



General Assembly Security Council

Distr.: General
3 May 2021

Original: English

**General Assembly
Seventy-fifth session**

Agenda items 14, 122 and 135

**Security Council
Seventy-sixth year**

**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**

Advancing atrocity prevention: work of the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (atrocity crimes)¹ remains a constant global challenge and an ongoing imperative. Without question, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and created new protection challenges. Throughout the world, there has been a surge in stigmatization and hate speech and increased incitement and violence towards national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, as well as towards other ethnic and racial groups simply because of their identity. In addition, State and non-State actors continue to flagrantly disregard well-established principles of international human rights and humanitarian law. The deliberate targeting of schools and hospitals, the destruction of religious and heritage sites, the weaponization of food and widespread sexual and gender-based violence have all become more frequent.

¹ The term “atrocity crimes” refers only to the four acts specified in paragraph 138 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1). Genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity are defined in international criminal law, including article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and articles 6 to 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Ethnic cleansing, while not established as a distinct crime, includes acts that may amount to one of those crimes, in particular genocide and crimes against humanity.



2. During the early months of the pandemic, the Secretary-General called for a global ceasefire to silence the guns and help to create the right conditions for the delivery of life-saving aid. In spite of significant endorsement, conflict has continued, and conflict-related risks of atrocity crimes have increased. Prioritization of prevention therefore remains as critical as ever.

3. In September 2020, on the occasion of the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the principle of the responsibility to protect, the Secretary-General stated that systematic and grave human rights violations, widespread impunity, hate speech, exclusion and discrimination could all increase the risk of atrocity crimes, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. In his call to action for human rights made in 2020, the Secretary-General stressed the links between human rights protection and prevention and provided a framework for putting human rights at the centre of all United Nations action in areas that are central to the collective commitment to upholding the responsibility to protect.

4. At the 2005 World Summit, all States Members of the United Nations committed to protecting populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Since then, there has been progress in advancing both the conceptualization and operationalization of the responsibility to protect. The annual reports of the Secretary-General on the responsibility to protect² have provided guidance on the implementation of that principle. The first such report (A/63/677) laid out a three-pillar strategy for implementation in line with paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1). Pillar one is based on the understanding that State sovereignty implies the responsibility of individual States to protect their own populations from the gravest of crimes in accordance with their national and international obligations. Pillar two sets out the parallel commitment of the international community to assisting States in discharging that primary responsibility. Pillar three underscores the responsibility to protect of the international community when States are manifestly failing to protect their populations, and includes taking collective action, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, including the range of tools available under its Chapters VI, VII and VIII.

5. In 2009, in its resolution 63/308, the General Assembly decided to give ongoing consideration to the responsibility to protect. In his subsequent reports, the Secretary-General examined different aspects of the concept and its application by providing further guidance on the three pillars and focusing on thematic issues, most recently the role of women in atrocity prevention (A/74/964-S/2020/501).

6. The aim of the present report is to provide an overview of how the responsibility to protect has been and is being operationalized through the Organization's prevention, early warning and response work, led by the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. The Office supports Member States, regional and subregional organizations and grass-roots and civil society actors through a range of initiatives aimed at assessing and addressing existing vulnerabilities to mitigate the risk of atrocity crimes. This work is done in coordination with all United Nations headquarters and field presences to support those at risk. As outlined in the report, the Office collects information on and analyses the risk of atrocity crimes, encourages early action by Member States and regional and subregional organizations and advances essential agendas, such as preventing incitement to violence and addressing hate speech.

² Available at www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/key-documents.shtml.

II. Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect

7. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect supports two Special Advisers. Twenty years ago, in its resolution 1366 (2001), the Security Council invited the Secretary-General to refer to the Council information and analyses from within the United Nations system of cases of serious violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. In furtherance of the resolution, and in response to lessons learned, the Secretary-General informed the President of the Security Council of his decision to appoint a special adviser on the prevention of genocide (S/2004/567).³

8. The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide is specifically mandated to: collect information from within the United Nations system on massive and serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law of ethnic, religious and racial origin that, if not prevented or halted, might lead to genocide; act as a mechanism for early warning to the Secretary-General and, through him, to the Security Council, by bringing to their attention situations that could potentially result in genocide; make recommendations to the Council, through the Secretary-General, on action to prevent or halt genocide; and liaise with the United Nations system on activities for the prevention of genocide and work to enhance the capacity of the United Nations to analyse and manage information regarding genocide or related crimes.

