



Call to Action for the United Nations General Assembly during its 80th session from the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect

The UN was established to uphold international peace and security, protect human rights and advance international cooperation in the face of crises. As UN member states convene during the 80th session of the General Assembly, they do so amid a world once again shaken by crises and moral reckoning.

This year also marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Galvanized by the global commitment to “never again” fail to halt mass atrocities following the conscience-shocking genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica, at the 2005 World Summit, member states committed to a collective Responsibility to Protect, affirming their obligation to safeguard populations from atrocity crimes, namely, genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. The World Summit Outcome Document not only established the R2P principle but also set out a transformative roadmap for international human rights governance, including the creation of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and the Universal Periodic Review. This was a landmark moment in strengthening the global architecture for preventing mass atrocities, reinforcing earlier initiatives such as the UN’s Protection of Civilians (PoC) mandate in peacekeeping, first authorized by the UN Security Council (UNSC) in 1999 and gradually expanding to become a core component of some of the UN’s most robust peacekeeping missions to date.

Yet, 20 years on, the multilateral context in which these norms and provisions were first introduced has shifted significantly. Today’s international landscape is marked by growing polarization, revanchist nationalism, extreme xenophobia, a deepening crisis of trust – both among member states and between governments and their constituencies – and the erosion of the international legal system. We are once again witnessing protracted atrocity crises devastating populations in Gaza, Sudan, Myanmar, Ukraine, the Democratic Republic of Congo and beyond. Therefore, as we reflect on two decades of R2P, it is critical to ask: where do we stand today in fulfilling the UN’s promise of protection and prevention?

The 80th session of the UN General Assembly offers a pivotal opportunity to renew and deepen the UN’s foundational, collective commitments to human rights, peace and security, the rule of law and sustainable development. Amid current introspection and reform processes, including the UN80 Initiative, the international community stands at a crossroads. This is a moment to transform global governance and reinvigorate effective multilateralism to better address ongoing challenges, from conflict and climate change to the rapid expansion of digital technologies that pose new risks to civilian protection. Upholding protection must remain a central measure of the UN’s legitimacy.

In this context, the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICR2P) calls on all UN member states to fulfill the following commitments during the 80th session.

1. REAFFIRM PROTECTION AS THE CORE PURPOSE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The UN’s credibility and legitimacy depend on its ability to protect civilians. Few failures have more profoundly undermined confidence in the UN than its inability to prevent or respond to genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. ICR2P urges UN member states to ensure that PoC and R2P remain central, system-wide priorities in efforts to reform the UN’s protection framework. These principles are not rhetorical aspirations – they are defining features of the UN’s identity and purpose. Upholding protection is both a moral and legal obligation and the ultimate test of the organization’s relevance in today’s world.

Current reform processes – including the UN80 Initiative, the Peacebuilding Architecture Review, the Humanitarian Reset and the review on the future of all UN peace operations – reflect a growing recognition of the system’s shortcomings and the urgent need for change. Yet, these processes will fall short if they prioritize efficiency over purpose or rely on superficial language designed to avoid controversy. Reform must be substantive, candid and ambitious. ICR2P calls on UN member states to outline clear parameters for reform that confront gaps in accountability, coordination and political will, and to ensure that the protection of vulnerable populations takes precedence over institutional self-preservation.

ICR2P further urges member states to expand their approach to reform beyond conventional conflict prevention frameworks and assessments, as those often overlook the unique risks and early warning signs of atrocity crimes. This requires continued investment in and strengthening of dedicated protection roles and mandates, including the Special Advisers on Genocide Prevention and R2P. These experts provide critical foresight and strategic guidance, helping to foster a system-wide understanding of protection across all pillars of the UN’s work. Diluting or sidelining these roles in the name of administrative streamlining would only weaken the UN’s ability to anticipate risks to civilian safety and respond decisively.

Reaffirming protection as the UN’s core purpose requires concrete commitments from member states. This includes adequate and predictable financing, strengthened institutional capacities and robust mandates that explicitly prioritize the full spectrum of civilian protection. These actions are essential to translating principles into practice. Addressing these challenges demands not only sustained resources but also more political support to ensure these mandates are fully and effectively carried out.

