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Every April for the past 13 years, the international community has commemorated the anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda with a mixture of shame, contrition and solemn pledges not to let this most heinous of crimes happen again.

(...) [The] legal responsibility of states to hold perpetrators of genocide individually accountable is now finding multiple venues, from the ad hoc and special international tribunals created by the Security Council, to the treaty-based International Criminal Court, to the exercise of universal jurisdiction by national courts.

The equally vital obligation to prevent genocide needs to attain comparable rigour. To this end, the UN secretary-general has appointed a special adviser to collect information on massive and serious violations of human rights that could lead to genocide, and to enhance the capacity of the UN to analyze and manage information relating to this crime. The special adviser also liaises with other UN partners to better co-ordinate preventive activities.

To further bolster such prevention capacity, in 2006 the secretary-general appointed seven experts who provide support to the special adviser and contribute to the broader efforts of the UN to prevent genocide.

These initiatives represent important steps in the right direction. But I believe that more can and must be done to bolster our institutional capacity of prevention by directly anchoring such capacity into the genocide treaty.

(...) Properly designed, a monitoring mechanism could provide an authoritative early warning of situations at risk of degenerating into genocide. Such situations are almost invariably preceded and characterized by a discernable escalation of systematic or gross violations of human rights.
(...)

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights editorial is available at:
<http://www.thestar.com/columnists/article/411149>