9. In 2007, following the adoption of the principle of the responsibility to protect in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the Secretary-General addressed a letter to the President of the Security Council in which he recognized the need to further advance conceptual development and consensus-building on the responsibility to protect (S/2007/721). To that end, and on the basis of the agreement contained in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the Secretary-General expressed his intention to designate a special adviser on the responsibility to protect with the main task of developing the conceptual, political and institutional dimensions of operationalizing the principle. Given the distinct but complementary nature of the prevention of genocide and the responsibility to protect, the Secretary-General decided that the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect would work under the overall guidance of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. The Secretary-General also specified that the Special Advisers would share an office and support staff for reasons of both efficiency and complementarity of their responsibilities. This contributed to enhancing the work of the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, including on early warning and capacity-building, while adding value in terms of new tasks focused on advocacy, cross-sectoral assessment and cumulative learning on how to anticipate, prevent and respond to crises relating to the responsibility to protect.

10. The Special Advisers have distinct but closely related responsibilities and maintain a close working relationship on the common elements of their operational activities, including the employment of common methodologies and efforts towards system-wide coherence in the approach to prevention. For example, they work in partnership with the broader United Nations system to ensure that atrocity prevention

³ The mandate of the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide was reaffirmed through an exchange of letters between the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (S/2007/721 and S/2007/722) and in resolutions of the General Assembly, the Commission on Human Rights and the Human Rights Council, including Assembly resolutions 60/1 and 63/308, Commission on Human Rights resolution 2005/62 and Human Rights Council resolutions 7/25, 22/22, 28/34, 33/19 and 37/26.

is prioritized in all dimensions of the work of the Organization, including through consideration of atrocity risk factors in system-wide deliberations in respect to situations of concern. This has entailed contributions to the implementation of system-wide initiatives, such as the development of an internal prevention platform, the five-year Review of Peacebuilding Architecture and the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations. Those actions have been taken in parallel to the operationalization of the distinct assessment, response and political advocacy role envisaged through the establishment of their two mandates.

III. Operationalizing atrocity prevention

11. The implementation of the responsibility to protect is an integral part of the broader strategy of the Secretary-General for prioritizing prevention. While the responsibility to protect represents a political commitment, the conceptual development of the principle has contributed to advancing its operationalization, including by providing a framework and guidance for action to prevent and halt genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Moreover, the complementarity of the Special Advisers' mandates is reflected in the operational and preventive work of the Office. This relates in particular to analysing risk, providing early warning and encouraging Member States to take effective action in response to situations where populations are at risk of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, or where those crimes are ongoing, including by building international, regional and national capacities for prevention. While a substantial part of that work is carried out outside of the public domain through internal deliberations or diplomatic engagements, it also has a public dimension in the form of advocacy missions, press statements, remarks at public events or briefings to intergovernmental organs of the United Nations or regional organizations. In line with pillar two, which outlines the collective responsibility of the international community to encourage and help States to meet their responsibility to protect, the Office also works to build and strengthen the prevention, early warning and response capacity of Member States, regional and subregional organizations and civil society through capacity-building activities and targeted technical assistance, among others.

A. Risk assessment: information gathering and analysis

12. It was recognized in the 2005 World Summit Outcome that the international community should, as appropriate, encourage and help States to exercise the responsibility to protect and support the United Nations in establishing an early warning capability. The United Nations system continues to refine tools for integrated analyses, including its capacity to monitor and analyse atrocity crime risks. The "Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A tool for prevention"⁴ serves as a comprehensive early warning tool to systematize the collection of information and assess the presence of risk factors associated with atrocity crimes. Risk factors comprise indicators of structural or imminent risk, such as a previous history of conflict, long-standing structural discrimination, weak governance structures, a history of human rights violations or atrocity crimes, marginalization or exclusion of racial, ethnic and religious minorities, and motivation or capacity to commit crimes, among others. Not all risk factors need to be present to conclude that there is a significant risk of atrocity crimes; however, the more risk factors and the greater number of relevant indicators that are present, the higher the risk. Careful verification

⁴ Available at www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/about-us/Doc.3_Framework%20of%20Analysis%20for%20Atrocity%20Crimes_EN.pdf.

of facts, rigorous analysis and broad consultations, both inside and outside the United Nations system, are essential for the mobilization of preventive measures by national, regional and international actors in a position to implement prevention and protect populations experiencing or facing imminent atrocity crimes.

