

**Statement by Under-Secretary-General - Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the
Prevention of Genocide *ad interim*, Ms. Virginia Gamba**

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Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for this opportunity to update the Human Rights Council in this interactive dialogue session. I do so in my capacity of Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide *ad interim*.

It is very clear to me that the Human Rights Council remains a critical inter-governmental organ to advance efforts for the prevention of genocide and other atrocity crimes. This goes from building resilience and strengthening prevention institutions to empowering protection initiatives to reacting to situations in which there are strong allegations that international crimes might have been committed. Short and simple, the Human Rights Council is indispensable in the discharge of the collective responsibility to prevent.

Excellencies,

The mandate of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide includes four key dimensions: collecting information, conducting early warning, making recommendations for prevention, and working with the rest of the United Nations to strengthen our collective capacity to prevent.

Our work therefore entails two clearly distinct yet connected priority areas. On the one hand, it requires conducting assessments on the basis of risk factors and indicators contained in the

United Nations Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes; elevating such assessments internally; conducting diplomacy aimed at prevention and speaking publicly when the Special Adviser feels that such early warning can be conducive to alerting the world of the need to act.

On the other hand, the work of the Special Adviser entails developing, supporting and sustaining initiatives and programs for prevention with a range of partners within and outside of the United Nations.

This includes also in support of prevention initiatives led by the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, with whom I work in a joint office and whose focus on conceptual development and consensus-building will continue being essential to enhance our collective capacity to prevent.

What the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide cannot do is to conduct investigations or to take any legal determination of whether the crime has been committed. This determination corresponds, only, to fair, impartial and independent courts of justice.

This is as true as the affirmation that absence of accountability constitutes in itself an indicator of risk, especially when venues for accountability for allegations of this crime are closed, be it because the crime has not been domesticated in a country's legal system, be it because the country has no access to international tribunals. Accountability is important for justice, but is also essential for prevention.

Also, today, more than 70 years since its adoption, a significant number of Member States have not ratified the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. I call on all of them to take this step, and on all those who have ratified this cornerstone of international law to continue advancing towards its full implementation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The mandate of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide was established more than twenty years ago. Also, all Member States unanimously adopted the responsibility to protect almost twenty years ago. However, the need for enhancing our collective capacity to prevent and for this mandate is today even more urgent than then.

The conflict in **Sudan** between the Sudan Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces continues to have a devastating effect on the civilian population as the war enters its third year. Thousands of civilians have been killed, and over 10.5 million people have been displaced. Both parties have committed serious human rights violations. Of specific concern to my mandate is the continued and targeted attacks against certain ethnic groups, particularly in Darfur and Kordofan regions. RSF and allied armed Arab militias continue to conduct ethnically motivated attacks against the Zaghawa, Masalit and Fur groups. The risk of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Sudan remains very high.

In **South Sudan**, growing tensions between the ruling coalition of President Salvar Kiir and his First Vice President Riek Machar, following violent clashes between South Sudan People's Defense Forces and the opposition militia known as the White Army is threatening to plunge the country into another cycle of a civil war. Hundreds of civilians have been killed, including with ethnically motivated attacks. The labelling of ethnic Nuer as "enemies" is dangerous and can instigate violence against the group. It is important for the parties to immediately cease hostilities and recommit themselves to the Revitalized Peace Agreement.

In the **Sahel region**, allegations of serious human rights violations allegedly committed by the national forces of Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali, remain of outmost concern. Reports of killings of members of the Fulani ethnic group by Burkina Faso's army and allied militias near the western town of Solenzo in March 2025 is emblematic of the serious concerns in the Sahel region. The situation demands urgent attention and action.

The situation in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** remains precarious, with persistent inter-communal clashes across the country, attacks of civilians by armed groups, especially in the eastern part of the country, where in recent months the escalating fighting between the Congolese armed forces and the M23 armed group has resulted in widespread civilian suffering. Violence is also being carried out along ethnic lines. Amid the ongoing fighting, hate speech and discrimination has surged.

The situation of the Rohingya people remains deeply troubling, marked by ongoing violence in **Myanmar's** civil conflict and worsening humanitarian conditions in refugee camps. In Cox's Bazar, **Bangladesh**, the humanitarian crisis in the refugee camps continues to deteriorate. Meanwhile, in neighboring countries, rising nationalism and anti-Muslim sentiment have further endangered Rohingya communities.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The **Middle East** is in a highly volatile situation, in which the most vulnerable continue to bear the most serious consequence of conflict. At a time of escalation of the ongoing hostilities between Israel and Iran, it is imperative that all possible steps are taken to open spaces for dialogue.

