

New York, 12 July 2011 - Secretary-General's Remarks to General Assembly Informal Interactive Dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. President, thank you for convening this timely conversation. Special thanks also to our distinguished guests from regional and sub-regional arrangements for sharing their insights and experiences with us. We value their words and deeds.

We gather today as partners determined to rid the world of atrocity crimes.

This partnership was born of necessity, shaped by practical experience, and sustained by common purpose.

Together, we seek to insure that the history of the twenty-first century is the first not to be written in the blood of innocents.

Every region knows the agony of mass killings and sexual violence. These barbaric acts, wherever they occur, are stains on humanity everywhere. The wounds, as well as the economic and social dislocations, take generations to heal.

The principle of the responsibility to protect was agreed at the 2005

World Summit.

Its roots, however, extend to the early declarations of ECOWAS, the pioneering work of the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the OSCE, the legal and human rights traditions of the Americas and the spirit of non-indifference that animates the African Union.

The United Nations has followed your lead.

Everywhere, efforts are underway to improve early warning, to spur normative development, to end impunity and to assist States under stress.

Everywhere, global, regional, and sub-regional organizations are helping States to meet their sovereign responsibilities to their populations.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

There is no easy, simple, or assured path to stopping genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, or their incitement.

We may not agree on every step in every situation. So we must

continue to listen and learn from each other.

No one has a monopoly on virtue, insight, or judgement. So we must continue to address legitimate concerns about possible misuse beyond what was agreed in 2005 or about interference in internal affairs, even as we move forward.

No one has a magical formula for discouraging those determined to make war on their own people.

They are masters at splitting tactics, at playing one group or organization against another.

They rule by intimidation and dividing populations, not by uniting them for the common good.

No action is without risk of doing harm, so we must try to avoid unintended consequences, whatever our good intentions.

But the history of atrocity crimes is not one of acting too boldly, but of doing too little, too late.

At the United Nations, we have been proceeding step by step, developing this principle conceptually, politically, and operationally through a series of reports and dialogues.

This process has produced both broader political support and a keener sense of how to proceed. We will continue on this incremental but determined path.

For those facing mass rape and violence, however, the slow pace of global deliberations offers no relief. They look to us for protection, not comforting words or another five years of debate.

Excellencies,

Over the past year, the responsibility to protect has become an operational reality. Both the Security Council and the Human Rights Council have invoked the principle in recent months.

All of the organizations and Member States represented here have been challenged by a series of acute, complex, and largely unexpected crises in which populations were threatened.

How have we done? What have we learned?

Candidly, our record at every level – global, regional, sub-regional, and national – has been mixed at best. We have done better in some places than others. Both will and capacity vary.

We need to sharpen our tools for prevention and for protection. We need a fuller understanding of what motivates the perpetrators and planners of mass violence. We need to explore how to apply the principle more consistently across cases.

Nevertheless, I am confident that we have made a positive difference in terms of saving lives and giving hope to the vulnerable and displaced. In crisis after crisis, our chances of success have multiplied when we have worked together.

Regional and sub-regional arrangements, along with civil society, have made cardinal contributions to each of the pillars of my implementation strategy: State responsibility, international assistance, and timely and decisive response.

It is evident, for instance, that members of the United Nations Security Council have paid close attention to the views of regional partners in determining how to respond to the acute crises in Cote d'Ivoire, Libya, and elsewhere.

Whether under Chapter VI, VII, or VIII of the Charter, our capacity for effective and timely action is conditioned, in part, by the degree to which we share perspectives and priorities.

My report, therefore, offers a number of ideas for enhancing consultations, planning, early warning, and assessments with our regional and sub-regional partners.

Every day, we work together on conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. We share abiding commitments to human rights and the rule of law. The results have been impressive.

Now we can do the same for atrocity prevention.

My Special Advisers on the Responsibility to Protect and on the Prevention of Genocide have benefited from the information and insights generated by regional and sub-regional arrangements, as well as from local and international civil society.

They look forward to further collaborations on training, education, and awareness-raising around the world.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This morning, we heard eloquent testimony to how much our partners have to contribute to this common enterprise. Each has developed tools, institutions, and norms that could serve as models for others.

We have much to learn from each other. Today's dialogue should open a sustained cross-regional conversation on lessons learned and practical experiences.

At the United Nations, we are listening and learning. Your contributions have made this a good day for both.

Thank you for all that you have done and will do for the common good.

Thank you very much.