13. Systematic analysis that, *inter alia*, allows for early warning involves many United Nations entities, both at headquarters and in the field. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect actively collaborates and partners with those entities, including through inter-agency consultations and established arrangements through which information is shared, deliberations are held and coordination is explored, in particular with the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect also relies on formal arrangements for operational cooperation that include information-sharing and protection, early warning, advocacy, reconciliation and dialogue, such as with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Other entities with mandate-generated information relevant to atrocity risk assessments include the Department of Peace Operations, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Children's Fund. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect also actively participates in the regional monthly review mechanism as the main forum for cross-pillar prevention discussions.

14. As outlined in the call to action for human rights and the policy brief on COVID-19 and human rights, timely, reliable and accurate information on current and emerging human rights crises remains essential. This has been especially important at a time when the Special Advisers and the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect have been unable to conduct field visits as a result of the measures put in place to control the COVID-19 pandemic. In the past, such visits have helped to verify reporting through meetings and consultations with relevant stakeholders, including government officials, national human rights institutions, human rights defenders, civil society representatives, traditional elders, religious leaders and faith-based actors, women leaders, young people and the private sector. The Office envisages returning to undertaking as many country-level consultations at different stages of the prevention cycle as possible.

15. In addition to its own analysis and early warning, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect also uses the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes as a tool for raising awareness and increasing the capacity of other actors. At their request, the Office has provided training to United Nations staff, Member States, regional organizations, civil society organizations, religious leaders, human rights defenders and academics. The Framework allowed all actors with leverage in the field of prevention to assess challenges and identify new opportunities for prevention. Within the United Nations, the Office ensures that the risk factors outlined in the Framework are considered, as relevant, in thematic inter-agency mechanisms, such as the United Nations network on racial discrimination and protection of minorities, the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples' Issues, the Protection of Civilians Working Group and the United Nations Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict.

B. Strengthening early warning and prevention

16. No society is immune to the risk of atrocity crimes, and each individual State has the primary responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, including at the national level. This is the essence of pillar one of the responsibility to protect. Building national capacities

for prevention thus remains a priority. Assisting one another in building such capacities, which is at the core of pillar two of the principle, also constitutes a key responsibility and priority. The work of the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect in strengthening national resilience in cooperation with State institutions is part of that effort.

17. The Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes underlines that prevention is an ongoing process that requires sustained efforts to build the resilience of societies by promoting respect for the rule of law and human rights without discrimination, establishing legitimate and accountable national institutions, eliminating corruption, managing diversity constructively and supporting a strong and diverse civil society and pluralistic media. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that sustainable development depends on fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies that are free from fear and all forms of violence, which, in its worst manifestation, includes atrocity crimes. Achieving the 2030 Agenda would be the most effective way to prevent human suffering and crises. It is the cornerstone of prevention.

Supporting national and regional efforts

18. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect is committed to working with national institutions in advancing prevention as part of a State-owned and sustainable effort. Where they exist, national atrocity prevention mechanisms can be instrumental in identifying risks and coordinating response. Supporting their work and assigning the necessary prioritization within national administrations have proven effective. National institutions with which the Office works also include national human rights institutions, ombudspersons and parliamentarians, which have an important role to play in ensuring accountability for atrocity prevention through a variety of tools. Guidance notes for parliamentarians and human rights institutions produced by the Office underscore the importance of atrocity prevention in the annual and thematic reports and education programmes of those institutions, the monitoring of serious human rights violations through their complaint mechanisms, the advocacy of the adoption of national legislation related to the prevention of atrocity crimes, and the training of security forces and monitoring of their policies. As an example, the Office has worked with the offices of ombudspersons in Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador to assess the risks faced by vulnerable communities and support initiatives aimed at mitigating such risks. The Office has also encouraged parliamentarians to hold briefings on atrocity crime risks and invite civil society to provide recommendations for action. In addition, parliamentarians are instrumental in providing budgetary resources to national efforts in that direction. At the international level, national human rights institutions, ombudspersons and parliamentarians can promote cooperation with other human rights mechanisms and build mutually supportive cross-national networks.

