

Summary of the UN Secretary-General's 2026 Report on R2P, *Sustained implementation of the responsibility to protect at the national, regional and multilateral levels*

The UN Secretary-General issued the 18th report on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) titled “*Sustained implementation of the responsibility to protect at the national, regional and multilateral levels.*” The report reflects on lessons learned in operationalizing R2P and emphasizes the need to strengthen implementation through sustained national, regional and multilateral policies and practices. Against a backdrop of escalating armed conflicts, deepening geopolitical fragmentation and growing disregard for international law, the Secretary-General argues that atrocity prevention cannot remain reactive or episodic. Rather, prevention and protection efforts must be embedded into governance systems and public policy across periods of stability, emerging risk, active crisis and post-conflict recovery. The report outlines practical and policy-oriented approaches for integrating an atrocity prevention lens across institutions and frameworks to strengthen prevention, improve the protection of vulnerable populations and support long-term non-recurrence.

KEY POINTS

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect highlights the following central themes from the Secretary General's report:

- International norms protecting civilians are under increasing strain. State and non-state actors are increasingly operating with permissive interpretations of, or open disregard for, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL). Civilians continue to bear the brunt of contemporary armed conflict, while double standards, assertions of exceptional circumstances and weakening

accountability mechanisms erode safeguards designed to prevent atrocities.

- The sustainable implementation of R2P requires national ownership and long-term political will. While R2P begins at home, the principle must be implemented consistently across national, regional and multilateral levels to be mutually reinforcing and to avoid selectivity and double standards. This sustained and principled application is essential to preserving R2P's legitimacy and strengthening collective prevention efforts.
- R2P complements, but is distinct from, civilian protection and human rights frameworks because it maintains a distinct focus on identifying risks, vulnerabilities, patterns and triggers specific to mass atrocity crimes.
- Atrocity prevention should function along a continuum; with prevention and protection measures integrated well before crises emerge. Embedding atrocity prevention priorities into policies and governance structures during periods of relative stability strengthens the ability of states and institutions to identify risks early and respond before they escalate.
- Effective prevention requires broad-based cooperation and dialogue. Atrocity prevention and protection efforts are more effective when informed by cooperation among governments, affected communities, civil society organizations, regional bodies and the UN system. Dialogue and inclusive participation strengthen resilience, improve early warning capacity and reinforce national ownership.

SECTION II. PATTERNS AND MODALITIES IN THE ONGOING COMMISSION OF ATROCITY CRIMES

In this section, the Secretary-General situates atrocity risks within a rapidly deteriorating global landscape marked by escalating armed conflicts, deepening governance crises, technological transformation and the erosion of international norms.

Despite clear protections under IHL and IHRL, civilians continue to suffer the devastating and avoidable consequences of mass atrocity crimes. Forced displacement has become increasingly protracted, leaving millions dependent on shrinking humanitarian assistance. The decline in humanitarian funding is forcing impossible prioritization among highly vulnerable populations.

The Secretary-General specifically highlights the increasingly complex role of non-state armed groups, the threats created by rapid technological change – especially the increasing use of drones in conflict – identity-based targeting and discriminatory policies in his analysis of contributors to atrocity risks.

Furthermore, some actors are increasingly adopting permissive interpretations of international law or disregarding their legal obligations altogether, hollowing out the protections designed to safeguard civilians. Assertions of exceptional circumstances, selective application of legal standards and inconsistent compliance with international law erode respect for civilian protection norms. Concurrently, efforts to intimidate UN experts and officials associated with international accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court (ICC), risk creating chilling effects that further weaken accountability efforts.

The Secretary-General further warns that governance systems are facing a critical inflection point, driven by growing disconnects between societal expectations and the ability of institutions to respond effectively.

SECTION III. SUSTAINED RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT: PREVENTION, PROTECTION AND NON-RECURRENCE

The Secretary-General consolidates several lessons learned regarding the effective implementation of R2P over the past two decades. These include the importance of national ownership, sustained political commitment, atrocity risk and threat assessments, dialogue with affected communities and the consistent application of

prevention and protection standards across national, regional and multilateral levels.

