

72nd Anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime

Wednesday, 9 December 2020
11am to 1:00pm, New York, EST (Webex)

**Keynote speech by Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu
Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide**

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we mark the 72nd anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. It is also a day of reflection and remembrance of all victims of this crime. I want to show my deepest solidarity with the past as well as with the present victims who have been subjected to or are facing and paying the price of genocide.

The Secretary-General has said that the prevention of atrocity crimes is one of the Organization's most sacred callings. As Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, I am committed to do my utmost to continue providing early warning and recommendations on potential situations where atrocity crimes may become a concern, to prevent and halt them and protect those at risk from such atrocities.

Such crimes were and are a call for action - a call for more robust accountability mechanisms and reparation for victims, to ensure “never again” becomes a reality. Genocide has inflicted such great losses on humanity, let’s do everything in our capacity to save humankind from such an odious scourge and renew our resolve to protect populations at risk.

When genocide and related crimes are committed, the repercussions are felt across borders and may become a threat to international peace and security. The sharp increase in the number of people displaced and refugees around the globe from active conflict situations must end immediately as it has disastrous human and economic consequences that last for decades.

Disturbingly, there has been also an increase in extreme forms of ethnically and religiously motivated attacks in many countries around the world in the last years, for example in violent conflicts such as Ethiopia, Iraq, Myanmar, South Sudan and Syria. But equally intolerable are the serious human rights violations and abuses that different ethnic, religious or national groups are suffering around the world. Ascendant national populism ideologies and strategies are fueling racism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance around the world, in developing and developed democracies and in some countries in Europe and Latin America. Here in the United States, a wave of massive protests came to symbolize the systemic racism that harms millions of people of African descent around the globe.

We all know that genocide does not happen spontaneously. It is a process, and we all know the early warning signs very well. We can take early action to mitigate those risk factors which include gross human rights violations, structural discrimination against certain groups and intergroup tensions, and attacks against civilian populations. Many outbreaks of violence, conflict and atrocity crimes have roots in long-standing structural discrimination, deep economic inequalities and social exclusion, and a shrinking democratic and civic space.

It is our inaction in promptly responding to these warning signs that allows genocide and related atrocity crimes to happen as we speak. We must respond to those underlying issues through early and sustained engagement to prevent inter-group tensions from escalating; to counter and address hate speech that is so rampant today; prevent incitement to violence; deal with impunity and ensure accountability when these crimes are committed; build tolerant, inclusive and equitable societies. We need multilateralism more than ever before. We need robust regional and international cooperation and commitment to respond to this. We need to work together.

At today's event we will discuss the potential and the contributions that accountability and reparation can make to the prevention of atrocity crimes. Special Tribunals, the International Criminal Court and investigative bodies established by the Human Rights Council, the Security Council and the General Assembly have played a pivotal role as deterrent of further atrocities. The voices and courage of victims and their representatives in calling for justice have been a fundamental piece for the establishment of such mechanisms and their outcomes. In Iraq, a

coalition of civil society organizations is strongly advocating for accountability and reparations for victims of Da'esh to induce changes in the country towards full respect and protection of human rights for all.

While we all know the extent of how justice and accountability and reparation can break the recurrent cycles of atrocity crimes, most victims have yet to receive and benefit from accountability and reparation. This implementation gap not only affects victims directly but can have long-lasting effects even across generations and entire societies with legacies of mistrust and institutional weaknesses. We must ensure victims' right to truth, justice and reparation which will in turn assist in preventing future crimes.

I want to reiterate the call from my predecessors and the Secretary-General for the universal ratification of the Genocide Convention. Forty-two United Nations Member States have yet to accede or ratify the Convention. It is time to commit and act to eradicate the scourge of the crime of Genocide from our societies. I stand here to support you to do so. We owe this to the victims, survivors and their families.

The year 2020 has taught us important lessons. From the COVID-19 Pandemic that has magnified the visibility of the structural gaps and their impact across society, to lessons of hope that a just and inclusive world is possible.

We must pay specific attention to exclusions, to ways in which we create role models and work towards ending structural inequities. It is a fact that women are a powerful proven force for preventing genocide as many understand the situation first-hand, and possess the personal qualities to take action and find solutions. We need sustained actions at community, national and regional levels in documenting and shaping narratives, bridging generational divides, supporting and mentoring young people by building capacities to prevent genocide.

Let's echo the Secretary General's voice that "We cannot go back to the old normal of inequality, injustice (...) we must step towards a safer, more sustainable and equitable path. Now is the time to transform humankind's relationship with the natural world – and with each other". Let's stand up, join hands and ensure that "never again" will any person experience the terrible suffering of this egregious crime of Genocide.