19. At their request, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect provides technical assistance to Member States in establishing or strengthening mechanisms for preventing atrocity crimes, including early warning mechanisms. Beyond its advocacy work to increase the number of States parties to key international instruments, including the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Office has supported national efforts to incorporate obligations emanating from those instruments in national legal systems, including the criminalization of atrocity crimes in domestic law, and helped to build national mechanisms on prevention and accountability for atrocity crimes. The Office does much of this work in coordination with atrocity prevention and responsibility to protect focal points in States that are members of dedicated regional and international networks, such as the Regional Committee of the International Conference on the

Great Lakes Region on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity and all forms of Discrimination, the Latin American Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention, the Global Network of the Responsibility to Protect Focal Points and the Global Action against Mass Atrocity Crimes. In doing so, the Office encourages focal points to identify risks within their States and to address them as appropriate.

20. Often, national prevention efforts require addressing the legacy of the past, thereby making support for transitional justice initiatives, institutions and processes essential. Prevention entails addressing concretely what are sometimes persistent intergenerational risks, including entrenched discriminatory policies affecting specific communities or groups. This is the case in particular in countries and regions that have experienced atrocity crimes and where the legacy of the past is marked by divisive narratives, sometimes by political leaders, unresolved deep-rooted grievances, structural impunity and a generalized sense of injustice among communities and populations. At the global level, the work of the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect in this field builds upon its partnership with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence and has included the publication of a joint study on the contribution of transitional justice to the prevention of gross violations and abuses of human rights and serious violations of international humanitarian law, including genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, and their recurrence, prepared pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution [33/19 \(A/HRC/37/65\)](#). Conclusions and recommendations contained in the joint study have informed the operational support of the Office for national transitional justice initiatives, in coordination with national institutions and actors. As a specific example, in the Western Balkans, visits conducted by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and resulting assessments have informed the development of a comprehensive United Nations regional strategy that includes an important transitional justice component.

21. It is important to emphasize the vital role that regional arrangements, including regional and subregional organizations, can play in preventing and responding to atrocity crimes. These organizations 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. They can also ensure the timely flow of accurate country-level information and analyses to global decision makers, while lessening the risk of misinterpretation, misinformation and distortion. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect has supported regional organizations in preventing genocide and other atrocity crimes across all regions, including through the activities in Africa, Europe, the Americas and Asia outlined below.

22. The regional and the national dimensions can build upon each other. In Africa, for example, the Protocol for the Prevention and the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity and all Forms of Discrimination, adopted in 2006 by the Heads of State and Government of the member States of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, provided the framework for the work of the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect with the Governments of the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania to establish national committees for the prevention of such crimes. The Office also provided technical and financial assistance to support the operationalization of those committees. Collaboration between the Office, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UNDP thus led to the creation of provincial subcommittees in North Kivu and South Kivu. In Kenya

and Uganda, the Office assisted national committees in the development of domestic legal frameworks for atrocity prevention. To help with the implementation of the programmes of work of national committees in Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania, the Office supported intercommunity and intracommunity dialogues aimed at mitigating atrocity risks.

23. The African Union is also integrating risk factors and indicators for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity into its Continental Early Warning System and early warning mechanisms in a number of African regional economic communities. In July 2019, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect brought together officials of the African Union Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division and of the regional economic communities⁵ to review the Continental Early Warning System and integrate human rights and risk factors for atrocity crimes into its database.

24. In Europe, the European Union established a conflict early warning system in 2014 as an evidence-based risk management tool that identifies early, assesses and prioritizes situations of risk of violent conflict in non-member countries. With support from the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, the European External Action Service developed a toolkit that integrates the atrocity prevention dimension into its early warning system. This work has led to cooperation supported by periodic briefings by the Special Advisers to European Union governing bodies. The Office is also cooperating with the European Union in the development of atrocity prevention guidelines for international practitioners as practical recommendations for concrete preventive action.

25. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect has also contributed to the work of the European Union High-level Group on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance and supported efforts to address discrimination by working with the European Commission, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the Council of Europe on measures to prevent and counter incitement to violence. This support included a briefing by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide to a plenary meeting of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, in October 2018. The Office holds regular consultations with the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Conflict Prevention Centre and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It has conducted workshops with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights that brought together representatives of civil society and vulnerable communities in specific subregions within the OSCE area for risk assessment and response discussions, leading to more accurate assessments of existing vulnerabilities and priority lines for engagement in the region.

