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Deputy Secretary-General

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REPEATING 'NEVER AGAIN' AFTER ATROCITY 'A SIGN OF CONTINUED FAILURE'

DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS AT EVENT ON RWANDA GENOCIDE

Following are UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson's remarks at the event on the Rwandan Genocide, in New York today:

I am deeply honoured to have been invited to speak at this event at the United Nations and in this year that so sadly marks the twentieth anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda.

We all recall that our honoured guest today, Senator Roméo Dallaire, as Force Commander of the United Nations Mission in Rwanda, sounded the alarm about the frightening developments in the country. As we all know, he did not receive the response he needed and, above all, the response which the people of Rwanda needed, as we have just heard so movingly from Ambassador Mathilde Mukantabana [Ambassador of Rwanda to the United States].

Others, too, tried to alert and mobilize the international community. In 1993, a United Nations Special Rapporteur warned that all the precursors of genocide were visible in Rwanda. But, the United Nations system and the world were not able to stop the events unfolding on the ground. The consequences of failing to heed the warning signs were monumentally horrifying. We must never forget the collective failure to prevent the Rwandan genocide. Repeating the phrase "never again" is, in itself, a sign of continued failure.

Over the years, there have been several proposals to improve action by the United Nations in the face of grave crimes and violations of human rights. Some of these recommendations emerged from two landmark exercises in self-scrutiny: the 1999 Independent Inquiry on United Nations Action in Rwanda, and the United Nations Secretariat's 1999 review of the fall of Srebrenica.

One of the first areas in which we saw progress was on criminal accountability for atrocity crimes. The Security Council established the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda to prosecute alleged perpetrators. We also now have a permanent body, the International Criminal Court, as the centrepiece of the global system designed to deal with these horrendous crimes. Trials by domestic justice systems have also confirmed the primary duty of States to investigate and prosecute human rights abuses.

In September 2005, Member States endorsed the concept of Responsibility to Protect. I was very proud to be the President of the General Assembly at that time. In recent years we have also taken steps to strengthen genocide prevention, conflict resolution, the protection of civilians, the rule of law and human rights mechanisms. As a result, the United Nations and the international system are now better prepared to anticipate, prevent and, I would strongly hope, respond to crises.

Let me here acknowledge the role played by civil society in these efforts. Civil society plays a very important role, and I particularly want to commend here the Global Centre for R2P (responsibility to protect) for its work under the leadership of Dr. Simon Adams. But, I also want to acknowledge the courage and

commitment of many individuals, including United Nations staff in the field, who are providing early warning and supporting local and national efforts to protect human rights and stop the conflicts from escalating.

We need look no further than South Sudan today for an example of dedication and innovation in protecting people. In spite of a tragically great number of people being killed in the conflict, thousands of civilians are alive today because they have sought shelter inside United Nations facilities and have been provided with protection and assistance. Conditions there are trying and difficult, and the situation remains volatile. But, for the moment, people are largely safe and the United Nations is doing its utmost to see to their needs while promoting a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

However, let us admit that the lessons we have learned over the years have not always been followed by action. Since the tragedy in Rwanda, hundreds of thousands of people have died in mass atrocities and tens of millions have been displaced. Over the last few weeks alone, men, women and children have been slaughtered not only in South Sudan, but also in the Central African Republic and in the nightmare of Syria. The consequences for victims and their families over the past two decades have been staggering. The wider impact has been disastrous for peace and security as well as for the economic and social development of entire regions.

This is all the more so because of the deeply worrying and growing divisions along religious or ethnic lines that we are witnessing in many nations. The demonization — I use that word intentionally — of people of different faiths or ethnic belonging is one of the most toxic deeds of which human beings are capable. It undermines the fundamental principle that must lie at the heart of human interaction — and in fact, of the United Nations — the incontrovertible truth of every human being's equal value. When people are killed or violated in the name of religion, race or ethnicity, everybody's humanity is diminished. We are all brutalized — victims and perpetrators as well as bystanders.

From this sombre perspective, strengthening action to prevent human rights violations and abuses must be one of the most important issues that Member States and Secretariat alike must deal with in today's troubled world. It was with grave violations of human rights in mind that, in April 2012, the Secretary-General — Ban Ki-moon — established an Internal Review Panel to examine United Nations action in Sri Lanka during the final stages of that conflict, and to recommend ways to strengthen our response in similar situations. The Panel's report concluded that there had been a "systemic failure" of United Nations action. It also stated that some of the failings were close to those that had occurred 15 years earlier in Rwanda.

The Panel proposals for broad changes in the way the United Nations works on the ground generated a process of profound internal reflection. I was impressed myself by the seriousness with which the representatives of agencies and partners worked on this issue, in a sense of serious common pursuit. At the request of the Secretary-General, last year I led the work to design a plan to carry out the Panel's recommendations. The result is the "Rights up front" action plan. The Secretary-General and I have informed Member States about this effort in different contexts, different occasions. We have been encouraged by their positive reception of the plan. Now we are translating it into action.

In essence, the "Rights up front" action plan seeks to strengthen the United Nations' ability to prevent large-scale violations of human rights. The plan is framed by several guiding concepts:

- 1) The United Nations must respond early to the risk of mass atrocities so as to prevent their occurrence. We already have grave violations of human rights in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. We must stop them from turning into mass atrocities.
- 2) Prevention is a common responsibility of the entire United Nations system;
- 3) We can best meet this responsibility when we in the United Nations system realize the potential of our combined mandates and roles and when we operate as "one";
- 4) Sharing information with Member States and national actors about human right violations and

civilians in need of protection is a crucial means to gather political momentum for prevention. There has to be a credible cooperation in places, with countries, with the Governments where these events occur.

We have, during the last few weeks, activated some of these new mechanisms in response to the crises in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. Other aspects of the "Rights up front" approach will unfold in the months ahead. I remember that one of the horrible aspects of the Rwanda massacres was the role played by the radio station *Mille Collines*. We need the absolute contrast to the *Milles Collines*, and the Secretary-General has sent radio messages to the Central African Republic, and we are doing similarly through the Special Representative in South Sudan now.

If we are to prevent future tragedies, progress requires leadership and courage to speak out at every level — the kind of leadership and the kind of courage that Roméo Dallaire showed 20 years ago. It requires action by Governments to uphold their fundamental responsibilities — and by the international community when that does not happen.

As never before, the people of the world are measuring the performance of the United Nations by our efforts to protect human rights and civilian populations. We all hear the voices around the world about Syria, Central African Republic and South Sudan. "Rights up front" initiative should, in the spirit of the Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and everything we believe in, become a defining part of the culture of the United Nations. It should serve as a reminder that "We the Peoples" — in the name and the words of the Charter — and our faith in fundamental human rights are at the heart of this Organization.

I thank all those involved in organizing this event in sad memory of the huge tragedy in Rwanda 20 years ago. The United Nations will continue to work hand in hand with the people of Rwanda and with the peoples of the world towards lasting peace, development and human rights — towards a life of dignity for all.

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