



CROATIA

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STATEMENT by
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United Nations

Responsibility to Protect
"Integrated and coordinated implementation of and
follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations
conferences and summits in the economic, social and
related fields"

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Mr. President,

At the outset, I wish to thank you for organizing this timely debate. Croatia welcomes the Secretary-General's Report on "Implementing the responsibility to protect" and his commitment to the R2P agenda.

Even though Croatia has aligned itself with the statement made by the EU, I would like to take this opportunity to make some additional points.

As we read in the report, especially those parts mentioning violence in our region, we cannot help but think of all the lives that could have been saved in Croatia. The civilian tragedy of Vukovar served as an important wake-up call for the international community and underscored the importance of preventing the re-occurrence of such tragic events in the future.

It is regrettable that the international community and the United Nations itself failed to recognize and respond adequately to the ethnically inflammatory rhetoric that for us culminated with the tragedy and complete devastation of the civilian city of Vukovar. Even after the temporary cessation of hostilities and the creation of United Nations protected areas, first in Croatia and then in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we were witness to ethnically biased killings and the abhorrent practice of ethnic cleansing.

United Nations peacekeepers were not only present in the so-called UNPA regions of Croatia where hundreds of thousands of Croatian people were forced from their homes and where hundreds lost their lives, but were also present in the UN-declared safe haven of Srebrenica where 8,000 Bosniak men and boys fell victim to an act of genocide. Before these crimes were perpetrated, we cannot say that many early warning signs were not present. Unfortunately these signals were ignored, which raises what we believe is the most important aspect of the R2P principle, that is prevention.

Mr. President,

In 2008 the world witnessed the success of the work of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Secretary-General in preventing post-election violence and an escalation of tensions in Kenya. They reminded political and community leaders that they can be held accountable for violations of international law. This is where the value of the International Criminal Court lies, especially when it comes to cases of widespread and systematic rape and sexual violence against women and children.

Croatia believes that the commitments undertaken at the summit of world leaders in 2005, contained in paragraphs 138, 139 and 140 of its Outcome document, deserve to be applauded. In agreeing on their responsibility to protect populations from the egregious four crimes [as outlined in this document], the international community has accepted for the first time the collective responsibility to act should states fail to protect civilians. The purpose of such a commitment is to save lives by preventing mass violations of human rights, while reinforcing the Charter of the UN and the abiding principles of responsible sovereignty.

We should, though, not confuse the responsibility to protect with the "right to intervene". On the contrary, the responsibility to protect is a collective obligation that consists of three pillars; the protection responsibilities of the State, international assistance and capacity building, as well as timely and decisive responses. As it was described in the Secretary-General's report, these three pillars offer numerous possibilities in exerting the responsibility to protect; from establishing effective mechanisms for handling domestic disputes to protecting the rights of women, children and minorities, through the exercise of good offices and public and state diplomacy in assisting states under stress before a crisis breaks out.

The commitment to a timely and decisive response when a State is manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity is the last resort in situations where the first two pillars can be applied. However, where a rapid unfolding situation requires sanctions or decisive action, Croatia believes the Security Council, acting in accordance with the Charter has a special responsibility.

Mr. President,

The importance of the R2P concept lies in the many possibilities it offers towards achieving one fundamental and common goal, namely saving people's lives. By developing the UN strategy, as well as the standards, tools and processes in the General Assembly on the responsibility to protect, each member state has a unique opportunity to fulfill a historic gap that can be found somewhere between non-interference and intervention.

Each member state and the international community as a whole can stand ready to put in to action the promises our world leaders made in 2005. We have the commitment. What we need now is the political will to guarantee that it is implemented.

Thank you.