26. In the Americas, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect maintains regular consultations with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, with which it has also held capacity-building workshops on its risk assessment and response methodology. The Office has initiated plans in the region to conduct workshops aimed at identifying risks faced by indigenous populations, as well as policy options to mitigate them. This builds upon the advocacy work of the Office for the protection of indigenous rights resulting from working-level visits to specific countries. Since 2012, the Office has also supported the Latin American Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention in capacity-building activities,

⁵ Arab Maghreb Union, Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, Community of Sahelo-Saharan States, East African Community, Economic Community of Central African States, Economic Community of West African States, Intergovernmental Authority on Development and Southern African Development Community.

as well as by participating in annual discussions on institutional arrangements, tools and methodologies to prevent and address challenges linked to atrocity crimes.

27. In Asia, the Special Advisers have continued to engage with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, including its Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, which has contributed to an increased awareness of how atrocity prevention efforts can be implemented in this region. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect has also explored options to work with specific States in advancing this agenda. In Pakistan, this has led to cooperation with the Higher Education Commission in an initiative aimed at countering hate speech and advancing inclusivity and protection of minority populations. The Office has also supported the implementation of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes (Fez Plan of Action) in the region, including a regional meeting with stakeholders from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In Bangladesh, the Office has conducted workshops contributing to the establishment of an interreligious council for peace and development. As in other regions, the Office works with United Nations country teams to support the implementation of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech through context-specific action plans and initiatives.

Supporting grass-roots efforts

28. An effective response to preventing atrocity crimes requires not just a whole-of-system approach by Member States, intergovernmental bodies and the United Nations system, but also a whole-of-society approach from the national to the local level. Non-State actors, such as civil society organizations and networks, community groups, local media and journalists and grass-roots organizations, including those of women, children and young people, have made significant contributions to atrocity prevention for decades by monitoring abuses, raising alarm, advocating action, reducing and stopping tensions and violence, facilitating intercommunal dialogue, holding Governments accountable and building social cohesion. They are often primary agents of peacebuilding, playing key roles in conflict-affected societies and in situations of extreme fragility or transition. In places where no direct connection between official governmental bodies and victims of past crimes exist, they can also facilitate this linkage. This makes them critical partners to State efforts and interlocutors for the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, including in identifying vulnerabilities and supporting on-the-ground efforts to prevent violations and strengthen resilience against atrocity crimes.

29. Strengthening resilience and promoting the sustainability of prevention efforts are at the core of atrocity prevention, and the interconnection of peacebuilding and the sustaining peace agenda with the prevention of atrocity crimes cannot be overlooked. As supported by the General Assembly and the Security Council through their adoption of “twin” resolutions on peacebuilding in 2016 and 2020,⁶ sustaining peace encompasses activities aimed at preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development. To that end, the Assembly and the Council also encouraged in those resolutions Member States and the entire United Nations system, in partnership with relevant stakeholders, including regional and subregional organizations, international financial institutions, civil society organizations, local peacebuilding stakeholders and, where relevant, the private sector, to continue to take action to implement the resolutions on peacebuilding and sustaining peace. A people-

⁶ General Assembly resolution [70/262](#) and Security Council resolution [2282 \(2016\)](#) in 2016, and Assembly resolution [75/201](#) and Council resolution [2558 \(2020\)](#) in 2020.

centred approach that includes the perspectives and priorities of both survivors of violence and agents of change continues to be at the forefront of the United Nations atrocity prevention work. The United Nations Community Engagement Guidelines on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace issued in 2020⁷ bring more coherence to the United Nations approach for working with those groups.

30. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect also supports capacity-building in the field of early warning through its work with civil society actors and networks. As an example, in Asia, this has included advocacy activities coordinated by the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Atrocity Prevention and the Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. In the Americas, this has involved training for civil society organizations conducted jointly with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights or advocacy workshops coordinated with United Nations colleagues and civil society organizations. In Europe, the Office has supported the work of the Budapest Centre for Mass Atrocities Prevention and its Visegrad Group national trainings on atrocity prevention. Direct advocacy and capacity-building work conducted by the Office also led to the establishment of the Western Balkans Coalition for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Crimes Prevention in 2017. In Africa, the Office recently collaborated with the United Nations country team in Ethiopia on a training for government officials, media and civil society organizations on addressing and countering hate speech.