Central to the report is the assertion that R2P must be understood as a sustained prevention agenda that extends across periods of relative stability, emerging risk, active crisis and post-conflict recovery. It also reiterates that R2P complements conflict prevention, human rights and civilian protection frameworks while maintaining a distinct focus on the risks, vulnerabilities and triggers specific to atrocities, including in situations that may fall below the threshold of armed conflict. In this regard, the report highlights the *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes* as an important tool for identifying risk factors and informing prevention strategies.

A major emphasis throughout the section is the operationalization of an atrocity prevention lens across state institutions and multilateral frameworks. The report advocates for the continuous monitoring of societal vulnerabilities, early warning indicators and risk factors, alongside greater integration of prevention considerations into public policy and institutional planning. This includes establishing early warning mechanisms, sharing analysis across national and multilateral actors and developing tailored prevention strategies that strengthen resilience and enable political leadership to act earlier.

The section concludes with a notable conceptual comparison: likening early warning mechanisms for atrocities to public health prevention models that rely on continuous monitoring, coordinated prevention strategies and risk reduction measures to respond to emerging threats. The Secretary-General argues that atrocity prevention should similarly function as a sustained and normalized component of governance rather than an exceptional response that is triggered only during crises.

SECTION IV. RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT AT THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND MULTILATERAL LEVELS

In this section, the Secretary-General focuses on operationalizing atrocity prevention across national, regional and multilateral institutions. Sustained implementation of R2P requires embedding atrocity prevention measures into legislation, governance structures, early warning systems and coordinated

protection frameworks capable of responding across periods of stability, crisis and recovery.

At the national level, the report emphasizes the importance of strengthening institutional resilience through inclusive governance, rule of law protections and measures aimed at addressing structural discrimination and exclusion. Recommended measures include safeguarding judicial independence, protecting minority rights, supporting independent media, combating hate speech and ensuring credible electoral processes.

Regional actors are presented as critical partners in strengthening early warning systems, facilitating preventive diplomacy and supporting joint prevention and protection initiatives. The report highlights efforts by numerous organizations in developing regional frameworks, training mechanisms and institutional capacities related to atrocity prevention.

The section also reiterates the responsibility of the international community to take collective action when national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations. The Secretary-General references restraint on the use of the veto by permanent members of the UN Security Council in atrocity situations. The report notes that if the Council fails to act, the UN General Assembly may consider alternative avenues for collective action, including through the “Uniting for Peace” mechanism.

While urging for greater consistency, coordination and coherence across national, regional and multilateral responses, the Secretary-General argues that sustained and principled implementation of R2P across all levels can strengthen the credibility and legitimacy of atrocity prevention efforts. Over time, this coordination can help reinforce a “shared culture of prevention and protection.”

SECTION V. PREVENTION IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

This section focuses on practical approaches for embedding atrocity prevention within existing national, regional and multilateral governance structures. A central emphasis throughout the section is the important role of domestic focal points and national atrocity prevention entities in strengthening implementation and national ownership of R2P. Domestic focal points can help mainstream atrocity prevention perspectives across state institutions and improve coordination among

relevant actors, including with their counterparts already operating at the multilateral level. In situations marked by instability or heightened societal stress, national prevention entities, such as public officials and civil society representatives, may also support early warning efforts, identify emerging risks and develop recommendations aimed at protecting vulnerable populations and preventing escalation.

The Secretary-General further acknowledges that the international community has too often failed to prevent atrocities or adequately protect populations at risk. In response, the report calls for more consistent implementation of R2P, supported by coordinated and complementary approaches that strengthen resilience, reduce institutional fragmentation and ensure that prevention efforts are not misaligned.

SECTION VI. PROTECTION IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

This section examines how atrocity prevention can be further integrated across the UN system, particularly through human rights mechanisms, peacebuilding initiatives and peace operations. A central theme throughout the section is that the effective implementation of R2P requires strengthening coordination and prevention-oriented approaches across existing institutions and mandates, including ensuring more complementary approaches among humanitarian, human rights, development and peace actors.

