

**Statement of the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect
Jennifer Welsh at the 2015 UN General Assembly Dialogue on the
Responsibility to Protect [Transcribed]**

8 September 2015

I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening the discussion today. I would also like to thank my colleague Adama Dieng for moderating the session but also for his continued leadership and support with respect to the prevention of genocide and the responsibility to protect. I want to thank all of you, it has been a long day, for your engagement with the Secretary General's report, and I also want to thank all of you for the various ways in which you interacted with the office in the preparation of this report and your frank expression of your ideas, with respect to the responsibility to protect over the last year.

I want to highlight a few comments that have been made by Member States today, I won't be exhaustive, but I think they are very important for us to consider as we go forward in the next decade.

I want to begin with an observation from Albania, that a principle alone cannot protect, that we need political will and resources to protect. And that's absolutely true – the responsibility to protect in and of itself as a principle cannot protect. And then I want to acknowledge the words of Costa Rica which said very clearly and I think very poignantly that states need to be able, across the board, to admit where there are risks and to admit where they need assistance. This was echoed by Tanzania which talked about building resilience and by Brazil which talked about the importance of prevention first, which is a key part of the consensus that has been built over the last decade. India talked about national ownership which of course we highlighted in last year's report as well as being a key part of the implementation of the responsibility to protect. Armenia mentioned that we should recognise the concerns of Member States where they exist and I want to stress to all of you that both in the consultations and today, I have heard and the Secretary General has heard the concerns that continue to exist that surround the use of military means in conjunction with the responsibility to protect. But I think it is also important to stress, as many of you did today, that pillar three, timely and decisive response, encompasses much more than military instruments. Military means, yes, should be a last resort. But timely and decisive response is a broader rubric under which we can think about how we respond to ongoing crises.

Finally, I think it's important to highlight what Ghana, Poland and Denmark said, that the responsibility to protect does not exist in a vacuum. Many of you mentioned today the ongoing reviews that are going on within the United Nations, that have gone on over the past year, of peacebuilding and of peace operations, and have already turned your attention to implementation, and to working with very practical measures, to ensure that we protect populations, and I think this must be part of our approach going forward into the next decade.

There is a point I want to come back to, and that was a point that was raised by the delegation from Venezuela, which made some very constructive comments about the report. But the representative talked about the principle of responsibility to protect dividing Member States into two camps – those who are responsible and those who are not responsible, and I want to very respectfully disagree with that statement. The principle of the responsibility to protect is not designed to do that. It is first and foremost a statement that all states are responsible, bear the primary responsibility to protect their populations from acts which the international community as a whole has stigmatised as crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and ethnic cleansing. And they declared in 2005, Member States, that the international community has a responsibility to assist states to fulfil those responsibilities. So all states bear a responsibility, all states are responsible. That is at the core of this principle. That was behind the 2005 Summit outcome document and I very much hope it will be behind the responsibility to protect's next decade.

The Secretary-General deliberately authored a forward-looking report, a forward leaning report. And it meant that some of the aspects of that report are controversial, they will need further discussion, and that discussion will require open dialogue and engagement in good faith with difficult questions. Some of you believe that the way to take that forward is to put the responsibility to protect on the formal agenda, where we can have a longer and more in depth discussion. Some of you believe it may be premature to do that because the concept needs further refinement. But I want to stress that the consensus that has built up over the responsibility to protect over the last ten years is real. There are a number of elements that states universally have agreed on, including the importance of using diplomatic and humanitarian and other peaceful tools including the importance of prevention. There is a paragraph in this year's report that summarises the consensus that exists. And in my consultations with Member States I didn't hear a single Member State disagree with those elements. So we have a basis on which we can move forward.

But I want to conclude by coming back to, despite the importance of prevention, the crises that we have before us. The ongoing crisis in Syria, the crisis in Iraq and the global refugee crisis. They're evidence for all of us that improving our ability to prevent and respond to genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing is a moral and political imperative. And let's remember that the responsibility to protect was not intended to create new law, it's not striving to be a new legal principle, it's about political commitment to implement existing legal obligations. And I believe it's a powerful tool and the Secretary-General believes it's a powerful tool in doing that.

I also want to, before I conclude, invite you all to contribute to the finalisation of the compendium of practise. We're releasing the preliminary version of that compendium this week. We believe it can be a very useful resource for states. But it needs your further input, your ideas, your reflections on initiatives that

you have taken as Member States to implement the responsibility to protect over the last decade.

As a final note, I want to simply observe the remarkable progress that we have made over the last ten years. We have turned a political commitment in the World Summit outcome document into a programme for implementation. That doesn't mean that all of you agree on every single aspect, there's more discussion we need to have, but I think the past decade we can be proud of the engagement that we've had, the discussion that we've had and the progress we've made in identifying real practical tools for implementation.

Finally, the Secretary-General this morning put forward a call to action, it's a call to all of us in our capacities to make the commitment of 2005 real, to make a difference in the lives of populations around the world who are imperilled and I encourage all of you to take up that call to action and I look forward to working with you over the months ahead in order to do that.

Thank you very much.