

Remarks at UN General Assembly on the Responsibility to Protect

*Full text of remarks delivered by Prof Alex Bellamy, Director of the **Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APR2P)**, at the UN General Assembly informal and interactive dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect*

New York, 8 September 2015

Thank you Mr. President for convening this informal and interactive dialogue. RtoP is, as the title of the Secretary-General's report confirms, a "vital and enduring commitment".

We would also like to acknowledge the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Advisers on genocide prevention and RtoP, Mr. Adama Dieng and Dr. Jennifer Welsh.

It is fitting that as the tenth anniversary of the General Assembly's commitment to RtoP approaches, we take stock of what has been achieved and what remains to be done.

Progress on the normative, conceptual and some of the institutional facets of RtoP's implementation has been impressive. We now have a deeper consensus on RtoP than we did a decade ago and the principle is being mainstreamed into the world's institutions in a variety of ways.

Mr. President, progress has been evident in the Asia Pacific. Last year, a group of eminent persons led by the former secretary-general of ASEAN, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, issued a landmark report detailing how RtoP could be implemented in Southeast Asia in support of the ASEAN community. Since then, the report's findings have been discussed in forums in Jakarta, Bangkok and Phnom Penh.

Earlier this year, Cambodia's prime minister Hun Sen said that "I believe that Cambodia has an important role to play in promoting Responsibility to Protect and mass atrocities prevention in Southeast Asia". He went on to suggest that "Cambodia could initiate holding a regional dialogue on mass atrocities prevention in an effort to mainstream the Responsibility to Protect principle in ASEAN". It is through such dialogue that states and regional organizations can support one another to fulfil their RtoP.

Meanwhile, the Republic of Korea appointed a National R2P Focal point. The first of many governments in the region, we believe, who will do so in the coming months and years.

This normative and diplomatic progress has been matched by significant practical progress. Over the past three decades, the Asia Pacific region has witnessed a dramatic decline in the incidence of atrocity crimes. And, in corners of the region where the threat of atrocity crimes linger, historic steps are being taken to address those risks, be it through national actions supported by the international community or through bodies such as the UN's General Assembly and Human Rights Council.

We commend the region's governments for the progress they have achieved thus far. But there is much work left to be done.

Mr. President, if the first decade of RtoP was primarily concerned with its normative consolidation, in the second decade our focus must shift squarely to the practicalities of protecting populations.

To that end, we should:

- First, develop, and implement, comprehensive strategies for the prevention of atrocity crimes and their incitement. The Secretary-General could take the lead by developing a system-wide UN strategy, but regional groupings and individual countries could also develop and implement their own strategies.
- Second, ensure that words and mandates are backed by resources and determined action. The UN continues to struggle to secure the capabilities it needs to fulfill its peacekeeping mandates, to provide sufficient humanitarian relief to the victims of atrocities, and to properly and flexibly resource its peacemaking and peacebuilding activities. We must also confront a global crisis of displacement that requires a global response. It must be underscored that RtoP entails a duty to protect those fleeing atrocity crimes by granting asylum.
- Third, do more to recognize and respond to the scourge of sexual and gender based violence and to empower women at all levels to contribute to the fulfillment of RtoP.
- Fourth, respond nimbly and flexibly to new types of challenge, when they arise, such as those posed by violent extremists and non-state armed groups.
- Fifth, reflect frankly on our efforts to protect vulnerable populations, recognize – together – where we are falling short, and use our collective wisdom and resources to overcome these challenges.

Delivering on these ambitions will require partnerships that reach across boundaries. That is why we are proud to announce the establishment of the Asia Pacific Partnership for Atrocity Prevention. The partnership, whose founding members are drawn from Australia, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, and Singapore, aims to support the prevention of atrocity crimes by fostering functional and practically oriented collaboration and cooperation. Membership of the partnership is open to non-governmental organizations and governments in the Asia Pacific region.

We call upon governments in our region to consider appointing a National RtoP Focal Point and joining the Asia Pacific Partnership to prevent atrocities.

Mr. President, as we enter RtoP's second decade, we must redouble our efforts to make protection a lived reality everywhere.