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Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

The responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity

Security Council
Seventy-fourth year

Responsibility to protect: lessons learned for prevention

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

At the high-level plenary meeting of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly (2005 World Summit), Member States agreed that each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Since the adoption of those commitments, there has been progress in advancing the conceptualization and the operationalization of the responsibility to protect. However, the international community sees a troubling decline in international commitment to multilateralism, which is also affecting efforts to prevent atrocity crimes. There is a growing gap between its words of commitment and the experience of protecting vulnerable populations around the world.

It therefore remains imperative to continue to advance the operationalization of the responsibility to protect. Member States are invited, in particular, to prioritize efforts to manage diversity as a strength rather than as a weakness; strengthen accountability and the rule of law; ensure secure livelihoods; promote a vibrant civil society supporting a plurality of views; and guarantee non-recurrence. The international community is called upon to prioritize early action and to sustain engagement on situations of concern. Recommended actions to reduce the vulnerability of civilian populations include: addressing hate speech, providing support to national authorities in strengthening their capacity to prevent atrocity crimes; and protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations.

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I. Introduction

1. At the high-level plenary meeting of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly (2005 World Summit), Member States agreed that each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. The international community should, as appropriate, encourage and help States to exercise this responsibility and support the United Nations in establishing an early warning capability (see Assembly resolution 60/1). This constitutes a clear commitment to spare no effort and to consider the full range of measures within the Charter of the United Nations to prevent the commission of the crimes that fall under the umbrella of the responsibility to protect.

2. In my 2009 report (A/63/677), I outlined an implementation strategy for the responsibility to protect, which rests on three distinct pillars. The responsibility to protect is based on the understanding that State sovereignty implies the responsibility of individual States to protect their own populations from the gravest of crimes (pillar I). The responsibility to protect also extends to the international community and requires that its members assist States in discharging this primary responsibility (pillar II). When States are manifestly failing to protect their populations, the international community's responsibility to protect includes taking collective action, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, including through chapters VII and VIII, on a case-by-case basis and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate (pillar III).

3. Since the adoption of these commitments in 2005, there has been progress in advancing the conceptualization and operationalization of the responsibility to protect. Member States have reflected on the matter through a series of informal dialogues and through its inclusion of an item in the agenda of the seventy-second session of the General Assembly. Member States will address the issue again during the seventy-third session of the Assembly.

4. At the national level, more than 60 Member States have reviewed or adopted mechanisms to strengthen resilience to atrocity crimes and continue to explore and establish national arrangements to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. States have also continued to appoint national focal points on the responsibility to protect. I was pleased to learn of the positive outcome of the annual meetings of national focal points, representing all regions of the world, in Helsinki in June 2018 and in Brussels in May 2019. The 2019 meeting of focal points was for the first time hosted by a regional organization, the European Union. Other regional initiatives contribute to strengthening national and regional prevention efforts. Cross-regionally, Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes also constitutes an important platform for international cooperation in advancing national prevention efforts. National parliaments, ombudspersons and national human rights institutions are increasingly owning this agenda. Civil society, including religious leaders, as well as women's and youth groups, continues to support atrocity prevention and encourages national authorities to fulfil their responsibilities.

5. At the regional level, the African Union has developed one of the most advanced legal and institutional frameworks to protect populations from serious crimes, as spelled out in the responsibility to protect. The Constitutive Act of the African Union specifically affirms the right of the Union to intervene in respect of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity pursuant to a decision of the Assembly of the African Union.

6. A number of States have considered the responsibility to protect primarily as a foreign policy issue rather than as a domestic issue. This has had the effect of undermining the first pillar of the principle, which calls for States to adopt national mechanisms and measures to protect their own populations from atrocity crimes. Viewing the responsibility to protect only as an international issue reinforces the erroneous notion that the responsibility to protect is primarily about international responses to domestic crises.

