

Statement delivered by the Delegation of the United Kingdom to the United Nations, at the United Nations General Assembly Thematic Panel Discussion on "From commitment to implementation: Ten years of the Responsibility to Protect," convened by the President of the General Assembly [Unofficial Transcription]

26 February 2016

Mr. Moderator,

I want to begin by thanking the President of the General Assembly for holding the discussion to mark this important anniversary – the 10th – on the responsibility to protect and if I may, I want to thank you for the way that you are moderating the sessions and turning it into something much more interactive and therefore useful than we are sometimes used to at the United Nations.

The United Kingdom has been a strong advocate of the responsibility to protect all along and we are very proud to recommit to that support today. We very warmly welcome the strong role that each of our panelists has been playing in the implementation of RtoP and the role of so many member states. I, in particular, welcome the comments made by the European Union and the Friends of RtoP.

We have this moment now where we can take stock of how far we have come and reflect on the successes as well as the challenges and to look forward to the next 10 years. It is a moment to think about how best to strengthen the mechanisms that we have at our disposal to help prevent and respond to mass atrocities when they continue to occur. The UK will continue to play our part. We've recently agreed a new strategic, security, and defense review, which amongst other things puts the responsibility to protect at the center of what we are doing continuing to drive toward global improvements. We will strengthen our own approach to the prevention of mass atrocities. We will work to improve our analysis of risk situations and we will continue to encourage greater and more effective international coordination in situations that relate to potential or on-going mass atrocities.

To pick up the point that Navi Pillay made recently, the human rights interface with peace and security is very well embedded now and the Secretary-General of the United Nations has played a very effective role in that embedding, including through his very welcome initiative on Human Rights up Front.

Thinking about the challenges ahead and the current challenges to protection, we have to start with Syria. That is the biggest protection issue facing us and it is where more civilians continue to be killed and continue to be forced to flee their country. We welcome the agreement between the US and Russia on the cessation of hostilities which the Security Council will be voting on this afternoon. It is absolutely crucial that the political negotiations can resume as soon as possible. We need, in short, to turn words into action and to ensure that there is a significant change in behavior by the Syrian regime and its backers so that civilians in Syria can no longer suffer from all of those indiscriminate attacks.

Finally, in terms of what we can do, we can try to improve early warning; we can try to turn that early warning into early action; and we can all sign up to the ACT Code of Conduct that commits us never to vote against credible security action to prevent and respond to mass atrocities. I am very proud that the UK has not used our veto at all since 1989 and I am very proud, as a Permanent Member of the Security Council, that we have signed up to that Code of Conduct.

Finally, I would encourage everyone to think about what practical action can we each take to support a united approach when we do have early warning of impending conflicts and crises.

Thank you very much.