Early Action: Prevention of Genocide; lessons learnt, the necessity of early warning mechanisms and the collective international responsibility

Remarks
At
The Panel Discussion on
“Let us Remember the Victims of the Genocide at this 11th Anniversary as we fight the Ideology of Genocide in Rwanda and Around the World”

by
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1. **Introduction**

Mr. Chairman,
Fellow panelists,
Excellencies, especially Ambassador Augustine Mahiga
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank my friend and dear brother Ambassador Stanislas Kamanzi for inviting me to make a few remarks on this Commemoration of the 11th Anniversary of the Rwanda Genocide. Nothing I say can match the power and passion of the testimonials you have just heard from the genocide survivors. The world owes to the Government of Rwanda a debt of gratitude for the positive steps it has taken to enhance reconstruction and reconciliation. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan said: Rwanda has much to show the world about confronting the legacy of the past, and is demonstrating that it is possible to reach beyond tragedy and rekindle hope.

The people of Rwanda have also demonstrated remarkable resilience and enormous dignity which have helped them in recovering from their national trauma. Moreover, there are a few who did their utmost to save lives and pledge their efforts and those of the international community, must be intensified so that genocide is never allowed to happen again. It is only by doing so that we honor the victims whom we remember today and contribute to those who might be saved from being victims tomorrow.

2. **Early Warnings and Preventive Measures**

The topic of my presentation today is: “Early Action: Prevention of Genocide; lessons learnt, the necessity of early warning mechanisms and the collective international responsibility”.

My views are influenced by my experience as Permanent Representative of Nigeria and a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council during the genocide and its immediate aftermath.

Eleven years later, we are still trying to cope with the consequences of the genocide in Rwanda. The United Nations is doing its utmost to help the people of Rwanda recover and reconcile from this tragic event. In Tanzania, a United Nations Criminal Tribunal has been created to investigate and pass judgment on the genocide committed against Rwandans based on perceived ethnic and political identifications. In addition, a UN System-wide Action Plan to Prevent Genocide has been put in place to convey the determination of the international community to:

a) prevent the armed conflicts that are the primary settings in which genocide occurs;

b) protect civilians, and especially minorities, who are the primary targets;

c) end impunity, through robust judicial systems, both national and international;

and finally, to

d) improve early warning, in order to recognize the signs of approaching genocide.

Concerning the last item, it is the view of the Secretary-General that one of the reasons for our failure in Rwanda was that beforehand we did not face the fact that genocide was a real possibility. And once it started, for too long, we as the international community, especially the UN Security Council could not bring ourselves to recognize it, or call it by its name. The Secretary-General then suggested that if we are serious about preventing or stopping genocide in future, we must not be held back by legalistic arguments about whether a particular atrocity meets the definition of genocide or not. We must recognize the signs of approaching or possible genocide, so that we can act in time to avert it. He further suggested that civil society groups can play a vital role because their reports are often the first to draw attention to an impending catastrophe although these tend to be ignored.
The United Nations human rights system, too, has a special responsibility. This Human Rights Commission, through the work of its Special Rapporteurs, independent experts and working groups, as well as the treaty bodies and the Office of the High Commissioner, should be well placed to sound the alarm. The challenge is to bring all this information together in a focused way, through better analysis and management of the information about complex situations, and thus be in a position to suggest appropriate actions.

The Secretary-General has also created a new post of Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, who will report through him to the Security Council and the General Assembly, as well as to the Human Rights Commission. This adviser's mandate will refer not only to genocide but also to mass murder and other large-scale human rights violations, such as ethnic cleansing. The functions include, firstly, to work closely with the High Commissioner on Human Rights to collect information on potential or existing situations or threats of genocide, and their links to international peace and security; secondly, to act as an early-warning mechanism to the Security Council and other parts of the UN system; an finally, to make recommendations to the Security Council on actions to be taken to prevent or halt genocide.

The Secretary-General has initiated a broad ranging discussion on prevention on armed conflict which has sensitized the United Nations Member States and is starting to yield consensus for specific preventive activities which involve the active United Nations system. They include:

a) new mechanisms for structural prevention (addressing the socio-economic conditions which could lead to conflict)
b) frequent use of good offices of the Secretary-General and his Special Representatives
c) special procedures in the field of human rights
d) the international tribunals (ICTY, ICTR, ICC, Sierra Leone and Cambodia Tribunals) have created a cumulative effect, with the standards of legal accountability being strengthened.
e) on the part of Africans, 2 important steps:
   - the rejection of coups and non-constitutional change of governments
   - monitoring good governance through the APRM (NEPAD/AU)

3. Conclusions:

   As I observed in March, 2004 during the 10th Anniversary Commemoration of the Rwandan genocide, in an addic titled “Beyond Apology: Looking Back an Looking Forward”

   Early warning is a necessary but not a sufficient tool for preventing serious conflicts, let alone genocide. Too often, even when there is abundant warning, we lack the political will to act. And in this regard, despite the wide-spread recognition that the killings and crimes committed in Darfur were acts of genocide which could only be stopped by the intervention of a strong third party force, only the African Union has stepped up to try to provide such a force. In general, the efforts of the international community remain inadequate to stop the tragic events and to fully address the humanitarian aspect of the affected population which, as of 1 January, 2005, reached a total of 2.4 million, including an estimated 1.84 million IDPs. The international community needs, therefore, to step up and provide prompt and adequate action to secure a durable and solid peace in western Darfur.

   Genocide is a crime against humanity which must not be tolerated or condoned. Humanity must respond promptly and decisively by taking action in its own defense and the most legitimate instrument for that purpose must be the United Nations, and specifically the Security Council. However, in the case of Rwanda, there was a glaring and tragic lack of political will to intervene to stop the genocide, especially on the part of the most powerful members of the United Nations Organizations. I wish to reiterate my view that we need to act now to ensure that the prospects for preventing another genocide are brighter than they have been up to now so that we would not continue to apologize while genocides continue in a tragic vicious circle.
Thank you for listening.