7. Stronger political will is now necessary to make the responsibility to protect a living reality. In my 2017 and 2018 reports on the responsibility to protect (A/71/1016-S/2017/556 and A/72/884-S/2018/525), I alerted Member States that trends were moving in the wrong direction, and that tendency has not been reversed. The international community knows all too well that today's crises require strengthened international cooperation and multilateral institutions. However, it sees a troubling decline in international commitment to multilateralism, which is also affecting efforts to prevent atrocity crimes. There is a growing gap between its words of commitment and the experience of protecting vulnerable populations around the world. Stronger commitment by the international community to the responsibility to protect is required to prevent atrocity crimes. The international community as a whole needs to step up its efforts to help countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and ensure that no one is left behind.

8. In past reports I have proposed some recommendations to narrow this gap, including the prioritization of early warning and early action, as well as the strengthening of accountability for the implementation of the responsibility to protect by ensuring rigorous and open scrutiny of practice, based on agreed principles. While some States have acted on those recommendations, there is still ample space to further strengthen their implementation. I consider implementing the responsibility to protect to be an important part of my broader strategy for prioritizing prevention. I reiterate my conviction that it is vital that prevention cuts across all pillars of the work of the United Nations and unites the United Nations system for enhanced cohesion and more effective delivery.

9. It is also important to promote a more coherent and comprehensive approach to the responsibility to protect across United Nations intergovernmental bodies. The General Assembly remains the main forum for discussion, but it is essential to continue to engage the Security Council on the matter, given its primary role in addressing peace and security issues. At the Human Rights Council, greater emphasis could be placed on the prevention of atrocity crimes in the broader context of human rights prevention. The universal periodic review process offers entry points to address human rights violations as underlying causes of violence which, if left unaddressed, could lead to conflict or atrocity crimes. Also, opportunities remain to include atrocity crime risk factors and national efforts to address them more systematically in national reports to human rights treaty bodies.

10. At the regional level, I reiterate the important role of regional organizations in the implementation of the responsibility to protect. Regional organizations have a vital role to play in operationalizing the responsibility to protect, as they are often the most directly affected by the negative transboundary consequences of atrocity crimes. As I mentioned in my 2011 report on the responsibility to protect (A/66/874-S/2012/578), context matters. The responsibility to protect is a universal principle. Regional and subregional arrangements can encourage Governments to recognize their obligations under relevant international conventions and to identify and address sources of friction within their societies before they lead to violence or atrocities. They can also play a critical role in helping to ensure the accurate and timely flow of information and analysis from the country level to global decision makers, while lessening the risk of misinterpretation, misinformation and deliberate distortion.

11. Many regional organizations have adopted explicit commitments in support of the responsibility to protect. These include the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which adopted a resolution on strengthening the responsibility to protect in Africa. The European Parliament has also recommended full implementation of the principle by the European Union. Such efforts need to be strengthened, so that regional organizations become more effective in protecting populations and providing early warning and early action to counter or halt the commission of atrocity crimes. Greater collaboration between regional organizations, including the sharing of good practices, should also be encouraged. The United Nations can also support such efforts. The trilateral cooperation between the United Nations, the African Union and the European Union constitutes a case in point.

12. It remains imperative to continue to advance the operationalization of the responsibility to protect. In her consultations with Member States since her appointment in January 2019, my Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect has acknowledged the need to conduct consultations at the regional level to further discuss existing challenges and identify opportunities to strengthen the implementation of the principle. Member States appreciate the need to further connect the atrocity prevention agenda with other global commitments and priorities, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – in particular, Sustainable Development Goal 16, on peace, security and justice; women, peace and security; and international peace and security. Most significantly, many of my Special Adviser's interlocutors in the initial period indicated the need to identify lessons learned and positive examples of prevention, as a way of highlighting the imperative of prioritizing this agenda. The present report aims at contributing to this effort.

II. Taking stock of past practice: lessons learned for prevention

13. Strengthening preventive action requires a better understanding of the range and combinations of measures employed, how these measures interact with local conditions and actors and their effects on the risk of atrocity crimes and protection of populations. In my 2017 report, I offered to provide evidence-based insight into the structural and operational measures that can be taken to prevent atrocity crimes. Efforts to this effect have focused on the identification of lessons learned from the study of past experiences of effective or failed atrocity prevention.