2. STRENGTHENING PRINCIPLED LEADERSHIP ON PROTECTION

Strengthening leadership – both among UN member states and within the UN Secretariat – is essential for the effective implementation of protection mandates. Leadership within the UN system must never be an exercise in status or diplomacy for its own sake. The authority and good offices conferred by high office must be used, first and foremost, in service of the people the UN Charter was created to protect. This requires centering the voices and testimonies of affected communities at the center of all protection responses.

Weak enforcement of international law, selective accountability and double standards erode trust in both the UN and its member states, ultimately undermining the legitimacy of protection efforts. Restoring that credibility demands consistent standards, impartial implementation of mandates and inclusive approaches that are shaped by the needs of those most at risk – developed in consultation with them. Those in positions of power must create environments where affected communities and marginalized groups can be heard, amplifying their voices and engaging in genuine dialogue on protection strategies and programming – especially in moments when political costs are high and silence is easier. Meaningful reform must confront the entrenched culture of risk aversion that too often prioritizes institutional preservation over civilian protection. ICR2P urges global leadership to prioritize humility, moral authority and transparency.

Practically, UN member states can fulfill these commitments by:

- Acknowledging the interlinkages between atrocity prevention, the promotion and protection of human rights, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), strengthening PoC and addressing cross-cutting challenges such as climate change, food insecurity and global health crises.
- Prioritizing PoC in the planning, renewal and drawdown of peace operations by ensuring that civilian protection is explicitly reflected in mission benchmarks, resource allocation decisions and future mandates.
- Committing resources and flexible funding to trusted local protection actors – including civil society organizations, women’s networks and community leaders – in contexts where the UN is unable to maintain a physical presence to protect civilians.
- Ensuring that information collected and presented before the HRC, UNSC and General Assembly includes systematic assessments of atrocity risks and strategies to address them.

- Leveraging meetings under Resolution 76/262, which mandates a General Assembly discussion whenever a veto is cast in the Security Council, to ensure timely responses to atrocity situations and uphold R2P.
- Raising atrocity risks in country-specific discussions across relevant UN bodies, including the Third Committee, the Economic and Social Council and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC).
- Highlighting risk factors and indicators from the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes in all deliberations on country situations.
- Integrating atrocity prevention into national strategies and policies, as recommended by the Secretary-General, to ensure that multilateral commitments are matched by national-level implementation.
- Joining and actively engaging in multilateral networks, including the New York and Geneva based Group of Friends of R2P and the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, to strengthen global coordination and political will to advancing R2P and atrocity prevention.

3. REINFORCE AND STRIVE FOR A COHESIVE AND EFFECTIVE MULTILATERAL SYSTEM

For the UN to remain credible and effective, it must strengthen its capacity to prevent the outbreak and escalation of hostilities while ensuring that approaches to prevention, response and resolution are integrated rather than siloed. A cohesive multilateral system must place protection at its core, embedding people-centered approaches across humanitarian, development and peace operations.

Respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is integral to this effort, as is the full implementation of R2P. While IHL provides a binding legal framework and R2P serves as a political commitment, both share the protection of individuals as their normative foundation. ICR2P calls on UN member states to stand firmly against the normalization of human suffering and to consistently uphold international humanitarian and human rights law, including prohibitions on forced displacement, indiscriminate attacks and obstruction of aid. Grave violations of international law must be met with accountability rather than impunity, reinforcing the credibility of multilateral institutions, preventing recurrence and fostering trust with affected populations.

Strengthening the multilateral system also requires serious and sustained investment in prevention. States must integrate atrocity prevention into all aspects of their work on peace, security and human rights – not as a siloed function, but as a cross-cutting priority. This also means designing protection frameworks that reflect the diversity of populations and the intersectional nature of risks they face. The lived experiences of women, LGBTQIA+ persons, ethnic and religious minorities, Indigenous Peoples, refugees and displaced populations must inform both risk analysis and the design of responsive, inclusive strategies across the multilateral system.