31. Working with women peacebuilders to end inequality and discrimination and to protect and empower women and girls reinforces efforts to prevent atrocity crimes. As stated in the report on the responsibility to protect issued in 2020 ([A/74/964-S/2020/501](#)), societies that tolerate violence against women and girls are more likely to experience gender-based atrocity crimes than those that do not. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect is increasingly prioritizing the strengthening of women's roles in atrocity prevention and supporting women's grass-roots organizations through workshops aimed at presenting risk factors and policy options for their mitigation. Workshops held with participants from the wider Middle East and North Africa region on the connections between the women and peace and security agenda, conflict prevention and the implementation of the responsibility to protect led to the creation of a women's regional working group on prevention. This platform will offer capacity-building activities, information and network opportunities on atrocity crimes prevention for women-led civil society organizations.

32. The work of the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect to engage and build trust with non-governmental organizations, community-level groups, grass-roots organizations, traditional elders, religious leaders and faith-based actors, indigenous communities, youth and student organizations, women's organizations and research and academic institutions in furthering the understanding of the causes and dynamics of atrocity crimes and promoting coordination to respond to existing risks is critical to prevention and will continue to be supported. Tools and guidance, such as the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, the Fez Plan of Action and the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, have also allowed the Office to further engage with grass-roots organizations.

33. While States bear the primary responsibility, the international community, including the United Nations and regional organizations, also carry a responsibility to prevent and stop atrocity crimes. Bearing in mind that community-based civil society also plays a critical role in preventing atrocity crimes at the earliest stages,

⁷ Available at www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/un_community-engagement_guidelines.august_2020.pdf.

before opportunities for international engagement expire and more costly actions are required, investing and supporting local efforts are of particular relevance.

C. Advising and mobilizing preventive and collective action by Member States, regional organizations and the United Nations

34. From the beginning of his mandate, the Secretary-General has made prevention a top priority across the work of the Organization, both in his reform efforts and in key decision-making and programming. Member States and United Nations intergovernmental bodies rightly expect the United Nations system to inform their deliberations on the basis of assessed risks and recommendations. A key part of the mandates of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect involves advising Member States, United Nations intergovernmental bodies and regional organizations on situations of concern and on measures to mitigate the risk of atrocity crimes. Early warning comes in various formats, and the decision to pursue a particular course of action depends on each situation and is based on a careful evaluation of the circumstances. Some situations have the attention of the Security Council, the Human Rights Council or the General Assembly, while others do not. The form of early warning delivery also varies; some situations are more conducive to public engagement, while others are best suited for quiet diplomacy. The risk of “over-alerting” must be balanced with the risk of not sounding the alert in the face of potential serious deterioration. The sensitive nature of atrocity crimes makes considering that balance particularly important.

35. In recent years, the Special Advisers have issued numerous joint public statements to warn of the risk of atrocity crimes. They have also partnered with other offices with protection mandates in issuing alerts, such as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and have contributed to statements by other senior officials at Headquarters and in the field with the aim of warning of risks and mobilizing action for prevention.

36. Mobilizing action, however, requires active engagement by those in a position to effect change. As affirmed in paragraph 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the Security Council has a special responsibility for the prevention of atrocity crimes. The Council has taken several initiatives that have contributed to early action, including inviting and receiving briefings from the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide in respect to the situations in Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan.

37. In addition, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide has regularly briefed the Human Rights Council on the implementation of the related mandate and participated in the first Council intersessional meeting on the prevention of genocide, held on 10 February 2021.⁸ In 2021, and for the first time, the Council organized an intersessional panel discussion on the responsibility to protect.⁹ The Council has also invited the Secretary-General and the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide to report on thematic topics of relevance, such as the contribution of transitional justice to the prevention of atrocity crimes (see [A/HRC/37/65](#)) and educational responses that contribute to the prevention of genocide (see [A/HRC/41/24](#)). It has also

⁸ Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution [43/29](#), paras. 37 and 39.

⁹ Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution [44/14](#).

taken note of the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes and welcomed the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech.