14. As part of my efforts to strengthen the preventive efforts of the United Nations, I remain committed to continuing to implement the Human Rights Up Front initiative. The initiative is aimed at strengthening the United Nations system's capacity to prevent serious human rights violations, including those that could lead to atrocity crimes, and sounding the alarm before abuses can escalate into atrocity crimes. It further seeks to strengthen United Nations engagement with Member States on emerging situations by providing opportunities to share information and make integrated, cross-pillar assessments to ensure coherent responses to emerging situations of concern. The United Nations entities have proven themselves better able to inform the Organization's decision-making bodies and Member States about situations of concern and options for prevention. Furthermore, the United Nations is engaged in system-wide consultations with staff at Headquarters and in the field to explore how best to create an atmosphere in which all staff are supported in promoting human rights and preventing and responding early to violations.

A. Prevention: the role of individual States

15. Lessons from past situations indicate priority areas of focus for States in which to strengthen their capacity to implement their primary responsibility to protect their populations. Preventing atrocity crimes requires concerted State-led action. In each country, the precise configuration of risks, sources of resilience and institutional capacity and authority are different. In practice, the implementation of the first pillar of the principle is difficult to measure precisely, because it touches on many different areas of government policy. In many cases, most of the relevant initiatives are not consciously associated by States with atrocity prevention. A practice or policy need not be described as "atrocity prevention" in order to make an important contribution thereto. Often, States fulfil their responsibility to protect without ever labelling it as such. However, several States remain cautious about articulating their responsibility to protect in national policy and about seeking and taking advice from external parties.

16. Lessons learned show that Member States can facilitate the prevention of atrocity crimes by focusing on five principal areas:

(a) **Need to manage diversity as a strength rather than as a weakness**. Because atrocity crimes may be rooted in extreme forms of identity-related discrimination and violence, the cornerstone of prevention lies in non-discriminatory societies capable of managing diversity and building tolerant and inclusive societies. This is at the core of Sustainable Development Goal 16. The management of diversity requires national policies and norms that pay respect to difference. This requires laws and institutions designed to promote equality between individuals and groups and protect them against discrimination. In particular, it requires constitutional and legislative protections for human rights and the rights of groups as the principal bulwarks against discrimination. These protections should be overseen effectively by independent judiciaries and national human rights institutions, including ombudspersons, with vibrant civil societies capable of holding authorities accountable. Promoting constructive management of diversity also involves tackling the root causes of conflict such as inequalities and exclusion, thereby making institutions more inclusive. It also requires ensuring that development strategies are risk-informed, including in education, employment and health. In addition, comprehensive strategies to tackle exclusionary ideologies, combining a variety of approaches, are often needed. To prevent communal conflicts from escalating to the point of atrocities, States need to ensure that in potential disputes among groups there is a means for an early peaceful resolution and for addressing grievances. It is important to recognize that, where there are different identities connected to group loyalties and contending visions of justice, States and societies require the means to manage and resolve conflicts in a peaceful and constructive fashion. Some countries have established mechanisms that promote and facilitate conflict prevention and conflict resolution towards sustaining peace;

(b) **Accountability and the rule of law**. Where national institutions and security sectors are unable to deliver accountability, and respect for the rule of law is weak, the apparatus of State authority is often unable to afford much protection for its population. In practice, strengthening rule of law capacity for atrocity prevention calls for action in three main areas. First, access to justice: the principle of equality before the law becomes a reality in the equal capacity of individuals and groups to access justice. Gender equality in access to justice is paramount. This means that States must have adequate judicial capacity across their territory, to ensure that complaints can be brought before them and that people have equitable opportunities to bring matters to courts, comprehensive knowledge about their basic rights and sufficient information about the relevant justice institutions. It also requires that justice be fair, impartial and governed by transparent rules. Second, effective and

legitimate security forces are crucial for the rule of law. Third, the rule of law calls for transparent and accountable governance. Adequate constitutional guarantees that a Government is subject to law represent a good solution. However, constitutional protections need to be reinforced with judicial institutions and security forces that are sufficiently independent to enforce the law equally. Other means of promoting transparency and accountability are necessary, such as free media. This also involves systems of governance that are representative, inclusive and accountable;

