

HRC38 Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect Statement re: Item 10

Panel Discussion on Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals

4 July 2018

Mr. President,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

We welcome this discussion on the complementary and mutually-reinforcing relationship between human rights, peace and security and the Sustainable Development Goals, and the role UN human rights mechanisms can play in contributing to the achievement of the SDGs.

Realisation of the SDGs will not be possible without addressing human rights violations that persist in many places around the world. Too many times we have seen a State's development not only hindered, but reversed by ethnic cleansing, genocide, war crimes and/or crimes against humanity.

Widespread and systematic violations of human rights, including marginalisation of and discrimination against specific groups or individuals, often serve as an early warning of the potential for such crimes. Violations and discrimination faced by women and girls not only show disregard for the international principles of non-discrimination and equality, but also prevent states from reaching their targets under the SDG agenda.

The principles of R2P are well established. These principles empower States to take action, consistent with international law, to prevent atrocity crimes. The toolbox for such action is wide-ranging. Pursuit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – which promotes the idea of 'leaving no one behind' and envisages a world free of fear and violence – is a key part of that toolbox.

As the head of UNDP recently noted, many of the underlying causes for invoking R2P can be found in failures of development. These include failures of governance, discrimination and forms of radicalisation that lead to conflict.

Addressing these failures and building more resilient societies are critical elements of States' efforts to prevent atrocity crimes. They require, among other things, respect for the rule of law and respect, protection and fulfilment of all human rights without discrimination. Legitimate and accountable national institutions, good governance, and an approach that supports diversity, a strong civil society and a pluralistic media are key.

The link between the SDGs and such resilience is clear. Goal 16 specifically addresses the promotion of peaceful, just and inclusive societies by providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. Goal 4 addresses the importance of ensuring inclusive and quality education, an essential objective for improving the lives of future generations and building cohesive societies.

Bringing an end to human rights violations and atrocity crimes, and ensuring transitional justice, accountability and non-recurrence, is essential for investing in the kind of social renewal and institutional capacity-building essential to the achievement of the SDGs.

That is why today we stress the key role of the Human Rights Council and other UN Human Rights mechanisms in supporting technical assistance and capacity-building work towards the prevention of atrocity crimes. The second pillar of the Responsibility to Protect highlights that “The international community has a responsibility to encourage and assist States in fulfilling this responsibility”.

We wish to underline the importance of technical cooperation, aimed at assisting States, upon their request, in building and strengthening national capacities that have a direct impact on the observance, respect and enjoyment of human rights by everyone.

The activities undertaken through OHCHR’s field presences can contribute to assisting States to take appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures, to prevent human rights violations and their potential escalation into atrocity crimes or conflict. The integration of a human rights perspective into the work of UN Country Teams and United Nations peace missions, within their respective mandates, is important for the prevention of gross violations of human rights that can potentially lead to atrocity crimes.

We urge the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to continue to strengthen this preventative capacity, and we encourage states to fully cooperate with the Council, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Special procedures mandate holders.