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RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT: TIMELY AND DECISIVE RESPONSE

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Australia wishes to thank the panelists for sharing their insights with us today. We wish to first thank the outgoing Special Advisers to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect, Francis Deng and Ed Luck, for their tireless efforts in advocating for the prevention of mass atrocity crimes. Mr Deng and Mr Luck have made important contributions, including highlighting the role of constructive management of diversity in preventing identity-based conflict and the importance of early response to incitement speech. We welcome the new Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng and assure him of our full cooperation and support.

Mr Chairman

The protection of people from atrocity and the prevention of conflict that often accompanies it were fundamental to the very establishment of the United Nations. Australia attaches high importance on the Responsibility to Protect as grounded in the 2005 World Summit Outcome and consistent with purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

Australia thanks the Secretary-General for his fourth 'Report on the Responsibility to Protect: Timely and Decisive Response' which provides a valuable guide for Member States in their consideration of the third pillar.

We welcome the Report's emphasis on the mutually supportive and closely connected role of prevention and response. Pillars one and two of Responsibility to Protect are often associated with prevention, and the third pillar, with response. The Report reveals that "the dividing lines are not so clear in practice." An effective strategy to protect populations will usually require elements of both prevention and response. We agree that the three pillars of Responsibility to Protect are not intended to be sequential, but rather, reinforcing.

Mr Chairman

It is essential that we work to sharpen the collective tools available to us under the Charter of the United Nations to effectively prevent and respond to mass atrocity crimes. We commend the Secretary-General for highlighting the extensive tool-kit of non-coercive and coercive measures available to the international community under Chapters VI, VII and VIII of the Charter. While military force remains one tool in the Charter, the Report underlines our primary aim should be to respond early and effectively in non-coercive ways in order to reduce the need for force; through preventive diplomacy, fact-finding, mediation and criminal investigations.

As the Secretary-General notes, there is no template for responding to mass atrocity crimes – and nor would it be appropriate to take a standard approach to what will always depend on specific context. What is needed is a willingness to draw on these tools when needed.

Australia agrees that the overall goal in action under the third pillar is to help States to succeed in meeting their protection responsibilities. Strengthening national capacities constitutes an essential step towards the prevention of mass atrocity crimes. The National Focal Point Initiative, co-facilitated by Australia, Ghana, Costa Rica and Denmark, aims to promote domestic atrocity prevention policies and promote international cooperation and coordination on prevention more broadly. Creating a “community of commitment” that increases states’ capacity to implement the three-pillar framework is a core objective of the Initiative. To date, 17 countries representing all regions of the world have made such appointments within their governments. We encourage other delegations to consider this important demonstration of political and practical support to implement the Responsibility to Protect.

Mr Chairman

In the worst cases, attempts at prevention and early response may not succeed in preventing atrocity. In these circumstances, the international community needs to speak with one voice in the face of egregious crimes. The success of our response requires political unity to be most effective.

Like others, Australia was greatly disappointed in the lack of unanimity in the Security Council on Syria. As the Secretary-General noted this morning, while moments of unity in the Security Council have been few and far between, the rest of the world, through the General Assembly have not been silent. The failure of the Council to adopt a Chapter VII resolution as called for by the Arab League, to ensure there were real consequences for non-compliance with UNSC Resolutions 2042 and 2043 sent the wrong message to President Assad. The continuing militarization of the conflict in Syria is having grave humanitarian consequences as we have seen. The Council must find a way out of the current impasse, to speak in one voice and condemn the mass atrocities which are occurring, and hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes.

Challenges in implementing Responsibility to Protect remain. These challenges must not be allowed to overshadow the value of Responsibility to Protect for states under stress. In 2012, the year the Secretary-General has appropriately designated as the “year of prevention”, our focus should be on how best to use our extensive tool-kit to prevent the four mass atrocity crimes from occurring.