(c) **Secure livelihoods**. Economic inequalities are also among the underlying causes of violent conflict and atrocity crimes. Experience shows that severe economic shocks can be powerful triggers of conflict. Socioeconomic inequalities are not only a source of tension and conflict in themselves, but also hinder a society's capacity to prevent atrocity crimes. The most important economic policies for the prevention of atrocity crimes are those aimed at reducing socioeconomic inequalities, poor governance, weak institutions and mismanagement and abuse of natural resources, in particular, minerals. Women's economic empowerment constitutes a contributing positive element;

(d) **Vibrant civil society supporting a plurality of views**. Civil society has been recognized as an important actor in the prevention of atrocity crimes. It is crucial to have a vibrant civil society that nurtures a plurality of different views and defends the right of groups to hold and express alternative perspectives while protecting the population from hate speech and incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence. This is particularly the case for women's civil society groups and women leaders. In recent years, non-governmental organizations have sometimes played crucial roles in the prevention of imminent conflict with a risk of atrocity crimes. In the Western Balkans region, the establishment in 2017 of a regional civil society coalition for the prevention of genocide and atrocity crimes has contributed to promoting and coordinating reconciliation efforts at the grass-roots level. Efforts to map out and coordinate civil society atrocity prevention efforts in the broader European continent, including in response to increasing racism and xenophobia, continue. Vibrant civil societies with authority to create civic spaces for the resolution of disputes, combined with civil society actors aligned with peace, stability and economic well-being are crucial – yet often overlooked – sources of resilience. The building of societies resilient to atrocity crimes involves paying attention to the roles of non-State actors;

(e) **Guarantees of non-recurrence**. Few questions are more sensitive – or more important – than that of addressing historic cases of atrocity crimes. It is therefore important to pay close attention to those countries that have recently experienced atrocity crimes and examine their various efforts to prevent the recurrence of past crimes. Two interrelated issues are especially important in this regard: first, the need to deliver effective efforts to sustain peace, which includes addressing the underlying sources of past atrocity crimes; and second, the importance of addressing truth, justice and reparations for past crimes through inclusive consultations and participation at all levels. The former points to the need for a closer relationship between atrocity prevention and sustaining peace; the latter points to the need for comprehensive transitional justice processes to properly address criminal accountability, truth telling, reparation for victims and guarantees of non-recurrence. In the aftermath of atrocity crimes, guaranteeing non-recurrence requires comprehensive strategies to be adopted by the States concerned in partnership with the international community. Core elements include: a guarantee of country-wide security and non-repetition of human rights violations, especially against the most vulnerable; recognition of the legal right to identity for all, so that members of all groups can be legal persons before the law and access their rights through strong institutions; the ratification of relevant instruments of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including the passage of enabling legislation;

holding the perpetrators of atrocity crimes accountable; legal reform aimed at de-incentivizing the perpetration of atrocity crimes; judicial reform which ensures legal competence and independence; constitutional reform to remove discriminatory provisions, incorporate international human rights law and standards, regulate the security sector and ensure separation of powers; education which promotes critical thought, respect for diversity and peacefulness by emphasizing different perspectives; the utilization of cultural initiatives as physical reminders, for both those being memorialized and those who are grieving, to respect the victims and acknowledge and understand past atrocity crimes; and psychosocial support and trauma counselling for survivors that is culturally sensitive and gender-sensitive. The record to date is mixed. More could be done by the international community to support countries in the aftermath of atrocity crimes and to break cultures of impunity.

B. Prevention: the role of the international community

17. We have seen significant engagement by the international community in activities that contribute to long-term and structural prevention, primarily aimed at building resilient societies, which is essential to addressing risk factors that may result in the commission of atrocity crimes, as well as to building peaceful societies in the longer term. At the same time, there is an urgent need to consider available options for the international community to carry out its responsibility to protect in situations where States are manifestly failing to protect their populations and where atrocity crimes or the risk of their commission are imminent. Such action should always be in accordance with international law and, in particular, with the Charter of the United Nations and should not replace the obligation of Member States to adopt measures to prevent atrocity crimes and to protect their own populations, which remain their primary responsibility. However, when required, the international community can effectively respond to the risk or occurrence of atrocity crimes by taking timely and sustained action in accordance with the Charter.

