

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

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Madam President, I thank you for organizing this important briefing as one of the events for the twentieth commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

Our briefers today have undoubtedly an extensive array of experience on the topic of the prevention of and fight against genocide. I welcome Ambassador Colin Keating of New Zealand, a man who, as a President of the Security Council in April 1994, witnessed a lurid moment of weakness of this organ 20 years ago, when he was calling for help for our people. I also acknowledge the presence of Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, a man who has rallied the United Nations system to learn from its failure in Rwanda in 1994 and who has played an important role in the liberation and promotion of our responsibility to protect. I thank both gentlemen, or let me say dear friends, for their briefings today.

I take the opportunity to thank all members of the Council for adopting unanimously resolution 2150 (2014) on the prevention and fight against genocide on the occasion of the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, during which Hutus and others were also killed. I also particularly thank all States Members of the United Nations that sponsored the resolution. It is our hope that the resolution will serve as a wake-up call and make a contribution, small as it may be, to preventing and fighting against future genocides.

In April 1994, more than a million people were slaughtered in Rwanda during the 100 days between April and July 1994. That is 10,000 people every day for the sole crime of being born Tutsi. Others — Hutus, Twas and foreign citizens — were also killed for opposing the genocide and for carrying out their obligation to protect their fellow humans. The systemic slaughter of men, women and children was perpetrated in full view of the international community. The genocide against the Tutsi highlighted the extent to which methods of prevention at the United Nations failed utterly. In that regard, my Minister for Foreign Affairs, Louise Mushikiwabo, at the launch of the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary in Rwanda back in January, raised a pertinent question that I believe the Security Council should endeavour to respond to in the years ahead. Her question was that today, if the international community had at its disposal the information and capacity to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe, as it did in 1994, would it act differently?

In 1994, the issue was not a lack of information about the true picture of what was happening in Rwanda. It was not a lack of a legal characterization of the crimes that were committed. It was not a lack of budgets or funding. As Ambassador Keating wrote, it was simply a lack of political will. A lack of political will on the part of permanent members of the Council, who held veto power; a lack of political will on the part of the United Nations Secretariat, which deliberately gave erroneous information in the Secretary-General's reports that contradicted the true information coming from the United Nations Force Commander; a lack of political will on

the part of the troop-contributing countries that pulled out their troops, leaving those who had run to them for protection at the mercy of Interhamwe militias. As President Paul Kagame said on 7 April, “genocide prevention demands historical clarity of all of us”.

It is therefore our duty to recall that genocide was carried out in Rwanda owing to complete systemic indifference between and during the tragedy. Twenty years later, we should ask if the broader international community, and the United Nations in particular, is capable of being any better at preventing a repeat of Rwanda in 1994 from happening elsewhere. On this issue, President Kagame clearly stated, in the same speech on 7 April, that

“[n]o country, in Africa or anywhere else, ever needs to become another Rwanda. But if a people’s choices are not informed by historical clarity, the danger is ever present”.

The horrific scenes coming from the Central African Republic, Syria and South Sudan will in some cases convince many that the United Nations is still struggling to match its normative principles with realities on the ground, and that the prevention of mass atrocities still has a long way to go. This was evident in the fact that the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda materialized in spite of the adoption four decades earlier of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and despite the inherent responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Since the tragedy that occurred in Rwanda, the Organization has deployed efforts to prevent genocide and mass atrocities by improving the capacity of the United Nations system, mobilizing the political will of key Member States and trying to learn lessons from the failures of the recent past — without, however, reaching their full potential. Those efforts range from endorsement in 2005 at the World Summit of the concept of the responsibility to protect; the enhancement of the agenda on the protection of civilians through normative frameworks; the creation of the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide; and, in relation to the responsibility to protect, the implementation of the Rights Up Front action plan as a tool for the United Nations to improve prevention by instituting a due-diligence policy on human rights to help enforce United Nations purposes and principles as set out in the Charter.