38. Member States have also demonstrated their commitment to the prevention of atrocity crimes through the intergovernmental organs of the United Nations. For example, they have put forward proposals in the Security Council for strengthening the effectiveness and transparency of the working methods of that body as it responds to atrocity risks. Other initiatives taken by Member States in the Council, including conducting an Arria-formula meeting on its atrocity prevention role in 2018, entitled “Raising the effectiveness of atrocity crimes prevention: the role of the Security Council and its members” (see [S/2019/48](#)), have also contributed to strengthening considerations by the Council of effective angles of preventive action. In the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council, Member States have established specific bodies to contribute to the prevention of atrocity crimes and support accountability processes. A number of those bodies are currently operational, including with regard to the situations in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Myanmar, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. In parallel, human rights treaty bodies and special procedures, together with the universal periodic review, can play a key role in informing the Human Rights Council of existing concerns, as well as in providing recommendations to strengthen resilience in societies before serious risks arise.

IV. Priority fields for action in prevention of atrocity crimes

39. In the overall range of responses to assessed risks, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect has prioritized two thematic, cross-cutting areas: preventing incitement to violence through engagement with religious leaders and actors; and addressing and countering hate speech.

A. Preventing incitement to violence through engagement with religious leaders and actors

40. In the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the prevention of incitement to violence¹⁰ was linked to the prevention of atrocity crimes. Preventing incitement to violence is a key component of the United Nations commitment to preventing atrocity crimes. Incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence is both an early warning indicator and a potential trigger of such crimes. The United Nations cannot succeed without working with partners. Religious leaders and actors, in particular, can influence the lives and behaviour of those who follow their faith and share their beliefs. When they speak out, their messages can have a strong and wide-ranging impact.

41. For that reason, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect led the development of the Fez Plan of Action, launched in 2017, following a two-year multi-stakeholder global consultative process. The Plan sets out recommendations for religious leaders and actors for preventing calls for violence, intolerance, racism or xenophobia that could lead to atrocity crimes. In the same spirit, and jointly with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and OHCHR, virtual consultations started in May 2020 by the Office resulted in the Global Pledge

¹⁰ The term “incitement to violence” is included in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which prohibits in its article 20, paragraph 2, any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

for Action by Religious Actors and Faith-Based Organizations to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic in Collaboration with the United Nations.¹¹

42. Preventing atrocity crimes and their incitement is a multilayer endeavour most likely to succeed when different actors work collaboratively. While the Fez Plan of Action is intended primarily for religious leaders and faith-based organizations, it also includes detailed recommendations for other relevant actors, such as States and State institutions, secular civil society organizations and digital and traditional media. In implementing the Plan, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect is supported by a steering committee composed of religious leaders and representatives of faith-based organizations, many of which have included the Plan in their work strategies. As indicated throughout the present report, the United Nations and its agencies, funds, programmes and departments are also actively supporting its implementation.

43. This work has resulted in partnerships, policies, advocacy initiatives or programmatic activities in Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Thailand, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and elsewhere. The implementation of the Fez Plan of Action in Iraq led to the adoption of the landmark Interfaith Statement on the Victims and Survivors of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh) in March 2020, on the basis of which a series of local-level multi-confessional implementation dialogues are about to be initiated. In other States in the Middle East region, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect is working with civil society and grass-roots organizations and religious leaders and actors to develop community-level plans of action for atrocity prevention. In the Asia-Pacific region, the Office is working with religious leaders, parliamentarians and civil society actors from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka to identify challenges and opportunities to promote inclusive and peaceful societies, leading to increased awareness of that agenda by religious leaders and actors in those countries. The Office has also conducted national-level workshops in Bangladesh and Pakistan that have led to preventive actions by religious leaders and actors at the national level.

B. Addressing and countering hate speech as a risk factor of atrocity crimes

44. Hate speech and incitement to violence constitute indicators of risk factors for atrocity crimes, in particular when they target a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, on the basis of their ethnicity, nationality, religion, race, colour, descent, gender, sexual orientation or other identity factors. The past few years have seen a rapid and alarming increase in hate speech, including multiple cases in which it led to violence.

45. In 2019, the Secretary-General asked the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide to lead efforts to develop a strategy for the United Nations to increase its efforts to address and counter hate speech, which was launched in June 2019. The Special Adviser and the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect serve as the United Nations focal point on the implementation of that strategy and coordinate the Working Group on Hate Speech. The United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech were developed to address both the root causes and the impact of hate speech, building on existing experience of the United Nations system and in line with international human rights standards. In 2020, the Secretary-

¹¹ Available at www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25909&LangID=E.