Early action

18. It is essential to continue to support and strengthen early warning capacity and, more importantly, to respond in a timely manner to the risk of atrocity crimes. Good practice in successful prevention demonstrates the importance of identifying and communicating a clear understanding of imminent risk. In such cases, successful anticipation has been marked by two characteristics. The first is the clear and public identification of those responsible for having committed or who are likely to commit atrocity crimes, on the basis of credible indicators. The clear and precise identification of potential perpetrators increases leverage and influence by those in a position to modify the behaviour of likely perpetrators. This can also encourage members of the same communities as the perpetrators to disassociate themselves from them. The second is the capacity to undertake early action in response to serious concerns and the need to include women effectively as part of early warning and prevention measures.

19. Concerted action does make a difference. There have been instances when the African Union, subregional organizations and the Security Council have worked in unison to avert the escalation of tensions: in particular, post-electoral crises.

20. On the negative side, the window for effective atrocity prevention closes when situations escalate. In the early stages of a crisis, factors associated with atrocity crime risks are normally identified, but not assessed as constituting a risk of the commission of an atrocity crime. As a result, the nature of the risk is not always sufficiently understood until a relatively late stage, when the range of available responses becomes more limited.

21. The prevention of imminent atrocity crimes involves attempting to persuade perpetrators and potential perpetrators not to commit such crimes. In practice, the international community has tried to do this in a wide variety of ways. This can take the form of direct high-level political engagement. There is also evidence of good practice in the use of coordinated and concerted political engagement by the United Nations, regional and subregional arrangements, neighbouring States and other actors. In other cases, the United Nations has called on influential third parties to intercede in support of prevention.

22. Persuasion and negotiation can be effective ways to change the behaviour of actors in situations at risk of atrocity crimes. Mediation is often utilized to address the political causes of atrocity crimes or to prevent escalation. In some cases, mediation has been key in reducing tensions through the negotiation of political arrangements. However, actors may also use negotiations to provide cover for the commission of atrocity crimes and to weaken international support for more coercive approaches; this is a particular risk where there are competing forums for mediation, resulting in delays and lost credibility. A recurrent challenge in past atrocity prevention cases has been ensuring the implementation of agreements brokered by mediators, including with respect to their gender provisions. It is therefore imperative that steps be taken to ensure that signed agreements are implemented.

23. When persuasion and negotiation fall short, direct efforts are needed to prevent atrocity crimes. Direct action can be focused on the capacity of actors to commit atrocity crimes, including by addressing hate speech and incitement to violence, preventing the flow of arms or degrading the capacity of potential perpetrators. Direct action may also be focused on reducing the vulnerability of civilian populations by denying armed actors' access to them, protecting them with armed peacekeepers or placing them out of harm's way. There is a wide range of examples of such action, including:

(a) **First, addressing hate speech**. The United Nations radio networks in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic and South Sudan are used to directly counter hate speech. In Europe, the European Commission is providing a platform for cooperation between civil society organizations monitoring online content and information technology companies in a position to remove it;

(b) **Second, providing protection of civilians through deployment of United Nations peacekeeping operations** is among the most direct ways in which the Organization prevents atrocity crimes. United Nations peacekeeping interprets the protection of civilians through a three-tiered approach: (a) protection through dialogue and engagement; (b) provision of physical protection; and (c) establishing a protective environment. Protection of civilians mandates have included access to protection sites, security patrols, work with local communities, direct advocacy with political and militia leaders, addressing conflict-related sexual violence and conducting activities in support of the disarmament and demobilization of armed groups, inter alia. Direct interaction between peacekeepers and local communities in various missions has helped to build trust and directly contribute to a reduction in violence. The level of protection is highest where peacekeepers have a strong mandate and robust capacity to protect civilians. Peacekeeping aside, the field presence of international actors – for instance, on human rights monitoring, investigation and reporting, engagement with civil society and local communities – can be instrumental in contributing to prevention;

(c) **Third, providing support to national authorities** in strengthening their capacity to prevent atrocity crimes. My 2014 report (A/68/947-S/2014/449) presented a list of "inhibitors" of atrocity crimes, many of which relate to structural resilience.