With the work and jurisprudence of the United Nations criminal tribunals, including the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and the special mixed tribunal in Sierra Leone and other international criminal mechanisms, the importance of accountability for perpetrators has been highlighted. It was our hope that the combination of all those efforts would result in a robust and effective architecture. As the concept note (S/2014/265, annex) puts it, the key question today is whether such capacity is adequate, or if there are areas that need sustained improvement. Without going into detail, anyone in this Chamber would agree that sustained improvement is required.

It is regrettable that some of the initiatives adopted in good faith in the United Nations by Member States and aimed at preventing and fighting genocide have encountered various challenges in their implementation and created controversies among States. Today, some of the viable initiatives, such as the International Criminal Court, are prone to political manipulation and abuses, which in turn contradict the original intentions in creating such mechanisms. Other

initiatives are still ill equipped and without sufficient capacity to discharge their functions, which in the long run hinders the translation of normative frameworks into practical preventive tools that match the realities on the ground. As a result, some of those efforts may not amount to much, and the pledges of “never again” will sound just as hollow today as they were after the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

It is true that the severity of the challenges that must be overcome for preventive action to be timely and effective are immense. On any given day, not just at the level of the United Nations but also within Member States, policymakers are grappling with many pressing tasks relating to crises unfolding somewhere in the world. Focusing on a problem that has not yet surfaced is clearly very difficult, but we believe that this is the task that this Organization should have mastered by now, over the nearly seven decades of its existence. It requires immense effort and willpower to overcome the many political, financial and operational obstacles.

We believe that more emphasis should be placed on reducing the risk of genocide and mass atrocities in order to reduce the need for crisis response. Investing in the areas that address the root causes of conflicts, such as improving the quality of democratic governance and human rights, establishing strong institutions, promoting economic performance, reducing poverty and inequality, and ensuring national reconciliation will, over time, lower that risk. We also believe that more effort should be put into United Nations crisis preparedness as opposed to crisis improvisation.

In that context, operational capacities should be developed well ahead in order to manage commonly recurring situations and to improve institutional responsiveness. In other words, the United Nations should have the capacity to deploy quickly rather than mobilizing for that deployment when a crisis erupts. That can be harnessed to regional and subregional arrangements, most of which are in the process of creating standby brigades. It is also very important that the international community invest greatly in strengthening the capacity of local and regional actors, given their higher incentive to respond to conflicts and crises in their proximity.

In that regard, we welcome the statement delivered by the Secretary-General in Kigali on 7 April during the twentieth commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsi, which we believe is a paradigm shift of the Organization:

“I have sent my own signal to United Nations representatives around the world. My message to them is simply this: when you see people at risk of atrocity crimes, do not wait for instructions from afar; speak up, even if it may offend. Act. Our first duty must always be to protect people — to protect human beings in need and distress.”

So let the entire United Nations system put in place the infrastructure to implement such a shift in policy. It is a priority.

Before I conclude, let me say that Rwanda is grateful to the Security Council that resolution 2150 (2014) condemns without reservation any denial of the genocide in Rwanda. We therefore reiterate our call on all Member States to support the fight against the denial of the

genocide, which is a denial of the right to memory, healing and reconciliation, and the obligation to learn lessons from the past.

In conclusion, I would like to quote Ambassador María Cristina Perceval of Argentina, who stated the following at a meeting of Security Council members with President Kagame, held on 7 October 2013 in Kigali.

“When I hear you, Mr. President, I remember the history of my country. I came here to see, to learn and to understand, not to point fingers. Genocide is not a slogan; it is in our body, and the shadow of the past is the light of tomorrow.”

Let us learn from that bitter past of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda in order to better prevent and fight against future genocide and mass atrocities. Again, a special thanks to all my colleagues on the Security Council, who not only voted for the resolution but also all of whom, exceptionally, co-sponsored it.