

**Intervention by Ambassador Jānis Mažeiks,
PR of the Republic of Latvia**

at the Informal Interactive Dialogue on Responsibility to Protect: State Responsibility and Prevention
11 September 2013

Mr Moderator,

At the outset I would like to align myself fully with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

The past two years of developments in Syria show among other things the topicality of today's discussion on the prevention aspect of the responsibility to protect. Indeed, the situation in Syria did not deteriorate overnight. Rather, it was the result of long-term grievances of large parts of the Syrian society that were not addressed in an adequate manner by the state bodies – such as government whose legitimacy cannot be questioned or forces of law and order that protect, not endanger the enjoyment of human rights.

Mr Moderator,

Latvia, like many European countries, has over the past 22 years emerged from being subject of an oppressive regime to a functioning democracy. In this transition we have learned a number of things that may be relevant for today's discussion. I say – may be – because as the Secretary-General's report rightly mentions, there can be no one-size-fits-all solution and all preventive mechanisms must be grounded in local realities.

First, comprehensive reforms of the state institutions and strengthened democratic governance are essential for building resilient society. It has been remarked that democracies do not go to war with each other. In the same vein, democratically representative governments do not commit atrocity crimes against their own people.

Second, we consider education of the young generation to be crucial. This education needs at least two components to have the preventive effect against atrocity crimes. First, the young generation should be educated about their human rights as well as the human rights of everyone and the universal values. Second, education must not overlook, brush over or try to justify past atrocities where such atrocities have taken place. Speaking openly about past atrocities, especially by their victims has a healing effect on the society. In this context free and independent media have a particular role to play.

Finally, it is important to avoid impunity for past atrocities by introducing effective and credible rules on accountability, in particular individual criminal accountability. In this respect, removal of statutory limitations mentioned in the Secretary-General's report is very important. Only when individuals who may otherwise consider engaging in atrocity crimes are certain they will be prosecuted for these crimes regardless of the passage of time since their commission – only then they will have the disincentive to commit such crimes.

In the case of Syria, the clear perspective of investigating and convicting the persons behind the use of chemical weapons at the International Criminal Court and the joint support of the whole international community for such steps is particularly important.

Thank you, Mr President.