Past experience suggests that direct assistance to security and judiciary sectors has contributed to the stabilization of particular situations;

(d) **Fourth, taking humanitarian action**. In many situations a large number of casualties continued to occur owing to the indirect effects of atrocity crimes, including disease and malnutrition. In several situations, the Security Council has taken decisive steps to address life-threatening humanitarian concerns. In addition to alleviating such threats, humanitarian action also supports individuals and communities in making informed choices about their own protection, providing safe routes when they are attacked and sustenance when they are displaced.

24. When the risk of atrocity crimes is imminent, local communities can take steps to protect themselves. They are the first line of prevention and are best placed to stop the seeds of violence escalating. They are also the first line of protection when atrocity crimes are perpetrated. The choices that vulnerable communities make to protect themselves can make a vital difference to their chances of survival, yet they all too often go unheeded and unsupported. It is imperative that the international community strengthen partnerships with civil society and local communities to help prevent and protect against atrocity crimes, including through regular and active information exchange and capacity-building. In some situations, the support provided by the United Nations, the African Union and non-governmental organizations to women and girls in internally displaced person camps was important, to provide additional protection against sexual violence.

25. Among the most innovative ways in which the United Nations supports atrocity prevention is through political and technical support for civil society organizations in enhancing prevention efforts at the grassroots level, which is particularly effective in a restricted and sensitive environment. There are numerous specific examples of positive support for civil society. These include:

(a) **Innovative violence reduction programmes and facilitation of community-to-community trust-building exercises**. The United Nations is providing encouragement and support to local prevention initiatives in many country situations as part of sustained efforts for reconciliation. In some instances, the United Nations has supported civil society dialogue using innovative approaches that promote the identification of solutions to daily problems irrespective of political differences. In other cases, the Organization has supported the establishment of local mechanisms to build preventive capacities for early resolution of disputes, trust building, and information sharing;

(b) **Engagement with religious leaders and actors to encourage them to use their influence to lessen escalation of violence within their communities and to facilitate community-based dialogues**. The Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes, launched in July 2017, provides a range of options to address and mitigate escalation when the risk of incitement exists;

(c) **Support for local human rights organizations**. The pathway to atrocity crimes often starts with systematic human rights violations. The first line of defence tends to be local and national human rights organizations. United Nations field presences provide many lines of support to local human rights groups and prioritize actions to further strengthen such lines of support. For example, in the Western Balkans region, the United Nations has identified the need to develop and scale up regional programmes that engage communities and groups, in particular women and youth, in activities and dialogue advancing reconciliation, trust building and social cohesion. In the Americas region, the United Nations is working with groups promoting the protection of indigenous peoples' rights;

(d) **Support for women's and youth organizations provides another opportunity for direct local level engagement**. Committed to inclusive peacebuilding, the Gender and Youth Promotion Initiative of the Peacebuilding Fund has supported the empowerment and meaningful participation of women and youth organizations in numerous conflict-affected situations, to promote and advance transitional justice and reconciliation initiatives;

(e) **When providing assistance to grass-roots efforts, the decentralization of preventive efforts is important**. Too often, international efforts have tended to focus primarily on capital cities and other major centres, yet quite often the seeds of violence are sown in more remote, rural and marginalized areas. It is imperative that efforts are focused where division and the risk of violence is higher and that assistance extends beyond the major centres. In March 2019, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme and a local non-governmental organization, organized a meeting with Rohingya religious leaders in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, to discuss ways to enhance peaceful coexistence with the host community.

Sustained engagement

26. Once early action has been undertaken, sustained engagement for prevention is necessary to prevent atrocity crimes. Ensuring that engagement addresses all the relevant issues is also important. Political engagement can help with negotiations between parties, while human rights engagement can contribute to monitoring and public reporting, and security assistance can support protection, including through the use of preventive diplomacy. In the longer term, the United Nations country teams can also provide invaluable support in the areas of security sector reform and reconciliation efforts.

