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RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT (R2P)

Statement by Mr Michael Bliss Political Coordinator Australian Permanent Mission to the United Nations

(Check against delivery)

Mr Special Advisor

Australia thanks the Secretary-General for his fifth report on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which provides a valuable insight for Member States into the risk factors that may lead to mass atrocity crimes and the measures we can take to strengthen prevention efforts.

Prevention lies at the heart of R2P. Prevention reinforces that R2P is a friend of sovereignty. It is important to recognise that the exercise of sovereignty by a State comes with a fundamental responsibility to protect its populations from mass atrocity crimes.

To prevent mass atrocity crimes we need to be alert to the complex range of circumstances which may increase the risk of these heinous crimes occurring, or serve as potential triggers.

Therefore, analysing risk factors is critical.

We look forward to the promised release of an analysis framework to address the risk factors identified in the Secretary-General's report.

Australia endorses the policy options for atrocity prevention outlined in the Secretary-General's Report. The Report demonstrates that there are many ways Member States can strengthen their preventive capacity – for example, by embracing constitutional protections, ensuring accountability for past atrocity crimes, engaging in effective security sector reform, and by promoting and protecting human rights.

Australia particularly welcomes the Report's emphasis on targeted measures to prevent atrocity crimes. One example is the designation of an R2P focal point to help integrate an atrocity prevention perspective into national policies and strategies. R2P focal points can form valuable networks for preventing atrocity crimes. Australia co-facilitates the R2P Focal Points initiative, together with Ghana, Costa Rica and Denmark.

Australia is deeply concerned by the widespread and systemic violence in Syria, including the 21 August chemical weapons attack.

The Human Rights Council's Commission of Inquiry for Syria has found that war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed. The Syrian government has manifestly failed in its responsibility to protect its people, and, accordingly, the international community has a responsibility to take appropriate collective action.

The Security Council's responsibilities in these circumstances are clear. But the Council has failed to fulfil its responsibilities to prevent further atrocities in Syria for over two years. It must now meet its responsibilities.

Challenges in implementing R2P must not be allowed to overshadow the value of R2P to states under stress. Political will is needed to translate theory into practice. We must remain focussed on how best to use our extensive R2P tool-kit to prevent mass atrocity crimes from occurring. It is important that an R2P prevention lens is applied to the broader work of the UN system in relevant areas, such as rule of law and human rights.

Australia welcomes the opportunity for Member States to participate actively in this dialogue. Regular and substantive General Assembly dialogue on R2P is essential.

Australia reaffirms its strong commitment R2P and the importance of working together to prevent mass atrocity crimes.

Thank you.

