

General Assembly Interactive Dialogue: The Responsibility to Protect

Statement by Ambassador Michael Grant, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations

New York, September 6, 2016

Mr. President,

I wish to thank you for organising this informal interactive dialogue which provides an opportunity to assess the obstacles to mobilizing collective action to prevent and respond to mass atrocity crimes.

Responsibility to Protect, as a concept, has come a long way. Yet, the number of people in need of urgent assistance and protection remains stubbornly high. The atrocity crimes perpetrated against civilian populations by State and Non-State actors in Syria and elsewhere are a daily reminder of this horrifying reality.

As the Secretary-General rightfully points out, the protection of civilians in United Nations peace operations should be a priority. We need to fully implement the rules and principles to which we have committed. The Kigali Principles provide an important framework for the effective implementation of protection of civilian mandates in UN peace keeping.

Peacekeepers are frontline ambassadors for the UN and R2P: their performance is directly linked with the credibility and efficacy of peace operations. Greater emphasis should be put on training peacekeepers on their responsibilities in cooperation with regional and international organizations.

Canada commends the Secretary-General's commitment to reporting failures in civilian protection to the Security Council. We must improve the system-wide capacity of the UN to prevent and respond to serious violations and abuses of international humanitarian and human rights law. Too often, political divisiveness prevents action. That is why Canada supports both the ACT's Code of Conduct and the France-Mexico Political Declaration on suspension of the veto in situations involving mass atrocity crimes. It is by addressing the institutional weaknesses that the UN could act swiftly and deliver on its political commitments.

Mr. President, Canada has long advocated for the protection of civilians to be at the heart of peace operations. It is a pivotal issue on which we are judged; it is the standard we set for the world. Canada welcomes the progress made over the years. More needs to be done in order to make the Responsibility to Protect a reality.

To this end, Canada recently announced a commitment of up to 600 troops in support of peace operations. Our government has also recently announced a Peace and Stabilisation Operations Program that will bolster our own efforts to support peace operations, including through supporting training which emphasizes civilian protection and upholds high standards of conduct.

Thank you, Mr. President.