Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A Tool for Prevention
UN Special Advisors on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect
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Foreword
By the Secretary General of the United Nations

All of us have a responsibility to ask ourselves what we can do to protect populations from the most serious international crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. These crimes continue to be perpetrated in many places across the world. Although calls for accountability are now the norm when such crimes are committed, impunity is all too common. We can and must do more, much earlier, to save lives and prevent societies from collapsing and descending into horrific violence.

The first thing we can do is to be more alert and pay attention to the warning signs. Atrocity crimes take place on a large scale, and are not spontaneous or isolated events; they are processes, with histories, precursors and triggering factors which, combined, enable their commission.

My Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect have developed this Framework of Analysis for the Prevention of Atrocity Crimes as a guide for assessing the risk of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. With the help of the Framework, we can better sound the alarm, promote action, improve monitoring or early warning by different actors, and help Member States to identify gaps in their atrocity prevention capacities and strategies.

I am pleased to present this Framework at a time when the United Nations is undergoing a system-wide revision of the way we respond to situations where serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law are happening or could happen. Through the “Human Rights Up Front” initiative, we are committed to upholding the promise of “never again” and drawing lessons from past failures. In practice, it means putting human rights, the protection of populations and the prevention of atrocity crimes at the centre of our work.
As affirmed at the 2005 World Summit, States have the primary responsibility for protecting their own populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The international community has committed to support each State in this endeavour and, should States manifestly fail in meeting their responsibilities, to take collective action in a timely and decisive manner in line with the United Nations Charter.

I therefore urge the widest possible use of this Framework to support prevention strategies at the national, regional and international levels. Prevention means acting early; to do that, we need to know what to look for. Together with a commitment to accountability, we owe this to the millions of victims of the horrific international crimes of the past — and those whose lives we may be able to save in the future.

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