

General Assembly Interactive Dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect
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Mr. President, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to express my gratitude to you Mr. President for the opportunity to speak at this year's interactive dialogue. My name is Nana Afadzinu, Executive Director, West African Civil Society Institute, based in Ghana. WACSI is a founding Steering Committee Member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect.

The Coalition is presently composed of 35 non-governmental organizations from around the world working in the areas of human rights, conflict prevention, peace and security, and women's rights. We are dedicated to advancing the norm and in particular aim to strengthen the normative consensus for the Responsibility to Protect at the international, regional, sub-regional and national levels, encourage governments and other regional and international organizations to build their capacities to prevent and halt mass atrocity crimes, and mobilize to push for action to save lives in RtoP country-specific situations.

Mr. President,

We welcome your convening of this interactive dialogue on the role of regional and sub-regional organizations and the Responsibility to Protect. This dialogue is an opportunity to focus on the challenges facing the implementation of RtoP as well as highlight the contribution of regional and sub-regional organizations in enhancing this important norm.

Regional and sub-regional organizations have a unique understanding of internal developments in countries facing potential or current atrocities and are often the first to become aware of crimes being committed. Existing regional and sub-regional early warning mechanisms, such as the African Union's Continental Early Warning System, the Economic Community of West African States' Conflict Prevention Framework and Conflict Early Warning Mechanism, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Conflict Prevention Center are able to play a direct and crucial role in facilitating early action in RtoP crisis situations. We look forward to continued action by regional and sub-regional organizations to prevent and respond to crises, and encourage the development and strengthening of early warning mechanisms in regions such as the Middle East, North Africa, and the Asia-Pacific.

ECOWAS and the AU have stood out in their efforts to mediate national crises as seen in Kenya in 2007 when an AU mediation team composed of eminent Africans and led by former SG Kofi

Annan was dispatched; to react rapidly when ECOWAS and the AU denounced attacks in Guinea in 2009 and immediately demanded an international inquiry commission; and to use diplomatic pressure in response to the crisis in Cote d'Ivoire, where the AU and ECOWAS issued multiple communiqués, press releases and proposals denouncing the political crisis.

Regional and sub-regional organizations may also deliver punitive measures as in Cote d'Ivoire where ECOWAS issued sanctions against former president Laurent Gbagbo and in Libya where the Arab League suspended the country from participation following the use of government force against civilians.

Recent events only underscore the growing influence that regional organizations can have in the decision-making process of the UN Security Council. Measures to protect populations in Libya were largely in response to appeals by the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council, who were among the first to call for a no-fly zone and demand the protection of civilians and foreign nationals. Regional reactions to developing and ongoing crises also highlight the importance of responding to the threat of mass atrocities in a consistent manner, and we encourage regional bodies to continue to react swiftly and decisively.

Civil society in diverse global regions is committed to practical engagement with regional and sub-regional organizations to enhance regional capacity to take early action to avert mass atrocity crimes. Regional and sub-regional organizations have taken efforts to enhance mechanisms for and relationships with civil society in the areas of conflict prevention and response. This is evidenced by bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States through its Conflict Prevention Framework and ECOWARN, which include within their work efforts to coordinate awareness and responses by civil society. We commend the support for and partnership with civil society, and recommend that regional organizations continue to increase accessibility for civil society and develop mechanisms to foster cooperation in the future.

Mr. President,

We cannot stress enough the importance of regional and sub-regional organizations and civil society in the prevention of genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Regional and sub-regional organizations are widely viewed as indispensable partners in translating the global commitment into actual policy. It is in this same spirit that they can foster regional ownership of RtoP and ensure that it is localized in a manner consistent with regional norms.

We hope to participate in future dialogues on the Responsibility to Protect and, as a Coalition composed of non-governmental organizations from all regions, we encourage continued engagement with regional and sub-regional organizations so as to further strengthen regional and international consolidation and implementation of the Responsibility to Protect.