

Statement of Deputy Secretary-General Mr. Jan Eliasson at Security Council Meeting on: Threat to International Peace and Security: Prevention and Fight Against Genocide

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(Unofficial Transcript)

“The genocide in Rwanda is one of the darkest chapters in human history”. Those are the words of the Secretary-General — deeply moved — spoken in Kigali last week.

Today we remember the victims and the survivors as we continue to work to achieve justice for them and to prevent genocide and other mass atrocities anywhere in the world. We remember with heavy hearts the collective failure of the international community to recognize and act on the warning signs of genocide.

Twenty years ago, we saw yet again, after the Holocaust, how genocide was not a single event but a process that evolves over time, a process that requires planning and resources. That means that genocide can be prevented, with information and mobilization as well as with courage and political will.

We must continue to build on the lessons learned to improve our ability to protect populations from the most serious international crimes. Positive steps have been taken. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, alongside national trials, has held perpetrators to account. Tribunals and special courts for the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia and Sierra Leone have made similar inroads against impunity. The International Criminal Court has been central in the advance of international criminal law. The Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide now gathers information and sounds the alarm where there is a risk of genocide or other atrocities. Along with the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, he and other United Nations officials work on prevention and on helping countries build inclusive institutions and tolerant societies, with a focus on the resolution of grievances and disputes through peaceful means.

More broadly, the United Nations has progressively placed the promotion and protection of human rights at the core of our prevention work. The recently launched Rights Up Front initiative aims to improve our ability to respond to serious violations of human rights, which often are early warning signs of mass atrocities and of conflicts to come. The initiative is meant to generate early action and more active engagement by Member States and by the different entities of the United Nations system. We must be committed to doing our utmost to protect human lives in a very violent world.

The Rwanda genocide had a serious impact on the Great Lakes region. Twenty years later, the region is still seeing and dealing with the consequences. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) established a Protocol for the Prevention and the Punishment of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity and all Forms of Discrimination. Rwanda now chairs the Regional Committee to implement the Protocol. We count on Rwanda’s leadership in the prevention of atrocities. Almost half of the States members

of the ICGLR have established national committees on genocide prevention. I commend Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda for doing so.

As we mark the passage of 20 years since the genocide, we also pay special tribute to the impressive work of the Rwandan people for their own recovery and reconciliation. Rwanda has come a long way since 1994, and is one of the few countries that have established a national institution dedicated to the prevention of genocide. We encourage others to follow its lead and institutionalize prevention mechanisms.

Conflicts today, from Syria to South Sudan to the Central African Republic and beyond, sadly, show that the protection of populations from atrocities remains lagging and elusive. Those and other crises have different roots, yet there is a commonality. Across the landscape of conflict we see similar fault lines, divisions based on religion, ethnicity and even language. We see the rise of separatism, extreme nationalism and demonization of “the others”: us versus them, our way or no way.

No part of the world is immune to that threat, and all of humankind is diminished by it. That means that all societies should assess their vulnerability and work at every level to build resilience, tolerance and vigilance in detecting early warning signals of crises to come. Let us reaffirm that the primary responsibility lies with States themselves.

Preventing atrocities also means establishing legitimate and accountable national institutions that are inclusive and credible in the eyes of the population. It means ensuring that the rule of law is respected and that all human rights are protected, without discrimination. It means managing diversity, supporting a strong civil society and allowing all peoples’ voices to be heard.

In conclusion, we must do more as a community of nations and as global citizens if we are to live up to the promise of “never again” and act upon our collective responsibility to protect. Let us, in these days of so many acts of blind and brutalizing violence — and I look at the President as I say this and think of the recent atrocities committed in Nigeria — be guided and inspired by the preamble of the Charter of the United Nations, which reaffirms “the dignity and worth of the human person” and by the Charter, which urges us to “live together as good neighbours” in this world.