General issued a global appeal to counter and address COVID-19-related hate speech, and the Special Adviser subsequently issued a guidance note on that topic.¹²

46. In September 2020, the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect issued detailed guidance for United Nations field presences on the implementation of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech,¹³ and multiple United Nations offices have now adopted strategies on addressing hate speech. Action plans on hate speech have been further developed and are being implemented in countries across all regions, and the Office is supporting United Nations country teams, special political missions and peacekeeping missions in that regard.

47. While Member States have the primary responsibility for addressing hate speech, other actors, in particular technology and social media companies, the media and civil society, also play a significant role. There are many examples of creative initiatives by grass-roots civil organizations, supported by United Nations country offices, to create safe social spaces where minority languages can be spoken, establish youth and minority-led working groups and share positive messaging through storytelling, the arts and videos. For example, the Peacebuilding Support Office has supported civil society programmes to combat hate speech in the Central African Republic and Côte d'Ivoire. Both the Fez Plan of Action and the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech have broadened cooperation among and engagement by United Nations offices and agencies, as well as national institutions, in strengthening resilience against that phenomenon. The Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect continues to engage with technology and social media companies to strengthen their commitment in this field, including through a round table held in June 2020 that resulted in specific recommendations for action.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

48. The present report contains reflections on the role and contributions of the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect in advancing collective efforts for the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as well as their incitement. Advancing those efforts effectively requires consistent attention to the need to raise awareness about the causes and dynamics of atrocity crimes, alert relevant actors when there is a risk, advocate appropriate action to mitigate such risk, build the capacity of and cooperate with national and regional initiatives in undertaking that effort, support civil society and grass-roots organizations, including women's and youth organizations, and integrate an atrocity prevention dimension into all relevant fields of work of the United Nations.

49. Effective and sustainable atrocity prevention remains subject to persistent challenges. This is reflected in the continued gap between the commitment to the responsibility to protect adopted in 2005 and the reality of populations exposed to the risk and the commission of atrocity crimes. The reasons for that gap include deficits in information collection and assessment, failure to take early and timely action in response to warning signs and a lack of systematic and interdisciplinary implementation of atrocity prevention measures. More can and must be done to make atrocity prevention a central part of the broader commitment to prevention. To that

¹² Available at www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/Guidance%20on%20COVID-19%20related%20Hate%20Speech.pdf.

¹³ Available at www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20PoA%20on%20Hate%20Speech_Guidance%20on%20Addressing%20in%20field.pdf.

end, I urge Member States to further support and prioritize atrocity prevention at the national, regional and international levels, including in partnership with the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, by considering the following recommendations:

(a) To consider becoming State parties to and implement international agreements relating to the prevention of atrocity crimes and the protection of populations, including the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as well as other relevant international and regional instruments, including through the criminalization of atrocity crimes in domestic law;

(b) To allocate dedicated capacities and resources to atrocity prevention assessment and response, including through the appointment of focal points on atrocity prevention or on the responsibility to protect, and to conduct periodic national assessments of risks and resilience, using the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes and requesting the support of the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect as necessary. Such assessments, which could be connected to broader prevention initiatives, should identify vulnerable populations and be conducted in consultation with civil society actors, prioritizing the voices of women and young people;

(c) To identify options to strengthen atrocity resilience and to implement them as appropriate, including in support of national human rights institutions and national atrocity prevention mechanisms, with the support of the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect and United Nations field presences, as necessary, and in response to the call to action for human rights. This includes addressing hate speech and incitement in line with international human rights law and by implementing the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech;

(d) To take advantage of the inputs that the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect can give to the work of United Nations intergovernmental bodies, including the Security Council and the Human Rights Council, as well as intergovernmental bodies of regional organizations, as appropriate, on situations or issues relevant to their mandates;

(e) To consider the inclusion of an atrocity prevention dimension in Human Rights Council mandates, where relevant, as well as the inclusion of such a dimension in national reports produced under the universal periodic review, and in the work of regional human rights institutions, as appropriate;

(f) To encourage and support civil society initiatives contributing to the prevention of atrocity crimes, including through cooperation in the implementation of the Fez Plan of Action;

(g) To provide continuing support to United Nations efforts to prevent atrocity crimes, in particular for the operationalization of the prevention mandates of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, and for the implementation of regional and national prevention activities, including through the provision of technical assistance to help all States to uphold their responsibility to protect populations.