saying that the Agenda was a key input in the deliberations of both the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's (MILF) peace panels, who eventually inked a peace agreement in March 2014 after almost two decades of war. The AOP meanwhile helped dissipate, if not arrest, a rising tide of vile, bigoted and anti-Muslim rhetoric in the country that climaxed in the call for an "all-out war" against the Muslims following a botched anti-terrorist operation of the government, resulting in the deaths of 44 Special Forces commandos, 18 MILF combatants, and 5 civilians near a MILF camp in January of 2015. Through AOP, motivated peace networks and civil society groups worked

together to call for justice and accountability, honor those who had fallen, and helped to simmer the tensions as an “all-out war” was averted.

5. However, through my work, I have also seen the disastrous outcomes that hail from the failure to work collectively to prevent atrocity crimes. I come from a region that has witnessed such horrible events as the loss of 25 percent of Cambodia’s population due to atrocities by the Khmer Rouge. The East Timorese population was decimated by almost one fourth of its total during the illegal occupation of its country by Indonesia, who itself suffered a pogrom of more than a million killings perpetrated by the Suharto dictatorship. But daily horrors are still ongoing, exemplified in the increasingly dire plight and continued statelessness of the Rohingya in Burma. It is even sadder that their condition continues to this day despite the recent election of an avowed democratic government led by the democracy icon and Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

6. As these past and ongoing situations from my region all too clearly show, one of the most perplexing obstacles that RtoP faces is the failure to invest in prevention. As the Secretary-General iterated, rhetorical support for atrocity prevention itself does not protect populations from atrocity crimes. A failure to turn commitments into concrete action not only costs innocent lives, but also forces the international community to fall back on coercive measures, which are costlier to mobilize and themselves can have destructive effects. The ICRtoP appeals to States to recommit to the prevention of atrocities by taking concerted action to institutionalize preventive measures and policies at the national, regional, and international levels.

7. Central to moving words to deeds is the development of coordinated and inclusive prevention initiatives and policies that are in sustained partnership with or informed by civil society. Such actors are instrumental in leading and implementing preventive measures, ranging from locally structured initiatives through to advocacy at the international level. Civil society has also continuously been at the forefront of taking action to address past and current atrocities in my region, and globally, through promoting justice and accountability, monitoring and reporting human rights violations, and working directly with communities affected by conflict and atrocities. The ICRtoP encourages Member States to invest in building and institutionalizing relationships with civil society so that collectively we can work to coordinate efforts to prevent future atrocity crimes.

8. An additional measure that will support the development and implementation of holistic policies and preventive action is prioritizing the mainstreaming of RtoP. Other sectors share similar prevention measures and peace and security objectives, and their promotion aids in the implementation of RtoP. Understanding such mutual linkages and exploring how existing efforts may address the risks associated with atrocities is essential for a more informed and effective approach to prevention. For instance, women and girls are disproportionately affected by atrocities and discrimination, and policies violating women's rights are often indicators of or can amount to atrocity crimes. The protection and empowerment of women is essential in recognizing early warning signs and preventing atrocities, while the meaningful participation of women in society and peace and security processes has been proven time and again to contribute to sustainable peace. The pro-active domestic translation into policies and mechanisms of the Women, Peace and Security agenda will help institutionalize this aspiration.

9. Development aid also provides an often overlooked, yet integral part in preventing the perpetration of atrocities and helping to rebuild more sustainably peaceful societies in their wake. Although a great step forward was taken last year to link development and conflict prevention in the Sustainable Development Goals with the inclusion of Goal 16, we must work together with development providers and practitioners to further incorporate an atrocity prevention lens into development programming to ensure the efficacy and sustainability of development aid in "at-risk" societies to prevent atrocities or their recurrence.

10. Furthermore, Mr. President, as the UN body tasked with making the greatest international peace and security decisions, the Security Council bears the responsibility to take leadership in implementing preventive and swift action in the presence of early warning signs. Disunity prevents the Council from fulfilling its core obligation to promote international peace and security as well as to uphold the international community's RtoP, and has tragic and dire consequences. The ICRtoP strongly encourages the Security Council's Permanent Members to demonstrate their support for strengthening unity in this body when facing imminent or ongoing atrocities through exercising restraint of their veto power against resolutions that seek to prevent or halt such crimes. The ICRtoP also urges all States to express or reaffirm their support for the Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency (ACT) Group's Code of Conduct, as well as for the political declaration for a regulation on the use of the veto jointly initiated by France and Mexico.

11. The ICRtoP would also like to take this opportunity to encourage Member States to act on the Secretary-General's recommendation to strengthen their commitment to the Responsibility to Protect through developing a new General Assembly resolution. The ICRtoP continues to urge States adopt a resolution that reaffirms their commitment to RtoP, recalls the primacy of preventing these crimes, expresses support for the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and RtoP, and formalizes the annual dialogue process.

12. Finally, Mr. President, the ICRtoP continues to stand steadfast in its commitment to serve as a partner for actors at all levels as we all work together towards the protection of populations from atrocity crimes into the next decade of the Responsibility to Protect. Thank you, Mr. President.