The report highlights the role of the UN human rights system – particularly the Human Rights Council and Special Procedures – in identifying early warning signs, documenting violations and supporting future accountability efforts. The Secretary-General emphasizes that human rights monitoring and reporting can provide critical information on atrocity risks.

The report stresses that addressing structural grievances, exclusion, weak governance and social fragmentation is essential to reducing long-term atrocity risks. In this regard, the Peacebuilding Commission, Peacebuilding Fund and broader UN peacebuilding architecture are identified as important peace tools for strengthening institutional resilience, supporting inclusive governance and fostering social cohesion in fragile contexts. The Peacebuilding Commission also serves an important advisory role to the Security Council and General

Assembly, helping to ensure information sharing across UN bodies and non-siloed approaches.

The section also examines the role of UN peace operations, special political missions and other field presences in supporting early warning, civilian protection, mediation and conflict prevention efforts, particularly in situations where institutions are under stress or violence is escalating.

SECTION VII. NON-RECURRENCE IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

Ensuring non-recurrence is a core component of R2P. Preventing future atrocities requires more than ending active violence; it also demands long-term efforts to address the structural conditions, institutional vulnerabilities and societal divisions that enabled atrocities to occur in the first place. This should include strengthening state institutions, responding to the needs and experiences of survivors and affected communities, addressing root causes and implementing structural, legal and governance reforms.

A central theme throughout the section is the importance of nationally owned and context-specific approaches informed by affected communities. The report highlights the role of civil society organizations, human rights defenders and community-based actors in advancing guarantees of non-recurrence, while warning against attacks, intimidation and restrictions targeting civic space. Drawing upon the work of the Special Rapporteur on truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence, the report identifies several key priorities at the societal level, including protecting civil society, promoting legal empowerment and fostering enabling environments for broader civic participation.

The Secretary-General also argues that atrocity prevention considerations should be integrated into peacemaking, mediation and post-conflict recovery processes from the outset. Incorporating an atrocity prevention lens into negotiations, peace agreements and post-conflict planning can help support more sustainable peace and reduce the likelihood of renewed violence. The report highlights the importance of demobilization and reintegration initiatives, security sector reform and the restoration of public services to all populations as foundational components for long-term stabilization efforts. Transitional justice processes are similarly

presented as central to overcoming the legacy of atrocity crimes. The report stresses that accountability measures, both retributive and restorative, can contribute to combating denial and revisionism.

The section concludes by emphasizing that non-recurrence efforts cannot rest solely at the national level. Sustained regional and multilateral support are essential to ensuring that long-term prevention, accountability and institutional reform efforts are adequately supported and reinforced long-term.

SECTION VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Secretary-General argues that R2P remains a relevant and practical framework for preventing atrocity crimes and protecting vulnerable populations. However, amid escalating conflicts, growing geopolitical divisions and increasing disregard for international law, the report stresses that there needs to be a shift in current prevention efforts. Atrocity prevention must become a sustained and institutionalized component of governance at the national, regional and multilateral levels.

Building on recommendations advanced in the [2025 report](#), the Secretary-General identifies several priorities for strengthening implementation of R2P, including integrating an atrocity prevention lens into governance and early warning frameworks, establishing or strengthening domestic focal points and prevention mechanisms and enhancing coordination across regional and multilateral institutions. The Secretary-General also encourages member states to strengthen engagement with international legal frameworks, including the Genocide Convention and the Rome Statute of the ICC.

The Secretary-General further calls on member states to continue engaging with the Special Adviser on R2P and other relevant parts of the UN system to strengthen cooperation, share lessons learned and support more consistent implementation of R2P. In concluding the report, the Secretary-General reiterates that sustained prevention, protection and non-recurrence efforts are essential to ensuring that commitments made under R2P are translated into meaningful and consistent action before populations face the risk of atrocity crimes.