22\textsuperscript{nd} session of the Human Rights Council

High-level panel discussion to commemorate the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action

Statement by Adama Dieng, Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on the prevention of genocide

- I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the President of the Human Rights Council, His Excellency Ambassador Remigius Hecznel, for inviting me to take part in this event. I am honoured to have the opportunity to talk about the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action as a member of such a renowned panel.

- The Vienna Declaration represents a building block of contemporary human rights from both a theoretical and practical perspective. Firstly, by reiterating that “the promotion and protection of human rights is a matter of priority for the international community”, it reaffirms the principle of human rights’ universality. Secondly, it represents a global commitment to the protection, promotion and implementation of human rights at national, regional and international level.

- Ladies and gentlemen, having been directly involved in 1993 in the drafting of the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action, I have followed closely progress made in implementation of the Plan of Action and in the acceptance of the central importance of human rights over the last 20 years. I am also very aware of the challenges ahead.
• Today I will specifically touch upon some of the key progress and challenges to the implementation of the Vienna Declaration that relate to my past assignment as Registrar for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda as well as to my current mandate as Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide. In its 28th paragraph, the Declaration states that "The World Conference on Human Rights expresses its dismay at massive violations of human rights especially in the form of genocide, "ethnic cleansing" and systematic rape of women in war situations, creating mass exodus of refugees and displaced persons. While strongly condemning such abhorrent practices it reiterates the call that perpetrators of such crimes be punished and such practices immediately stopped".

• One year after the Vienna Declaration, terrible events happened that emphasized the urgency to implement this plan of action. Respectively in 1994 and 1995, the Rwanda and Bosnia Genocides reminded us that we should continue to guard against the "crime of the crimes", which we all believed extinguished in the ashes of the Holocaust.

• The establishment of international tribunals, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, as well as the creation of ad-hoc and national courts to prosecute those responsible for international crimes and massive human rights violations, represent important steps in the fight against impunity. The International Criminal Court, set up in 2001, with its mandate to investigate international crimes worldwide signals a further essential step in the global search for justice. Thanks to the support of State Parties and the hard work of the staff of these national and international tribunals, many
perpetrators of international crimes and gross human rights violations have been brought to justice. Equally, the establishment of the position of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide in 2004 represents both a serious commitment and an important step by the international community towards trying to prevent genocide and related atrocities. Amongst other things, the Special Adviser is mandated to advise the Secretary-General on any situation where there is a risk of genocide, and to build the capacity of the United Nations to recognise the risk of genocide and build national preventive capacity. My Office is currently monitoring the situation in more than 30 countries where we assess there to be indications, however early, of a risk of genocide and related crimes.

- However, esteemed guests, can we confidently say that we have managed to win the battle to prevent genocide from happening again? The answer is no. Many challenges still remain ahead of us. During the last twenty years, in a number of places, we have seen the tremendous price paid in terms of human lives lost when atrocity crimes occur. Ladies and gentlemen, I talk about millions of lives lost during this period.

- Cambodia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Congo and Kenya. These are only a few of the countries where, during the last two decades, gross human rights violations and abuses have being perpetrated. I will not hide from you that I am currently very concerned about developments in Syria and Mali. In Syria, atrocity crimes have been committed, causing to the death of an estimated 70,000 people. And despite this huge death toll, some say that the worst is yet to come. We still no end in sight to the violence. In Mali, by implementing a very strict interpretation of the Sharia law, Islamist rebels perpetrated terrible human rights abuses against the civilian population in
the North and we are now facing the risk of retaliation attacks against innocent civilians associated by their ethnicity with the rebels, including the Tuareg and Aran communities.

- Ladies and gentlemen, I am here today with a very clear objective: to renew the promise I made in 1993 in Vienna - together with many of you - to uphold the respect for human rights by promoting their implementation. Hence, I am again committing to abide by the values set out in the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action. I call again for the Declaration to act as a guide for our work and our efforts to improve the protection and promotion of human rights.

- But we cannot stop here. At the 2005 World Summit, all heads of state and government committed to the concept of the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP); to protect civilian populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. I consider the 2005 World Summit that established the RtoP concept to be a natural development of the 1993 World Conference of Human Rights that produced the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action. Hence, my esteemed guests, let's seize the opportunity today to renew our commitment to the Responsibility to Protect, too.

- Ladies and gentlemen, we all play a role in the advancement of the RtoP concept. It is a very noble commitment but at the same time it is a complicated mission to accomplish. Despite the complexity and difficulty of this task, we have to do our best to keep the promise of « never again ». For this reason, today, for the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action, I invite all of you to accept the challenge of contributing to a world free of atrocities.
• Thank you for participating in this event. I hope that today’s discussion will pave the way for a united approach to putting our words and excellent intentions into action.