

**STATEMENT BY SINGAPORE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE  
AMBASSADOR KAREN TAN AT THE INFORMAL MEETING OF  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON THE RESPONSIBILITY TO  
PROTECT, 8 SEPTEMBER 2015**

Mr Moderator,

Thank you for convening this meeting. My delegation takes note of the Secretary-General's report "A vital and enduring commitment: implementing the responsibility to protect" (R2P) (A/69/981) which takes stock of efforts to advance R2P since the concept was first agreed upon at the 2005 World Summit.

In theory, the R2P principle states the obvious. The principle that each state has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, and that the international community should be prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner to help to protect populations against such crimes, should be unobjectionable.

Yet, after ten years, consensus on paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document remains tenuous. Cynicism over the relevance of the R2P concept is not unjustified when, time and again, national interests outweigh moral imperatives in the calculations of major powers whether to take "timely and decisive" action. It is difficult for the normative agenda of R2P to advance when the concept is undermined through its subjective application, sometimes through the actions of its strongest proponents.

Small states such as Singapore look to the UN Security Council to live up to its global responsibility to maintain peace and security. We called for a restraint on the use of the veto in situations of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity before it was fashionable to do so, and were

willing to have the General Assembly pronounce itself on this issue.

As we are all aware, some recent initiatives have renewed our attention on this important question. However, we hope that all member states will have the political will to move from rhetoric to action. In our view, those vested with the power to act, i.e. the Permanent Members of the Security Council, must show leadership and unilaterally commit to not use a veto to block Council action aimed at preventing or ending genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. As we commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the World Summit, and as we are about to adopt the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, such a commitment will help to signal the resolve of the Security Council to play its part in the joint effort to “leave no one behind”.

But even as we consider the responsibility of the international community to address situations of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, it is paramount that national governments do not abdicate their responsibility to protect their people. The well-being of all its citizens should be the key principle that guides government policy.

R2P goes beyond recognising all persons as being equal before the law or even, the general acknowledgement of the need to promote and protect their human rights. My delegation has observed that at the United Nations, much emphasis is placed on ensuring “mutual tolerance” or “peaceful coexistence” of people from different backgrounds. Regrettably, such language suggests that we are setting our sights too low.

We need to aim higher. We need to build a sense of unity and community spirit among our citizens, regardless of their race and religion. But doing so requires painstaking work over many decades, with each of our governments actively managing the common public space by making difficult decisions that could require trade-offs. In other words, there is no one-size-fits-all

framework for building a resilient society that can withstand the challenges of identity-based tensions. The Singapore Government will continue to uphold the responsibility to protect our citizens by working to strengthen the bonds between the different racial and religious groups in Singapore, as well as to pay attention to new fault lines that could emerge as our society evolves. Thank you.

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