

**Statement by H.E. Mr Gary Quinlan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations General Assembly on the Implementation of the Responsibility to Protect on 23 July 2009**

*(as delivered)*

Mr President

Thank you for convening this historic debate on the Secretary-General's report on how to operationalise and implement the Responsibility to Protect. This is not a debate about the now discredited notion of humanitarian intervention. Rather it is a discussion about protection – the protection of all our peoples against mass atrocity crimes.

In 2005, as we know, the world's leaders, all our leaders, declared with one voice that the international community should "never again" countenance indifference in the face of mass atrocity crimes. All our leaders also agreed the means through which the international community would prevent and address those crimes, setting out in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the World Summit outcome document an agreed understanding of the "responsibility to protect". As the Secretary-General has said to us the other day in introducing his report, this is a "universal and irrevocable commitment".

Our task now is not to reinterpret, reconceptualise or renegotiate that agreement. Our task is to implement it. That is why Australia welcomes the Secretary-General's report. The report reminds us of what was agreed by our leaders, all our leaders, in 2005, and provides us with some considered ideas, some important ideas, on how to translate this principle into practice.

We strongly support the Secretary-General's articulation of R2P as resting on three pillars, the size, strength and viability of which are equal.

We also strongly support the Secretary-General's characterisation of R2P as 'narrow but deep'.

It is narrow in the sense that it is focused on the prevention of four crimes – genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It is not a panacea for all humanitarian tragedies or for all human rights violations.

It is deep in that it needs to employ the wide array of prevention and protection instruments available to all Member States, available to the UN system, and to regional and sub-regional organisations, which are vital to this process, to assist States meet their primary responsibility to protect their populations.

The Secretary-General's report highlights the diversity of tools in the R2P toolkit, from preventive diplomacy, targeted development assistance programs, UN peacekeeping, international justice mechanisms, sanctions and, only of course as an instrument of last resort, the use of force. Which tool to use in any particular situation will clearly depend on the precise circumstances. The essential operating principle, however, must be that we do respond. Indifference, inaction or delay: these are not options.

Mr President

Australia looks forward to working with the Secretary-General and Member States in the further development of the full range of tools for operationalising R2P.

Mr President

We have already been active in assisting States to fulfil their responsibilities. Through our development assistance program we have a focus on assisting States to increase their capabilities for conflict prevention and peace building and respect for the rule of law. As the Secretary-General notes, it is these kinds of programs and many others that reduce the likelihood those societies will travel the path to crimes that relate to the responsibility to protect.

In Timor-Leste, for example, we are strengthening civil society institutions and promoting human rights to help with reconciliation and peace building after a period of difficult conflict. Consistent with the call in the Secretary-General's report, we are also developing a deployable civilian capacity to enable us to more effectively respond to emergencies in our own region.

Australia is also a strong supporter of the Global Centre, of the Asia-Pacific Centre, and of the International (NGO) Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect. We have also established a Responsibility to Protect Fund to advance the R2P principle and support States to build capacity to protect civilians.

Mr President

R2P is the expression of our irrevocable collective commitment to ensure that never again are we confronted with the horrors of another Rwanda or Srebrenica, Cambodia or the Holocaust. As we know, no region of the world is immune to mass atrocity crimes. We must continue our efforts to overcome the gaps in will, imagination and capacity to implement this vital principle to ensure that we prevent future atrocities, and never again fail our own peoples.