

UN Releases *Rights Up Front: A Groundbreaking Report to Improve the UN's Capacity to Prevent and Respond to Unfolding Crises*

On 17

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[published](#)

a

follow-up plan of action

to the 2012 Report of the Secretary-General's Internal Review Panel on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka (otherwise known as The Petrie Report.) titled

"Rights up Front: A Plan of Action to Strengthen the UN's role in Protecting People in Crisis."

Rights Up Front details specific actions to be taken by the UN to put "ensure that the lessons of the past are fully acted upon."

The plan of action was presented to the Secretary-General on 11 July and then the wider UN membership on 17 December. Deputy-Secretary-General Jan Eliasson has also briefed the UN's Chief Executive Board and senior advisers on the document.

The Deputy-Secretary-General

[presented](#)

the plan of action to the press on 19 December and noted the unanimous adoption of RtoP at the 2005 World Summit as one of the driving factors informing its development. When reflecting on the overarching themes of

Rights Up Front

, he highlighted three major elements that guide the action points listed within the document. The first is to "make human rights awareness and knowledge permeate the UN system." Noting that the majority of atrocities committed over the past half-century have indeed begun with human rights violations, the DSG stated that the UN must be more firm and take action at a preventive stage. This would require knowledge and understanding of human rights violations as early warning signals for the potential commission of atrocity crimes. The second element is that the UN must be prepared, both in planning and capacity, to better protect civilians when early warning for prevention has failed. Lastly, the UN must undertake action to address internal issues on its organization and preparation for potential crises, including by having the proper staff and reporting on the ground in order to "show greater flexibility" and "speedier action" when there is a risk of mass atrocities.

The plan of action recognizes that the challenges facing the UN in Sri Lanka were not new, and indeed were many of the same that plagued the UN during and after the Rwandan genocide and the Srebrenica massacre. Nevertheless, the UN has not always applied its lessons learned effectively and across the board."

The public summary of

Rights Up Front

notes that states have the "primary responsibility to protect their own populations against massive and widespread violations of human rights.

Yet, they have sometimes been unable or unwilling to meet these obligations. At times, the UN System has also failed to meet its responsibilities.”

Rights Up Front

serves as a plan of action to meet such goals.

Outlined within the document are six specific points that can make a “qualitative difference in the way the UN system meets its responsibilities”:

- 1)

Integrating human rights into the lifecycle of all staff, so that they all understand what the UN’s mandates and commitments to human rights mean for their respective Department, Agency, Fund or Programme.

- 2)

Adopting an “Article 99 attitude” in order to tell Member States what they need to hear. The UN will engage more proactively and strategically with Member States, including through, as Deputy-Secretary-General Eliasson suggested, providing horizon-scanning briefings to the Security Council.

- 3)

Ensuring coherent strategies of action on the ground and leveraging the UN System’s capacities.

- 4)

At headquarters, adopting a “whole-of-UN” approach to engagement with Member States and with teams on the ground, and to do so well before a crisis strikes to enable early action.

- 5)

Achieving greater impact in the UN’s human rights protection work.

- 6)

Developing a more robust system for gathering/analyzing information on serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law in order to support such activities.

For more on the Sri Lanka crisis, visit our [crisis page](#).

For more on the 2012 Petrie Report, visit our [blog](#)

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