ICR2P emphasizes that development and protection are mutually reinforcing pillars of a cohesive multilateral system. Developmental deficits and resulting fragility are risk factors for mass atrocity crimes, while atrocities, in turn, devastate development gains and deepen instability. The SDGs cannot be fully realized without addressing these interconnected risks. ICR2P therefore urges states to center atrocity prevention within their development efforts, adopting whole-of-government approaches and ensuring that development assistance prioritizes reforms that reduce vulnerability to atrocities and foster resilient, inclusive societies.

4. FACILITATE AND ENSURE MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND AFFECTED POPULATIONS IN ONGOING REFORM PROCESSES

The prevention of and response to atrocity crimes cannot succeed without the meaningful and inclusive participation of civil society and affected populations, including survivor communities. These actors bring irreplaceable expertise and lived experience that must be centered, not sidelined, in all stages of atrocity prevention. Their knowledge of local dynamics, protective strategies and early warning signs often makes the difference between timely action and catastrophic failure. Yet their role is increasingly under threat.

Ongoing reform processes are shaping the future of the multilateral system, often without structured civil society inclusion. Key decisions are being made that civil society will be expected to implement or adapt to, yet they remain largely excluded from these processes. Travel constraints and limited access to UN Headquarters in New York continue to hinder direct global civil society engagement. Meanwhile, proposals under the UN80 process to significantly cut national UN staff risk severing one of the most crucial links between UN institutions and affected populations on the ground. These trends undermine the UN's legitimacy, credibility and effectiveness – particularly in atrocity prevention, where local knowledge and engagement are indispensable.

Local peacebuilders and civil society actors are frequently the first to witness and document atrocity risks, to mediate tensions at the community level and to implement unarmed protection strategies when violence escalates. In the aftermath of atrocity crimes, survivors and communities lead efforts for justice, accountability, redress, reconciliation and peacebuilding. The devastating social and economic consequences of atrocities fall most heavily on them; their insights are therefore essential for designing strategies for sustainable recovery and structural prevention.

In contexts where national institutions are captured, collapsed or complicit in atrocity crimes, turning to the international system becomes the only viable channel for affected communities to seek justice and protection. Ensuring meaningful participation requires more than symbolic consultation. It demands robust inclusion of diverse identities and voices. Affected populations are not monolithic, and atrocity prevention will fail if women, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQIA+ persons, ethnic and religious minorities, people with disabilities, displaced populations and other marginalized groups are excluded. Without centering these perspectives, the UN risks reproducing inequities, overlooking critical risk factors and ignoring warning signs unique to these communities.

To achieve this, UN member states must:

- Embed civil society and survivor participation systematically in decision-making processes on prevention, response and recovery. This includes development planning, capacity-building initiatives and technical assistance.
- Safeguard civil society access to UN spaces, including the General Assembly, by removing administrative obstacles, supporting organizations with limited resources and ensuring interpretation and translation services to overcome language barriers.
- Commit to regular, substantive consultation with local peacebuilders, civil society and affected populations, ensuring these processes avoid tokenization or re-traumatization and instead reflect genuine partnership and respect.
- Institutionalize the practice of civil society briefings ahead of PBC meetings, ensuring their perspectives directly inform the PBC's advice to the UNSC on country situations. This should become a standardized element of the PBC's working methods, with equitable representation of local actors from affected regions.
- Build capacity and skill within the UN to recognize and address structural discrimination and systemic barriers that increase vulnerability, through training, guidance notes and accountability mechanisms focused on inclusivity, equity and community engagement.
- Strengthen inclusivity in protection frameworks, explicitly recognizing the needs of marginalized groups whose risks and vulnerabilities are too often neglected. This can take the form of gender-based violence prevention programming in displacement settings, safe reporting channels for persecuted minorities or specialized psychosocial support for survivors from marginalized communities, among others.

By institutionalizing meaningful participation, member states can ensure atrocity prevention strategies are grounded in lived realities and community-driven solutions. This approach not only improves the effectiveness of prevention, but also restores trust, strengthens legitimacy and affirms that international protection efforts are guided by those most directly affected.

ICR2P hopes that this call will translate into genuine concerted efforts to protect populations from mass atrocity crimes, hold perpetrators accountable and prevent atrocity risks from escalating. ICR2P and its

member organizations stand ready as resources of support, early warning and expertise for member states in fulfilling this responsibility.