

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

16 April 2014  
(Unofficial Transcript)

I shall now make a statement in my national capacity.

I want to join those who have taken the floor before me to thank our briefers, Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson and Ambassador Colin Keating, for their briefings. They have not only provided profound insights and fresh perspectives on today's subject of discussion, but they have also established some institutional memory for the future. I want to sincerely thank Ambassador Keating in particular for his recognition of Nigeria's critical role in condemning the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and reinforcing the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda in the Security Council in 1994. I thank him very much; we feel inspired by that recognition.

The concept note for today's briefing (S/2014/265, annex) invites us to consider various issues related to the prevention of genocide. I shall attempt to address the evolution of the preventive capabilities of the United Nations since the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, early warning mechanisms, fighting impunity through justice, and lessons learned.

On the evolution of the preventive capabilities of the United Nations since 1994, Nigeria would like to acknowledge the important steps that the United Nations has taken, and I want to name them specifically. During the tenth anniversary of the genocide in 2004, then- Secretary-General Kofi Annan presented a five-point plan of action aimed at preventing genocide. The elements of the plan were designed to, first, prevent armed conflict which may provide a pretext for genocide; secondly, protect civilians in armed conflict, including through the use of United Nations peacekeepers; thirdly, end impunity through judicial action in national and international courts; fourthly, gather information and set up early warning systems; and fifthly, take swift and decisive action, including through the use of military force.

One year later, at the 2005 World Summit, leaders from across the world agreed on the responsibility to protect populations against the four mass atrocities — genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. We appreciate the Secretary-General's past reports on the subject in which he has proposed tools for genocide prevention, including the report of January 2009 on "Implementing the responsibility to protect" (A/63/677), the July 2010 report on "Early warning, assessment and the responsibility to protect" (A/64/864), and the July 2013 report on "Responsibility to protect: State responsibility and prevention" (S/2013/399).

In July 2009, the Secretary-General presented his January 2009 report to the General Assembly, and in the same month a General Assembly plenary debate on the responsibility to protect was held (A/63/PV.97). The debate presented delegations with an opportunity to demonstrate their support for implementing their commitments under the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document (resolution 60/1). Similarly, following the release of the July 2010 report,

the General Assembly, on 9 August 2010, convened an informal interactive dialogue on the main themes of the report. Nigeria was one of the eight countries that participated in that dialogue.

In addition to the periodic reports, the Secretary-General has made some significant appointments since the genocide in Rwanda that will help in the fight against genocide, which has been mentioned by various speakers this morning. We therefore commend the Secretary-General for appointing the Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide and a Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect. We also commend the Secretary-General for his Rights Up Front initiative, which contains six critical actions to help the Secretariat coordinate the Organization's work in the area of human rights. One of the actions requires the United Nations to provide Member States with candid information concerning people at risk of various violations of human rights.

Nigeria would like to underline the importance of adherence to the principle of early warning mechanisms and the need for a timely and decisive response. Today, there is a plethora of theatres of conflict around the world, and urgent actions are required to halt those conflicts and indeed address their root causes. In some of those places, the situation is reaching a critical threshold and the risk of mass atrocity crimes is very high. The benefits of an early warning mechanism is that it enhances the chances of detecting those signs that point to the possibility that genocide may indeed occur. With that comes the added benefit of allowing for preventive measures to be taken in a timely manner.

Nigeria remains committed to the fight against impunity. We believe that impunity must be addressed resolutely wherever it occurs anywhere in world. The fight against impunity and the prevention of mass atrocity crimes are national priorities for us, as clearly demonstrated through the various instruments instituted to address that menace. Our belief in the need for global action against mass atrocity crimes and security threats to humankind underpins our ratification of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Arms Trade Treaty and other relevant international legal instruments.

Nigeria appreciates the important role of the ICC in fighting genocide and other mass atrocity crimes. Perpetrators of genocide must be held accountable in order to send a strong and unambiguous message of zero tolerance on the part of the international community. We recall that at the 27 January New York launch of Kwibuka20, the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, the Secretary-General aptly stated that we have learned important lessons. He also emphasized that genocide is not a single event but a process that requires planning and resources to carry out, and that with adequate information, mobilization, courage and political will, genocide can indeed be prevented.

Several questions arise from that thesis of the Secretary-General. How can we obtain information to prevent genocide? Who needs to be mobilized and by whom in order to prevent genocide? And how do we generate the courage and political will to prevent genocide? Those are key questions to which we are all collectively responsible to provide adequate and genuine responses.

Ultimately, it all boils down to the choices that we all decide to make. The choice of compassion over hatred, the choice of inclusion over exclusion, and the choice of peace over war are always ours to make. Today is an important reminder of the far-reaching consequences of those choices. Let the memories of Rwanda be a constant and visible reminder of the necessity of making the right choice — the choice of peace. Let us muster the courage that makes us too strong for fear and too noble for anger or revenge. Let us eschew neutrality.

In 2010, while we served on the Security Council, I had occasion at a retreat of the Council to remind the Council that, according to the great poet Dante, neutrality is not an option because, again according to Dante, the hottest corner of hell is reserved for those who preserve their neutrality in times of moral crisis.

We want to take this opportunity to recognize the remarkable progress that Rwanda has made over the past 20 years in healing the wounds of genocide and advancing the process of reconciliation. We are greatly inspired by that, and we join the international community in the adoption of resolution 2150 (2014) today in the determined chorus of “never again”.