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The horrors of the genocide in Rwanda are irrevocably etched on the world's conscience. The repercussions of the slaughter that traumatized Rwanda traveled far beyond its borders and reverberate to this day. I have personally seen how people and especially women and children in the war-torn Great Lakes region of Africa still endure the bloody aftermath. Seeing such suffering has strengthened my resolve to ensure their stories are heard and their rights respected.

I am greatly aided by the example and expertise of people like Alison des Forges, whose untimely death we mourn today. She understood the causes and consequences of the genocide. She worked tirelessly to document the atrocities and bring the perpetrators to justice, and made a significant contribution to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and related judicial proceedings. That she campaigned for justice impartially, without fear or favor, earned her some enemies, but many more allies.

When the news of mass killings started to trickle, then flood, out of Rwanda in 1994, the United Nations was seized by an overwhelming sense of grief and outrage from which grew a determination to never again allow such a tragedy to happen. Since then, we have seen both success and failure. The principle of the responsibility to protect was endorsed by all world leaders in 2005, but our collective will and ability to protect still lag behind in too many cases. On balance, however, we are slowly but surely moving in the right direction.

Thanks in large part to the commitment of people like Alison des Forges, the world is better equipped to hold despots and war criminals to account. Alison des Forges stood against impunity. She was a resolute advocate for the fundamental principle that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. The world will miss her insight, courage and dedication. I offer my deepest condolences to her family, friends and colleagues.

Source: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sgsm12261.doc.htm>