

Mr. President,

I welcome this debate at the General Assembly of the United Nations to discuss the report of the Secretary General on the implementation of the responsibility to protect and I align myself with the statement made by the Representative of Sweden on behalf of the European Union.

The concept of the responsibility to protect has been endorsed by our leaders at the highest level. At the World Summit in 2005, the General Assembly indeed unanimously adopted the Outcome Document of which paragraphs 138 and 139 form the basis of the responsibility to protect. The entire international community has taken a solemn commitment by underlining the obligation of State to protect its citizens from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Our Heads of State and Government have recognized that it is fundamental to avoid the avoidable, that is, the repetition of the failures of the international community in the face of the atrocities committed in Rwanda, in ex-Yugoslavia and in Cambodia.

This first report on implementing the responsibility to protect is a major step towards a concrete strategy translating the concept into reality.

Mr. President,

All Member States of the UN have recognized in 2005 that the responsibility to protect does neither weaken the principle of State sovereignty, which is at the core of international relations in the 21st century, nor justify arbitrary interventionism. As the Secretary General recalls in his report, the responsibility to protect is an ally of sovereignty, not an adversary. Sovereignty entails rights but also responsibilities, and among the latter, none is as important as the responsibility to protect one's citizens. The scope of this responsibility is limited to four types of particularly heinous crimes.

Paragraphs 138 and 139 further stipulate that the international community shall assist States to meet their obligations under the responsibility to protect, by encouraging them to effectively carry out their responsibilities or by assisting them to reinforce their national capacities to prevent crimes. Preventive action is indeed the key component of the responsibility to protect, as it seeks to save lives. The establishment of an early warning capacity, as the report suggests, could as a matter of fact contribute to preventing potential tragedies. My country is convinced that investing into training programmes on human rights, mediation, conflict prevention, crisis management and good governance will be beneficial in the long term. Many international actors can also play a crucial role in terms of prevention, in particular regional organizations – and I'll mention only ECOWAS, which has an early warning mechanism –, the Human Rights Council through its universal periodic review, the Peacebuilding Commission, the international justice, the members of fact finding missions, humanitarian actors, peacekeepers, but also the Secretary General himself. It is however first and foremost up to Members States to work towards the prevention of conflicts.

Finally, the responsibility to protect can also translate into collective action by the international community, through the United Nations, on a case by case basis, to protect populations against crimes and violations when States manifestly fail to meet their protection obligations. In fast-evolving situations, it is indeed vital that we are able to react quickly to save human lives.

Mr. President,

There might be differences of views on the responsibility to protect but there is a strong consensus among all Member States to honor the principle of the “Never Again”. The concept is laid out, it is now time to focus on its implementation. We all have to show the necessary political will to take this implementation forward at the United Nations and to deepen the concept on the basis of further contributions from the Secretary General.

Mr. President,

The memory of the millions of victims of past atrocities is a constant reminder that we have a burning obligation to pursue our dialogue in this forum to implement the responsibility to protect.

Thank you.