



Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide
Message to mark the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and
Punishment of the Crime of Genocide
9 December 2009

The ninth of December marks the day in 1948 when the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, an appreciation of the necessity that all states work together to prevent a recurrence of the Holocaust and other mass atrocities that preceded the Convention.

Throughout history, genocide has occurred in societies where different national, racial, ethnic or religious groups become involved in conflicts related to their identities. However, it is not mere identity differences that cause genocidal conflicts, as genocide is often preceded by serious discriminatory practices and other human rights violations against the targeted groups often reflecting an exclusionary ideology and eliminationist policies on the part of those in power.

Genocides may no longer take the shape and form of the Holocaust and will occur in times of peace where targeted groups are subject to long term practices and policies affecting their ability to exist as an identity group, and in the context of intra-state as well as inter-state conflicts. Authoritarian rule, absence of the rule of law, the proliferation of small arms and impunity contribute to the risk of genocide. Processes that should otherwise be uneventful, such as elections, can under such circumstances turn deadly.

Too often, the international community has failed to remain vigilant to the various manifestations of genocidal situations, such as “ethnic-cleansing” and targeting of civilian groups from which armed elements draw their membership. These situations are typically labeled as military and “counter-terrorism” strategies and highlight the ongoing necessity to understand genocide and therefore prevent the destruction of groups representing nationalities, races, ethnicities and religions.

The international community has a responsibility to prevent the risk of genocide. All States are called upon to implement the preventive aspects of the Convention and to support efforts to prevent massive and serious human rights violations that could lead to genocide. We must work to eradicate all kinds of discrimination and promote tolerance, respect for cultural and ethnic diversity, and discourage anything which tends to strengthen identity-based division, wherever it occurs.

Genocide is a crime against all of humankind and affects all of humanity. The choices we make on how and when we decide to respond to prevent genocide reflect our fundamental values, our commitment to protect civilian populations and human groups and the “never again” promises we have repeatedly made to victims of past genocides that they will be the last.