

Calling for young peoples' voices to be harnessed to inform atrocity prevention efforts

Thank you Mr. President,

I'd like to begin by thanking Special Adviser Nderitu for her statement today. We also welcome Special Adviser Okoth-Obbo to his new role and wish him every success.

And let me also thank the Secretary-General for his timely report on advancing the Responsibility to Protect, with its focus on children and youth. It is a stark reminder of the challenge ahead, as well as the imperative for us to succeed. I will make three points today in this regard.

First, on the importance of the responsibility to protect and prevent mass atrocities. The world is facing alarming levels of violence and displacement, with children and youth disproportionately affected. Millions of children are suffering now and millions more face the risk of mass atrocity crimes. Their safety, protection, dignity and welfare are fundamental to humanity and the responsibility to protect provides a framework for helping them.

Young people are powerful agents of peace and security, and their voices must be heard and harnessed to inform atrocity prevention efforts. Youth-led movements are demanding change to shape the world they will inherit.

All States can contribute to the prevention of atrocities by identifying drivers, triggers and risks of atrocity crimes, institutionalizing early warning and prevention mechanisms, and by coming together to break this cycle of violence. As part of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we support the United Nations in its efforts to get parties to conflict to enter into concrete action plans.

Which takes me to my second point. We can no longer accept hesitation or inaction. Russia's unjustified and unprovoked attack on Ukraine has resulted in appalling and horrifying violations against children, including credible allegations of sexual violence by the Russian military. In Myanmar, abhorrent violence has been committed against children, with credible reports of the military regime killing and torturing children. In Syria, children born in the last decade have been subjected to terrible hunger, deprivation and violence. And in northern Ethiopia, the situation for women and girls remains deeply concerning and there are reports of the continued use of sexual violence in Western Tigray.

Those responsible for these atrocities must be held accountable whether through domestic prosecutions, the International Criminal Court or otherwise. The United Kingdom will do all it can to hold these criminals to account.

Third, the UK remains committed to atrocity prevention and response. To give a couple of examples:

Last November we launched the Call to Action to Ensure the Rights and Wellbeing of Children born of Sexual Violence in Conflict. This is a first step in galvanising international action to improve the situation for this vulnerable group. We call upon all states to endorse this Call to Action.

In addition, the United Kingdom is building international action on conflict related sexual violence in a way that supports survivors and strengthens existing structures. In particular, we are seeking to strengthen the international legal architecture; build global political will; and drive action and best practice on accountability for relevant crimes.

To conclude, there is a vocal minority that wishes to debunk the responsibility to protect by ignoring the unanimously agreed World Summit Outcome and by claiming falsely that it is a cover for illegal interventions. We must not let this distract us. Atrocity crimes are happening right now and there are risks of further crimes elsewhere. The responsibility to protect simply calls on us to seek to prevent and respond to these crimes. That is why the United Kingdom will call out atrocities and atrocity risks. We expect others to do so too and, in this vein, we would like future reports of the Secretary-General on R2P to cover specific country situations. How can we protect children and youth from atrocities if we only speak about them in the abstract? We need practical case-by-case actions and not a debate about theory.

Thank you, Mr President.