

Statement by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide,
Adama Dieng
Informal Interactive Dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect
5 September 2012

Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Distinguished Delegates,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I address you this morning as Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. I am humbled by the responsibilities conferred on me by the Secretary-General and, in working towards their fulfilment, I am grateful for the opportunity to follow the progress already made by my two predecessors, Mr. Juan Mendez and Mr. Francis Deng. Allow me to use my first formal words as Special Adviser to express my gratitude to both of them for their encouragement, their leadership, and their passion for a task that, while unfinished, can be better served today thanks to their wisdom, the operational structures that they have contributed to establish and the support they have received from the international community. My gratitude also goes to Mr. Edward Luck for his work in advancing the concept of the responsibility to protect. We would not be where we are today without his critical contribution.

It is with a deep sense of humility that I address you in the opening session of this, the fourth, informal, interactive dialogue on the responsibility to protect. The commitment that Member States made in 2005 to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity has been referred to, correctly, as an important milestone in the advancement of the principles on which our Organization is based. The steps we have taken collectively since 2005, the lessons we have learned, the successes we have experienced, the mistakes we have committed, the gaps we have identified... are all contributing to enriching a conversation that is today more crucial than ever. Progress made since 2005 in the advancement and refinement of the responsibility to protect encourages us to keep on working and continues to lead us forward.

This informal dialogue is the fourth in a continuum that the General Assembly has conducted since 2009. In each occasion, Member States have reflected upon a different aspect and have explored opportunities and challenges in the implementation of the responsibility to protect. The three previous informal interactive dialogues paved the way for this conversation today. What was discussed then; the three pillar structure; the importance of early engagement; the critical contribution of regional actors; will inform this dialogue on the third pillar. I join this conversation with the advantage of learning from the advances already made. I also join it with a desire to be of service to Member States and to the populations we have all committed to protect.

In this year's report, as in previous reports, the Secretary-General encourages us to explore the linkages between the three pillars of the responsibility to protect. He also suggests further reflection on the close relationship between 'prevention' and 'response'. The truth is that any action that is designed and put in place with the aim of preventing mass atrocity crimes will also contribute towards responding to dynamics that could potentially lead to them. In this year's report, the Secretary-General reflects on the notion that there are elements of response in the implementation of the first two pillars of the responsibility to protect. Likewise, third pillar action, while responsive in nature, can ultimately play a prevention role. I am convinced, from my own experience, that the emergence of a system of international criminal justice – essentially a response mechanism – is playing an important role for the prevention of genocide and other related crimes.

The range of tools available under the third pillar of the responsibility to protect is extensive. It is our collective responsibility to study the implications of the use of each of them, and to understand the conditions under which the potential of each tool can be maximized. It is also our responsibility to establish and strengthen the structures that will make third pillar tools actionable and effective. All of the tools listed in this year's Secretary-General report require the creation of partnerships, platforms and structures for effective use. Last year's dialogue reflected on the importance of partnerships at the global and the regional level for the effective implementation of the responsibility to protect. There is no need to emphasize the significance of these partnerships in the case of third pillar implementation. What is crucial here is that we need to be ready to act, and to act effectively when the need arises. And, to be effective, the groundwork

needs to be done beforehand. The engagements that contribute to implementation of pillar I and pillar II measures can be highly effective in developing and implementing the tools that can be considered under pillar III. The links between ‘prevention’ and ‘response’ become particularly relevant from this perspective.

We all have a role to play. The responsibility to protect calls for each of us – Member States, international, regional and sub-regional organizations, civil society – to do what we can, with our distinct roles and capacities, to protect populations at risk. The Secretary-General’s report underlines a number of lessons learned and identifies a series of areas for further development, upon which we can continue building, including with today’s dialogue. From the perspective of the mandate I have been recently conferred, I look forward to continuing the work initiated by my predecessors, to strengthen what they have achieved, and to work with all of you to explore further ways to ensure the success of this noble and critical task.

Thank you very much.