

### **It's Time to Make Prevention a "Living Reality"**

Alex Bellamy Protection Gateway 12 September 2012 Although the topic of this year's UN General Assembly informal interactive dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect was timely and decisive response, many Member States expressed their support for the UN Secretary-General's view that the international community should focus on preventing the four RtoP crimes, thereby reducing the need for timely and decisive response. Many participating states emphasized the primacy of prevention and the Deputy Secretary-General, Jan Eliasson, called on the Assembly to make prevention a "living reality". For example, Ghana insisted that "our aim should be the prevention of the four capital crimes", South Korea that "the most efficient way to achieve the goals of RtoP is prevention", Brazil that "prevention is the best policy", and Denmark that "preventive and non-coercive measures are preferable options". The centrality of prevention was especially emphasized by the President of the General Assembly in his contribution to the dialogue. The President stated:

"I commend Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for designating 2012, as the Year of Prevention. By this act, he has enhanced the visibility of the Responsibility to Protect. He has accorded the necessary prominence to prevention as the first line of defence against genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. Prevention is at the core of the Responsibility to Protect".

Given the breadth of support for prevention exhibited by the dialogue and the fact that the Secretary-General declared 2012 to be his "year of prevention", it seems fair to suggest that it is time to move prevention from the realm of rhetoric to the world of practice.

During the 2012 dialogue, three significant themes were highlighted in relation to prevention. First, the EU raised the question of how to deliver on the UN's commitment to prevention, especially the further development of early warning, assessment and action; mediation and dialogue; and preventive diplomacy. South Africa offered an answer by calling for an integrated strategy for prevention. Second, Nigeria raised questions about the strengthening of prevention partnerships between the UN and regional and sub-regional arrangements and the provision of capacity building assistance to the latter. Third, New Zealand raised the question of late-stage prevention and asked how resistance to determined international action might be overcome when the warning signs of imminent genocide and mass atrocities emerge.

(...) In order to address the three sets of concerns highlighted in the 2012 dialogue on RtoP, a UN strategy for preventing the four crimes should entail seven core elements.

- First, work towards a shared understanding of the factors that can increase the risk of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, elements that mitigate these risks and the instruments at the international community's disposal.

- Second, acknowledgement of the work that the UN system and its partners already undertake which contributes to the mitigation of these risks, areas where there are gaps in the relevant capabilities (including capacity gaps and coordination gaps), and the development of a program of work designed to close those gaps.
  
- Third, the mainstreaming of RtoP's prevention goals across the UN system, as called for in the Secretary-General's 2009 report on the subject.
  
- Fourth, the strengthening and regularizing of assistance to Member States aimed at helping them achieve their primary responsibility to protect, as set out in the second pillar of RtoP.
  
- Fifth, strengthening of the UN Secretariat's support for early decision-making and preventive action through stronger analytical methodologies and capacities capable of assessing situations and policy options in an impartial, consistent and transparent manner and mechanisms to ensure that Member States have access to the Secretariat's advice at an early stage in any crisis.
  
- Sixth, the strengthening of partnerships between the UN and regional and sub-regional arrangements especially in relation to (a) strengthening the preventive capacity of regional and sub-regional arrangements; (b) the two-way sharing of analysis and assessment; and (c) the establishment of "anticipatory" relationships in advance of any crisis to facilitate the coordination of preventive action.
  
- Seventh, the development of a strategy for engaging in partnerships for prevention with civil society organizations. (...)

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