



# New Zealand Permanent Mission to the United Nations

Te Māngai o Aotearoa

## UN General Assembly

Informal interactive dialogue on the responsibility of States to  
protect their populations by preventing genocide, war crimes,  
ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity

## **New Zealand statement**

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8 September 2015



2015 marks the anniversary of two significant events: the 70<sup>th</sup> year of the UN and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Summit's collective commitment to responsibility to protect (R2P).

New Zealand reaffirms its commitment to the principles outlined in the 2005 outcome document. Then, the entire UN membership – including over 150 world leaders – provided an intellectual and collective reinforcement of R2P. Over the subsequent decade, this has been strengthened by many Security Council and Human Rights Council resolutions that explicitly cite R2P, new international legal instruments such as the Arms Trade Treaty with its role in reducing unregulated arms transfers and illicit trafficking which so often fuel atrocity crimes, and the way in which peacekeeping missions are increasingly mandated to support host States to protect civilian populations.

However, when we move from principle to practice, the shortcomings have been all too apparent. From Syria to Darfur, we could, and should, do much better. Given these dramatic failings – and the scale of many of today's crises – we must be honest in assessing how – despite our collective words of commitment – civilian populations continue to be subject to the violence and terror of atrocity crimes.

The Secretary-General's report points to many areas where improvements could be made, and efforts redoubled. It highlights a clear need to prioritise prevention; the valuable role of civil society in spurring domestic dialogues; promoting national ownership; and ensuring regional organisations are adequately involved in early warning and capacity building activities. We support the *Human Rights Up Front Action Plan* and the many other actions in the SG's important report.

Today I would like to emphasise the importance of timely and decisive responses, and the role of information flows.

One part of this problem is obvious and well-known, the veto, and the effect it has on the ability of the UN Security Council to respond to situations of mass atrocity. We support the Secretary General's call on permanent members to exercise restraint in their use of the veto in situations that include the commission of atrocity crimes.

On the flow of information, the Secretary-General's report recognises that without clear and timely information, we cannot react and respond to emerging situations. For the UN system to respond early enough, information needs to be provided rapidly and widely shared.

Advances in this area can be simple. In the Council, presentational methods can be changed: for example, new technologies, like infographics, can convey information more clearly. We support continued improvements in Council working methods as well, in terms of the use of early-warning and horizon scanning briefings, and to allow for better flows of relevant information, for example from Peace Building Commission chairs.

The lessons of New Zealand's last Council term and plight of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans remain all too fresh. The costs of investing in preventing or responding to atrocity crimes are insignificant when set alongside the human, political and financial costs of inaction that flow from our collective failures.