

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY INFORMAL INTERACTIVE
DIALOGUE ON “A VITAL AND ENDURING COMMITMENT:
IMPLEMENTING THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT”****New York, 8 September 2015**

Your Excellency Mr. Einar Gunnarsson, Acting President of the General Assembly,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Ten years ago, world leaders transformed expectations about the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

When Heads of State and Government unanimously endorsed the World Summit Outcome, they expressed an unprecedented resolve to protect populations from the most egregious international crimes and to assist one another in this effort.

The endorsement of the responsibility to protect was a milestone in transforming international concern about people facing mortal danger into a meaningful response.

In the decade since, we forged growing consensus on how to carry out R2P.

Today, on its 10th anniversary, I urgently call on governments and UN entities – especially the Security Council to move from understanding to action.

The Security Council is the only body empowered under international law to authorize military action to save lives when all else fails. We must do all that we can to act early, prevent atrocity crimes and support states in protecting their citizens.

The question that must guide the Council’s work is: have we truly done all that we can?

Countries know that the responsibility to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes is among their primary obligations -- both under international law and as a matter of common humanity. Leaders can no longer claim that national sovereignty outweighs all other concerns, or hide behind excuses about national circumstances or exceptional security threats.

Awareness is important – but since R2P was adopted, the international community has failed too many vulnerable populations.

We face a daunting, damning list of crises marked by acts that may constitute atrocity crimes. The concerns span many regions.

Syria is the world's largest humanitarian crisis. The parties have shown wanton disregard for human life. All parties are alleged to have committed grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Syrian Government in particular has not lived up to its obligation under international law to protect civilians.

The conflict is a colossal tragedy for Syria and a shameful symbol of international divisions. History's judgement will be harsh.

I deplore the abject failure to end the suffering of the Syrian people. That failure takes concrete expression in today's refugee crisis in Europe.

We must do everything possible to find a political solution based on the Geneva Communiqué. I appeal again for Security Council action.

In Yemen, civilians bear the brunt of a brutal conflict marked by reports of increasingly blatant violations of international humanitarian law.

In the Central African Republic, Muslims and Christians were targeted because of who they are or what they believe.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, armed groups continue to kill civilians.

I remain deeply concerned about the situation in South Sudan and Sudan, particularly in Darfur and the Two Areas. The culture of impunity must end.

I am particularly alarmed at the unacceptable impact on children. Their suffering due to violations of fundamental rights should prompt immediate action.

In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a wide array of crimes against humanity have been documented.

These and other situations demand that we strengthen our work across all the pillars of R2P.

Failure to rise to that moral obligation means greater human suffering that reverberates across borders.

R2P requires prevention. People need early protection so they are not forced to flee their homes.

When we fail in that primary obligation, we face the subsidiary obligation to address their plight. Throughout our search for a collective response to the root causes and manifestations of atrocity crimes, we uphold and defend human rights.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The atrocity crimes that stain humanity's conscience make it imperative that leaders transform R2P from a vital principle into visible practice.

That is why I am calling for three steps:

First: Genuine willingness among Member States, especially Security Council members, to create the necessary political space to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes.

Second: Stronger connections between early warning and early action.

And third: Courage in publicly confronting and addressing signs of risk.

As a cross-cutting priority we must also invest financially in prevention.

The 2011 intervention in Libya offered important lessons. Military force may be required as a last resort – but it must be grounded in a clear, common understanding of the goals, overarching strategy, potential consequences and conditions on the ground. Firm compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law is essential.

After the guns fall silent, we must ensure that atrocity crimes do not recur. We can help societies to rebuild by encouraging reconciliation and holding perpetrators to account.

This is a demanding agenda. Some may argue that the risks and costs of action are too high. But the costs of inaction are far higher. Our failure to respond decisively to the unfolding tragedy today returns as another tragedy tomorrow: namely desperate people fleeing indiscriminate violence – and in too many cases losing their lives in their quest for safety.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The global security landscape is shifting in dangerous ways. New technology is being used to incite violence. Cyberthreats are on the rise. Non-State actors are brazenly committing atrocity crimes as a means of pursuing their political goals and spreading violent extremism.

In response, countries must continue building their capacity to counter terrorism and prevent the spread of violent extremism in full accordance with human rights and the rule of law.

The United Nations will continue working with Member States, regional organizations and civil society to support these efforts to advance progress.

I call on all partners to institutionalize our commitment to R2P by showing political will to address serious human rights violations. I recommend appointing focal points and empowering officials with the resources and authority to act.

I have made the responsibility to protect a core priority. I have significantly strengthened our Organization's capacity in this area. I will continue to sound the alarm about situations of concern. I will press for dialogue and diplomacy. I will push for more rapid deployments of troops and police when necessary and authorized by the Security Council. I will deepen cooperation with regional organizations. And I will fully carry out our Human Rights Up Front Action Plan.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

For ten years, R2P has offered an alternative to indifference and fatalism.

The challenges of atrocity crimes are enormous – and the human cost is staggering. That is not a reason to be overwhelmed – it is a cause for urgent action.

The collective weight of international action can make a difference.

I count on your leadership in making sure that R2P provides real protection for people in dire need.

Thank you.