

**Statement on behalf of the Group of Friends
of the Responsibility to Protect at the**

UN General Assembly

**Informal Interactive Dialogue on the Responsibility
to Protect**

New York, 6 September 2017

Mr. President,

I have the honor of delivering this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, consisting of 49 Member States and the European Union, and co-chaired by the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Republic of Rwanda.

The Group thanks the President of the General Assembly for convening this Informal Interactive Dialogue.

We also thank the Secretary-General for his Report on *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect: Accountability for Prevention*.

We welcome the fact that the report underscores that R2P is a key element of the Secretary-General's prevention agenda.

The Group of Friends shares the view that we must prioritize the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, not just in word but also in deed.

We also agree that legal, political and moral accountability is critical in order to translate R2P into an agenda for individual and collective action.

For our part, in addition to reaffirming our resounding commitment to R2P as enshrined in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the World Summit Outcome Document, we want to highlight a number of points from the Secretary-General's Report that we consider are critical.

We firmly agree that the cornerstone of R2P is the primary responsibility of States to protect their population from mass atrocity crimes.

In this context, we welcome the issuance of the Secretary-General's five recommendations for domestic action, and take this opportunity to encourage all Member States to conduct periodic self-assessments to ascertain how national efforts to prevent atrocity crimes can be strengthened.

We share the Secretary-General's view that accountability for mass atrocity crimes is among the most effective ways of preventing their recurrence.

The Group of Friends of R2P stresses that the fight against impunity and ensuring accountability for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes is strengthened through the prosecution of these crimes in national and international criminal justice systems.

In this respect, we underline the primary role of national judicial systems and the importance of the progress of international criminal justice in the past years.

Members of the Group of Friends of R2P have different positions on the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; many have joined, while others have chosen not to do so.

The Group of Friends supports holding accountable all those responsible for mass atrocity crimes.

The Security Council has the authority to play a unique role in the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

It is in everyone's interest to have a Security Council that responds in a timely and appropriate manner where there is a real risk of these crimes being committed.

We call on all Members of the Council to act in a manner to support responding to and addressing the risk or commission of mass atrocity crimes, noting in this context the support of many Member States for the ACT Code of Conduct and the French/Mexican initiative on veto restraint.

The Security Council must of course have the necessary information in order to be able to act.

We encourage the Secretary-General to use his powers under Article 99 of the Charter to bring to the attention of the Council any risk or commission of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity that in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.

In this context, we also encourage all States to support the Special Advisers on the Responsibility to Protect and the Prevention of Genocide and their Joint Office, and welcome the efforts of the Secretariat to contribute to R2P's implementation through the commitment to Human Rights up Front, and the development of the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes. We encourage States to use this document in their prevention efforts.

To translate early warning to early action, we must make use of all tools at our disposal.

As the Secretary-General's Report correctly highlights, the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review is also well placed to support prevention efforts, and we welcome the suggestions made in the Report as to how the UPR could be better utilized.

The General Assembly of course also can play an important role, not least when Security Council action is blocked, as demonstrated by the GA's establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) for crimes committed in Syria.

Indeed, the Group of Friends considers that the General Assembly could, and should, be playing a more active role to support States in their efforts to carry out their primary responsibilities to protect populations from mass atrocity crimes.

The 2005 World Summit Outcome Document stressed the need for the General Assembly to continue consideration of R2P.

We welcome the fact that the Secretary-General has recommended the inclusion of an item on prevention and R2P in the GA agenda in order to facilitate a continuous, frank and inclusive dialogue.

We call on all Member States to support the request made by Australia and Ghana for the inclusion of such an item in the agenda of the Assembly for the 72nd Session.

Mr. President,

The first two sentences of the Secretary-General's Report really say it all: 'There is a gap between our stated commitment to the Responsibility to Protect and the daily reality confronted by populations exposed to the risk of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

To close this gap, we must ensure that the responsibility to Protect is implemented in practice.

This gap can, and must, be closed. The Group of Friends of R2P is committed to working with all stakeholders to help make this a reality.