The horror in **Gaza** continues impacting our collective conscience. The terrible events of 7 October 2023 will never be forgotten, and the continued suffering of the families of the hostages must be met with all our possible sympathy and support.

Violence cannot be met with violence. Israel's sustained military campaign has since devastated Gaza, killing tens of thousands of civilians and destroying critical infrastructure. The scale of civilian suffering is staggering and unacceptable. The deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure, the widespread destruction, and the denial of humanitarian aid are of outmost concern. We also see very concerning patterns of increased anti-Semitism and Islamophobia worldwide being exacerbated by this conflict. I call for an immediate ceasefire, unconditional release of hostages and the immediate restoration of humanitarian access.

In **Syria**, I have welcomed the positive steps taken by the interim authorities on investigating violations and improving the country's human-rights record. Yet, I have raised my concerns at reports of summary executions allegedly committed on ethnic or religious grounds in the country. I urge the interim authorities to develop and promote assurance of co-existence among communities.

Excellencies,

On 11 July, the world will observe, for the first time, the International day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica. This was established by the General Assembly in consideration of the essentiality of remembering the past to ensure that it is not repeated. In the region of the Western Balkans, however, I am concerned over tensions along identity lines and persistence of denial of past crimes, including those committed in Srebrenica.

This year we also commemorated the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz extermination camp. Last year we commemorated the 30th anniversary of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. All three tragedies have been met with empathy, sadness, and support for victims and survivors. They have also been met with hatred, vitriol and denialism. Genocide denial is real, is detrimental to reconciliation, and constitutes a risk for prevention. It must be addressed and countered.

Hatred is expressed, very often, in the form of hate speech.

Today, hate speech – which has been a precursor for genocide in the past – is present in far too many situations, often targeting the most vulnerable.

We see it being directed against refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, accompanying them in transit territories and once they arrive at their destination.

We see being directed against indigenous peoples, whose presence in their ancestral lands continues being challenged and who continue being attacked in spite of existing constitutional and legal protections.

We see it against racial, ethnic, national and religious groups – the protected groups under the 1948 Convention.

In 2019, the UN Secretary-General launched the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech. As United Nations system-wide focal point on hate speech, since then my Office has continued to coordinate the UN Working Group on Hate Speech, allowing this forum to share information on good practices from the field, to develop policy and to promote peer-to-peer learning. We also continue to assist field entities in implementing the Strategy. Today, 27 UN field presences have context-specific plans of action on hate speech. Importantly, my Office

launched in February this year an online course to build UN staff capacities to identify hate speech and counter it based on the 13 commitments of the UN Strategy. We are currently also supporting the Alliance of Civilization in developing a similar course on Antisemitism. Just last week we commemorated the International Day for Countering Hate Speech, with a range of events at UN Headquarters bringing together many of our partners on addressing this issue.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the country level, we can leverage our technical strengths to support key constituencies in advancing prevention. My Office has led engagement with religious and traditional leaders and actors in the prevention of incitement to violence that could lead to atrocity crimes, and with women in communities as strong contributors to atrocity prevention. The Office has also worked with new and traditional media, as well as sport teams and athletes.

For this, education has continued being an area of priority. We have developed a number of modules on genocide prevention, and we will continue striving to build capacities for prevention.

Excellencies,

Advancing prevention also requires deepening our partnership with regional and subregional organizations. I would like to particularly commend those organizations which have taken the step to designate focal point responsibilities in the field of atrocity prevention or the responsibility to protect, including the African Union, with the recent appointment of a Special Envoy on the Prevention of Genocide and Other Mass Atrocities. As for the United Nations, such dedicated capacities represent a strong commitment to prevent and a willingness to build solid alliances for this purpose.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

As many of you know, I have served in this mandate, in an *ad interim* capacity, for seven months. It has been an honor. This mandate was established in 2004 out of the lessons learned from the collective failure to prevent the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and the Srebrenica genocide. The need for it now is even more important than when it was created.

In these 20 years, the Office of the Special Adviser has played an important early warning role. It has alerted the Secretary-General and contributed to internal deliberations; it has conducted briefings to the Security Council, to the Human Rights Council and to ECOSOC; it has presented concerns to regional and sub-regional organizations; it has advanced prevention activities with Member States and has supported civil society in operationalizing prevention.

This list is not exhaustive. It can never be. Our work continues. I encourage the Human Rights Council to continue prioritizing these efforts, including through the Universal Periodic Review. The Council could consider, for example, adding a standard question on efforts to prevent genocide in its ongoing dialogue with Member States, and continue encouraging universal ratification of the 1948 Convention. I believe that this could make an important contribution to our collective prevention efforts.

Excellencies,

The task of preventing genocide remains critical and urgent, and the moment to act is now.

Thank you very much.