



Special Advisers Deng and Luck on the contemporary importance of the commitment to prevent genocide and mass atrocities

(New York – 9 December, 2010) On 9 December, the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General, Mr. Francis Deng, reminded states of the contemporary relevance of the Convention.

“Many of the violent conflicts that have recently erupted have their roots in long-standing grievances between ethnic, religious, national or racial groups, the groups that are protected by the Convention. Individuals, and entire groups, have been targeted based purely on their identity,” stated Mr. Deng. “While conflict is not a pre-requisite to genocide, peaceful resolution of these conflicts, and prevention of the conflicts that threaten to erupt in the coming year, is essential to ensure that they do not escalate into genocidal violence.”

At the heart of the 1948 Convention lies the commitment to protect vulnerable populations from mass violence. In the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, Member States reiterated this commitment and expanded its reach with the concept of the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.

States bear an ongoing responsibility to protect vulnerable populations by preventing those four crimes and their incitement, as agreed at the 2005 World Summit and confirmed by the General Assembly and Security Council. As also agreed at the Summit, the international community has concurrent responsibilities to assist states in their protection responsibilities and to respond in a timely and decisive manner when they are manifestly failing to protect their populations. In meeting these three pillars of the Secretary-General’s strategy, the United Nations recognizes that regional and sub-regional organizations are playing an increasingly important role in prevention and protection.

Mr. Edward Luck, the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General who focuses on the responsibility to protect, called the 1948 Convention “the cornerstone of the legal structure that frames the principle of the responsibility to protect.” He noted “the critical operational synergies between genocide prevention and the responsibility to protect” and commended the Secretary-General’s efforts to establish a joint office to address the whole range of atrocity crimes. “Too often,” he commented, “lesser crimes against human dignity are allowed to escalate into full-scale genocide. Early and sustained efforts at prevention—at the individual, community, national, regional, and global levels – are essential to break this destructive chain and to build tolerant and prosperous societies.”

Both Special Advisers urged Member States, the United Nations system, regional and sub-regional organizations and civil society to continue to work together to protect vulnerable populations from mass violence. Sustained and mutually reinforcing partnership is, in their view, the key.

To provide early warning of situations where there is a risk of genocide and related crimes is the primary role of the Office of the United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, which works closely with Mr. Luck, given their distinct but closely related mandates. The Office was established in 2004 in recognition of the international community's failure to prevent or stop past genocides. It was given a threefold mandate by the Security Council: to collect and assess information on situations that might lead to genocide; to advise the Secretary-General and, through him, the Security Council and make recommendations to prevent or halt genocide; and to liaise with the UN system on preventive measures and enhance the United Nations' capacity to analyze and manage information on genocide or related crimes.

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