III. Key lessons learned

27. **First, imminently anticipated atrocity crimes are preventable**. Concerted action by local, national, regional and international actors helps avert the escalation of violence. In practice, there is no straightforward relationship between the number or type of preventive tools employed and the outcome. I have repeatedly emphasized that preventive action must be context-specific. Experience since the 2005 World Summit provides strong support for this. In most cases, the international community has used a wide range of tools to prevent atrocity crimes. Often, the international community has used only a limited range of tools, when a more comprehensive approach has been needed. This can inadvertently signal international disinterest or the existence of competing priorities, encouraging perpetrators to believe that their crimes will not be met with a resolute response and disheartening vulnerable peoples. Experience shows that a divided and circumscribed approach to prevention tends to be less effective, especially when confronted by intransigent parties. Furthermore, impunity for past atrocity crimes inhibits the ability of preventive measures to change perpetrators' behaviour.

28. **Second, the best outcomes are achieved when atrocity prevention is made a priority**. The prioritization of atrocity prevention makes it more likely that the international community will take early and concerted action. It also means that atrocity prevention will not be considered secondary to other priorities. Where the prevention of atrocity crimes is not made a priority at all, prevention efforts can be sharply impaired and their effectiveness reduced. When atrocity prevention is prioritized, key guarantor States – those States with particular influence over an

affected country – tend to play a more active and positive role and to enjoy international support. This strengthens atrocity prevention.

29. **Third, unity of purpose is essential to successful atrocity prevention**. The commitment of the entire international community is imperative. Successful prevention always involves multiple actors, including the United Nations, regional organizations, key States and neighbouring States, working together in a coherent fashion. However, a lack of unity of purpose can sometimes seriously weaken atrocity prevention. Where there is no unity of purpose, the effectiveness of preventive action is undermined by uncoordinated and incoherent messaging and the availability of alternative forums. In practice, unity of purpose requires international leadership. Which State or group of States is best placed to show leadership will differ from case to case. Where there is a vacuum of leadership or consensus, preventive action is less well coordinated, less credible and, as a result, less effective.

30. **Fourth, in practice, the effectiveness of atrocity prevention is determined by a wide variety of factors that relate mainly to national attributes**. These may centre around: (a) leadership commitment to prevention, as receptive leaders can negotiate and peacefully resolve crises, are open to persuasion and are more likely to implement agreements; (b) State capacity to prevent, including the extent to which national authorities are capable of providing key State services; (c) robustness of civil society and inclusion of women, which can be instrumental in challenging and addressing hate speech, countering discrimination, fostering norms of peaceful coexistence and facilitating conflict resolution; (d) the presence of a culture of accountability, which is strongly conducive to prevention, as it reduces the risk of retaliatory violence that exists in spaces of impunity; (e) effective restraints in armed groups, which can have a direct correlation with the scale of the violence that they inflict on civilian populations; and (f) degree of favourability of the regional context, defined as the positive or negative posture adopted by a country's neighbours in response to internal dynamics.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

31. **As I have reiterated in previous reports, there is a widening gap between the high-level plenary meeting of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly (2005 World Summit) commitment to the responsibility to protect and the daily experience of vulnerable populations around the world. More needs to be done to translate early warning of atrocity crimes into decisive early action towards prevention. In the present report, I have identified a number of lessons learned that can inform the design and implementation of programmes of work to strengthen atrocity prevention in practice, as well as measures to improve the collective response capacity of the international community, including the United Nations.**

32. **States have the primary responsibility to protect their populations and are well placed to take the earliest action to prevent atrocity crimes. I encourage Member States to consider implementing the recommendations included in previous reports on the responsibility to protect, in particular those related to strengthening national resilience. Most particularly, this includes conducting national assessments of risk and resilience that are gender-sensitive, which can be done as part of existing processes – such as the universal periodic review – or as a stand-alone exercise. I invite Member States to use the "Framework of analysis for atrocity crimes: a tool for prevention" as an instrument for that purpose.**

33. **At the international level, more needs to be done to actively support initiatives aimed at reducing the risk of atrocity crimes or responding to the evidence of their imminent commission, as well as to support regional initiatives to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes, including by strengthening partnerships with regional and subregional organizations. I encourage the continuation of open and frank discussions aimed at advancing the responsibility to protect in response to the solemn commitment adopted at the 2005 World Summit, as well as in consideration of existing challenges for the implementation of this agenda.**

34. **I intend to continue to prioritize the integration of atrocity prevention with other collective agendas connected to the three pillars of work of the Organization. I encourage Member States to assist in this effort, as well as to continue supporting my Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect in implementing their critical mandates.**