

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

--

REMARKS TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY
INFORMAL INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE
ON “EARLY WARNING, ASSESSMENT,
AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT (RtoP)”
New York, 23 July 2010

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you. By convening this dialogue, Mr. President, you have ensured the General Assembly’s “continuing consideration” of the responsibility to protect, as called for by the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document and as confirmed by the Assembly itself last September.

I appreciate the readiness of skeptics and enthusiasts alike to engage in sustained and productive conversation on this critical matter. That is the way forward; that is one of the greatest strengths of this universal body.

A year ago, the Assembly had a wide-ranging, thoughtful and ultimately very encouraging debate on my report on *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*. Member States discussed both core principles and broad-based strategies for forwarding them under the Charter and the rule of law.

Today, we are gathered to exchange views on early warning and assessment. This is the right place to start for several reasons.

First, there is broad agreement on the need to strengthen early warning capacity.

At the 2005 World Summit, Heads of State and Government agreed to “support the United Nations in establishing an early warning capability.” In last July’s debate, a number of you, including representatives of States that had suffered such traumas, stressed the need for reliable early warning of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. Your voices, and those at the World Summit, could not have been clearer.

Second, early warning and assessment are at the heart of any effective international strategy for preventing these horrific crimes and violations and for protecting populations.

If we want the United Nations to play a leading role in prevention and protection, we need to equip it with early warning and assessment capacities comparable to those at the disposal of national decision-makers.

Third, early warning may not be sufficient to ensure early action, but it is surely necessary.

Addressing fast-moving atrocities requires an early and flexible international response, tailored to the circumstances of each case. This, in turn, depends on accurate and timely information and careful assessment of the facts on the ground and of the policy instruments available to the United Nations and its regional and sub-regional partners.

Fourth, these are sensitive and complex matters.

Paragraph 139 of the Outcome Document calls on the United Nations and its regional partners to consider the full range of pacific, enforcement and regional tools under Chapters VI, VII and VIII of the Charter in determining how to fulfil mandates for prevention and protection.

These tasks range from identifying and assisting States “under stress” to weighing collective action, through the Security Council, when “peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect populations”.

In preparing recommendations to the Council or other inter-governmental bodies, I need timely, high-quality assessments, drawing on the knowledge and experience of the UN system as a whole, from headquarters and field alike. I am pleased by the way the UN system is responding to these challenges. Acting as one is crucial for saving lives and preventing mass atrocities.

An early, nuanced and impartial understanding of a situation is essential whether we are exploring possibilities for prevention or reacting to a crisis already under way. Robust, persistent engagement in Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire made a difference -- but this was also timely and well informed diplomacy by the United Nations and its partners.

In many cases, global-regional partnerships have been the key to prevention and protection. I propose that next year, as part of its continuing consideration of the responsibility to protect, the Assembly hold a similar dialogue with regional and sub-regional bodies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As my report for today’s dialogue underscores, early warning and assessment have become well established functions in the UN system. They are essential components of our development, human rights, disaster preparedness, humanitarian, peacekeeping, conflict prevention, genocide prevention, and political work. They are

essential for building a more agile and dynamic world body capable of anticipating and responding to the shifting and layered demands of the twenty-first century.

As mentioned in the Annex to my report last year, and outlined more fully in today's report, I have begun to take some initial steps toward establishing a United Nations early warning capability.

I have asked my two Special Advisers -- Francis Deng on the prevention of genocide, and Edward Luck on the conceptual, political and institutional development of the responsibility to protect -- to explore ways of institutionalizing their ongoing collaboration, including through a joint office.

Any such office would be small, especially compared to the magnitude of the task. It would place considerable emphasis on system-wide coherence, on information and consultation with other UN entities, and on mainstreaming responsibility to protect perspectives.

Even as the Special Advisers continue to pursue the distinct aspects of their responsibilities, they are also collaborating on operational matters and have begun to work together on the collection and analysis of information, on early warning and on the cross-sectoral assessment of policy options in individual situations. Recently, for instance, they released a joint statement on the crisis in Kyrgyzstan.

A key question, of course, is what we do with information or other signs of mass atrocities or genocide-in-the-making. Should the Special Advisers conclude that a situation could result in genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity, they will provide early warning to me and, through me, to the Security Council and other relevant inter-governmental organs. If the situation persists, I would ask them to initiate the new emergency procedures described in paragraph 18 of my report for this dialogue.

Proposals for institutionalizing the collaboration of the two Special Advisers will be submitted to the General Assembly later this year. For today, my intent is to focus our dialogue on the substance of early warning and assessment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you well appreciate, a compelling moral imperative is embodied in the responsibility to protect. In addressing these important technical, procedural, and institutional questions, let us not forget what is at stake: protecting populations from the worst atrocities that, time and again, human beings have proven themselves all-too-capable of carrying out.

When weighing how to move forward, let us think of the millions of children, women and men who were killed, maimed or sexually assaulted in the Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia, the genocide in Rwanda, or the forests of Srebrenica.

Think, as well, of the scars these traumas have left on those who survived and on generations to follow. The legacy of the twentieth century need not be the blueprint for the twenty-first.

Let us chart a new path by turning lofty ideals into practical policies. I look forward to making this journey with you.

Thank you. I wish you a lively and productive dialogue.