Statement by
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At the UN General Assembly plenary meeting on

‘Responsibility to Protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity’

27th June 2019
Madam President,

It is fitting that we are gathered here again, to discuss the ‘Responsibility to Protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity’- a timely topic amidst a number of worrisome global trends.

We reiterate that the duty to prevent and to halt genocide and mass atrocities lies primarily with the State; by committing to protect its own population against genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing; and secondly by participating in international efforts to encourage and assist other states in meeting these obligations.

Madam President,

The international community has a moral obligation to assist the state to fulfil its primary responsibility. From our own experience in 1994, it is morally justifiable that if the state manifestly fails to protect its citizens from mass atrocities and genocide, and all peaceful measures have failed, that the international community has the responsibility to intervene through coercive measures, including military means in order to halt acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

We cannot just sit and grapple around the theories and principles, when in reality; innocent citizens are being massacred by those who are supposed to protect them. In principle we must agree on this.

This should not however, legitimize the use of unilateral coercive or military means/measures. The responsibility of the international community as a whole should be encouraged to expand multilateral options in order to streamline the nature and the scope of such intervention. Architects of such intervention should also desist any attempt to concentrate their efforts at regime change but
rather more efforts should be put into saving lives and protecting innocent people.

**Madam President,**

It is of utmost importance that governments, regional organizations and the international community focus their attention in addressing the underlying causes of conflict. At the national level, our post conflict experience in Rwanda has shown that this would require the development of strong institutions that establish the foundations of good governance based on the rule of law, democratic principles, values and accountability.

**Madam President,**

Allow me to touch on a few points from the Secretary-Generals report on ‘*Lessons Learned from Prevention*’ which was released earlier this month.

To begin with, we support the emphasis on preventive action which is more desirable than responding only when crises have erupted. Preventive measures should be an integral part of national, regional, and international mechanisms to avoid atrocity crimes. At the national level, strengthening rule of law is an integral element of prevention. In addition to this, it is important for post-conflict states to invest in efforts aimed at sustaining peace such as justice and reconciliation measures.

Secondly, we endorse key recommendations made in the SGs report, including combatting hate speech in the digital space. My country is well aware of the devastating impact that hate speech can cause if left unchecked.
Madam President,

I’d like to conclude with some recommendations in three related areas:

1. **Accountability**: Holding those involved in atrocity crimes accountable is fundamental to maintaining a credible international system where States interact on an equal footing.

2. **Peacekeeping**: As a top Troop and Police Contributing country, Rwanda believes that peacekeeping can be a catalytic tool to stabilize countries where they are deployed, allowing for a conducive atmosphere for actors to establish peace. The Kigali Principles enhance peacekeeping missions by placing protection of civilians at the heart of peacekeeping missions. We encourage more Member States to endorse these principles.

3. **Women, peace and security**: It is unfortunate that sexual and gender-based violence is a constant feature in conflicts around the world. It is necessary for states to implement interventions that cater for victims of sexual and gender-based violence, and to hold those responsible to account.

I thank you for your kind attention.