

ICRtoP

General Assembly Informal Interactive Dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect

Statement by Mr. Donald Deya

International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect

06 September 2017

1. Mr. Secretary-General, Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to convey my gratitude for the opportunity to speak at this year's interactive dialogue. I would also like to thank Special Adviser for RtoP, Dr. Ivan Simonovic, for moderating this meeting and the panelists for their interventions.
2. I have the pleasure to take the floor in my capacity as Chair of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), a global civil society network with over 90 members working in every region of the world to advance the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) and improve its implementation to better protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. I have had the opportunity to work closely on raising awareness on the norm and its implementation also as Chief Executive Officer of the Pan African Lawyers Union, an umbrella association of African lawyers and Law Societies working to advance the rule of law, good governance, human and peoples' rights, and the socio-economic development of the African continent.
3. First, I would like to congratulate Secretary-General Guterres on his first report on RtoP. I would also like to applaud the impetus behind his prevention agenda, including the recognition of the gaps in current atrocity prevention commitments and the realities faced by those at-risk populations on the ground. As emphasized in our organization's Prevention up Front Alliance, a partnership we have with the government of the Netherlands to strengthen civil society organizations' advocacy capacities for conflict prevention, we, like the Secretary-General, believe that we must work together to strengthen legal, moral, and political accountability and ensure open scrutiny of practice for actors at all levels in order to press States and the international community to uphold their RtoP obligations. The focus on accountability for prevention is needed now more than ever in recent memory, as the world is currently experiencing more mass violence than it has seen since the founding of the United Nations decades ago.
4. Mr. President, as States bear the primary responsibility to protect populations from atrocity crimes, it is indeed imperative that States adopt and uphold the core treaties of international human rights and humanitarian law, as well as ensure that the prohibition of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity are included in national legislation and strictly enforced, particularly for the actions of security forces and their commanders. In this vein, the ICRtoP calls on States to abide by the obligations acknowledged by all Member States of the United Nations in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document. We also call on the international community to assist in building States' capacities for prevention through the development of national infrastructures and legislation in order to reinforce accountability for national early warning and preventive efforts.
5. The ICRtoP also urges Member States to invest in building and institutionalizing relationships with civil society and local community actors, particularly women, youth, and racial, religious, and ethnic minority groups, among others, in order to ensure a more coordinated and holistic approach to atrocity prevention. For example, 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. Also, such actors are often uniquely positioned to observe and assess early warning signs of

ICRtoP

atrocities as they arise and often provide initial early responses to the presence of such risk factors long before national, regional, or international actors are aware of the situation and realities on the ground. Due to this unique positioning, civil society and local community-based actors can also provide vital context-specific understanding of situations imperative for the assessment of appropriate early response actions to prevent the escalation of such at-risk situations, as well as to promote and ensure accountability for those who have failed to fulfill their RtoP obligations, as well as for the perpetrators of atrocities.

6. Experience truly has shown that preventive efforts are most effective when actors across levels work together. Indeed, as the Secretary-General reflected in this year's report, regional and sub-regional organizations also have a key role to play in supporting atrocity prevention; the importance of which has been underscored time and again through the success of preventive efforts, or failure due to a lack thereof, of regional and sub-regional organizations in my own region. In Africa, the actions of the African Union (AU) to halt violence in the wake of Kenya's 2007-2008 election crisis and the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) actions only just this year to prevent the outbreak of violence in the Gambia, played decisive roles in protecting populations from the possibility of suffering mass atrocities and should not only be lauded, but learned from. On the other hand, the AU and other relevant regional bodies' failure to act in other ongoing crises such as in Burundi and South Sudan, regardless of the numerous warnings about the presence of risk factors or even of ongoing atrocities, must also be held to account and learned from. In these instances, enhanced cooperation between national, regional, and international organizations is crucial and necessary to find the right path forward for preventive efforts, particularly as regional organizations have the advantage of region-specific knowledge in order to assess the most appropriate responses and the obligation to take action to assist States if they are unwilling or unable to protect population from atrocities, or committing these crimes themselves.
7. Furthermore, Mr. President, the Security Council has been tasked with making the greatest international peace and security decisions, including taking timely and decisive action to protect populations from atrocity crimes. However, in practice, as the Secretary-General has noted, the international community's expectations for such action have been left unfulfilled. Disunity among the Council has led to a persistent inability to uphold its RtoP obligations to take swift and crucial action to prevent or halt atrocities, resulting in tragic and deadly consequences for populations around the world. Such failures to take action to protect populations stand as blemishes on the integrity of the UN and the international community as a whole. The ICRtoP strongly urges States to voice their support for Permanent Members of the Security Council to exercise restraint of their veto power against resolutions attempting to prevent or respond to atrocities. We urge all States to voice or reaffirm their support for the political declaration for a regulation on the use of the veto jointly initiated by France and Mexico, as well as for the Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency (ACT) Group's Code of Conduct, for which there will be a special signing ceremony here in New York on Friday, 22 September.
8. The ICRtoP encourages Member States to seriously consider the Secretary-General's recommendation to include the prevention of atrocity crimes and the implementation of RtoP on the General Assembly's formal agenda in order to increase opportunities for the consideration and deliberation of atrocity prevention-related issues, particularly when the Security Council is gridlocked. We continue to urge States to adopt a resolution, reaffirming their commitment to RtoP, recalling the primacy of preventing these crimes, and expressing support for the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and RtoP. The ICRtoP also strongly encourages States to acknowledge the vital role of civil society in the advancement of RtoP and the prevention of atrocities, especially through its critical role in early warning and early response, as well as promoting accountability.
9. Finally, the ICRtoP remains ready to serve as a partner for governments, regional bodies, and the international community as we all work together to strengthen accountability for the implementation of the Responsibility to Protect in order to close the gap between stated commitments and the realities on the ground and improve the protection of populations from atrocity crimes. Thank you, Mr. President.