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United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide marks the first observance of the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime.

[New York, 09 December 2015] Today marks the first observance of the *International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime*. This day was established in September by the General Assembly following a recommendation by the Human Rights Council. Today also marks 67 years since the adoption in 1948 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which was the first international human rights treaty.

This international day has two important elements. It is about the past, and also about the future. Remembering the victims of genocide and the crimes committed in the past must contribute to our understanding of the present and guide our actions in the future. Acknowledging past genocides, addressing the consequences and fulfilling the rights of the victims not only dignifies the victims, it also represents our willingness not to let these crimes be repeated.

Genocide is not a crime contained within one culture or one region of the world. Genocide is, at its heart, an identity-based conflict and to prevent it means managing diversity constructively. This is a message for all nations. Our countries and regions are extremely diverse and it is in this diversity that their richness lies. We are a multitude of races, ethnicities and nationalities. We have different cultures; we practice different religions and have different beliefs. We must protect this diversity and use it to promote dialogue and understanding, not to spread hatred and intolerance.

This day represents both memory and action - memory as a step towards action. States not only have a legal duty to prevent and to punish genocide, they have also committed to a responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as well as their incitement. We also have a duty to remember – this is a social imperative. Let us remember. Let us not repeat past mistakes. Let us all act now to stop genocide from being part of our present or our future.

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