

Statement by France at Security Council Meeting on: Threat to International Peace and Security:  
Prevention and Fight Against Genocide

16 April 2014  
(Unofficial Transcript)

I thank Rwanda for having organized this moment of gathering and commemoration in honour of the victims of genocide. The briefings of Mr. Eliasson and Mr. Keating will enabled us to draw a lesson from the past in order to improve our actions in the future.

On this day of mourning, France pays tribute to all the victims of the genocide. More than a million innocent people were massacred because they were Tutsi or because they were opposed to the murderous folly of a political ideology and system. Mass atrocities were carried out by militias, armed forces and civilians in violation of the very principle of humanity. The violence was planned; radios disseminated hate speech that will forever echo in our consciences.

I also pay homage to the 15 Blue Helmets of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) who were killed in the line of duty. The international community was not able to prevent or stop the genocide. The Council acted too late and did not do enough. And yet, the earliest warning signs had already been given, the first of which in a communiqué from General Dallaire of 11 January 1994.

Fourteen years ago, we met in the Security Council to draw lessons from our collective failure. At that time, we asked the Secretary-General to draft an action plan to prevent genocide. Since then, our preventive mechanisms have been strengthened. Like my Argentine colleague, I shall return to this topic, which she addressed with deep emotion and thoughtfulness.

To prevent is first and foremost to warn. One early aspect of progress to that end was the establishment of the Office of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, led by Mr. Adama Dieng. Mandated by resolution 1366 (2001), his Office is acting as an early rapid-warning mechanism for the Secretary-General and the Security Council by bringing to their attention any situation that threatens to deteriorate into genocide. The briefings of Mr. Dieng in the Security Council on the Central African Republic have contributed to raising the awareness of the international community so that it can act urgently to prevent such crimes. We must continue to include him further in our work.

To prevent is also to act. A second note of progress was the adoption in 2005 by the Heads of State and of Government of the concept of responsibility to protect. When a Government cannot or will not assume responsibility to protect, the international community must assume that responsibility, including by taking resolute and timely action. France is currently engaged in Mali and the Central African Republic, at the request of the authorities and under Council mandate, to assist the endangered populations. In those countries and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Council has given the kind of robust protection of civilians mandate that UNAMIR lacked in 1994. That progress should be consolidated. The Council must continue to play its full role in implementing the responsibility to protect. As a member of the Group of Friends on Responsibility to Protect, France is in favour.

To prevent is to bring to justice. Adopted in 1948, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was a precursor to the International Criminal Court; 58 years later, we finally adopted the Rome Statute. In the meantime, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda advanced justice. It was the first to recognize that acts of sexual violence could be acts of genocide. That jurisprudence has been used since then. It remains an essential factor for memory and reparation in reconciliation processes that can avert the cycle of reprisals. The International Criminal Court is permanent and operational. When atrocities are committed, as they are today in Syria, there is no excuse for inaction. The Council can refer the situation to the International Criminal Court.

In spite of such progress, tragic situations, such as that in Syria today, recall the ongoing need to improve our action. In that regard, I welcome the initiatives of the Secretary-General, including his policy of accelerated diligence and of limited contact with those against whom an arrest warrant or a warrant to appear has been issued by the International Criminal Court.

The Organization must serve as a model. All tools must be mobilized — our human rights mechanisms; the network of focal points for the responsibility to protect, in which we participate; our horizon-scanning meetings in the Security Council, which are integral parts of our preventive diplomacy efforts that would benefit from being organized regularly.

Tragic situations arise despite early warning and preventive action. Crimes against humanity or war crimes are perpetrated before our very eyes, while the Security Council remains paralysed by the abusive use of the veto. That is why France is working for a voluntary code of conduct for the five permanent members to limit the use of the veto when such crimes are committed. We owe that in particular to the Syrian people.

Rafael Lemkin called 70 years ago for international cooperation to free humankind from an odious scourge whose anomic, immoral and inhumane nature shocks the human conscience. In his lofty statement, my Jordanian colleague tried to attribute this scourge to fear. He may well be right, but the absolute horror of the crime attains a metaphysical level in touching upon the evil that is within each of us. Whether or not we are Christian, it is difficult to not think about the original sin in human nature.

Today, France honours the memory of all victims of genocide, and reiterates its commitment to doing everything possible to ensure that the lessons of the mistakes of the past are heeded and that such atrocities do not recur, because such tragedies are still present and possible.