United Nations

Remembrance of Rwanda – 21st anniversary of the Genocide

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Introductory Remarks:

- 21 years ago, the world stood by and watched as the horrors of genocide unfolded in Rwanda.
- This country with a history of ethnic tension started to unravel.
- The world was warned – UN peacekeeping General Romeo Dallaire tried to frantically alert the world to what was happening.
- But no one listened. Those who did hear, did nothing.
- In the 100 days that followed, more than 800,000 people (mostly Tutsi, moderate Hutus, Twa and others) were butchered by their fellow Rwandans.
- Many others were tortured. Beaten. Raped. Humiliated.

- Today, we mark a sombre anniversary of what happens when we allow our sense of humanity to falter, when we lose our sense of moral responsibility to our fellow human beings.

Learning from the Past:

- The atrocities of Rwanda put us all to shame. We in the United Nations, other governments, ordinary human beings.
- The philosopher George Santayana once said: “Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”
- But today, our role is not to simply remember the past. We must learn from it. We must move forward and to build on these experiences to create a more peaceful world.

Lessons Learned

- We in the United Nations have searched our own humanity. We have asked what we need to do to protect this humanity. We have made changes to how we approach conflict and how we deal with major crises.
- From these atrocities in the past, we have learned from our mistakes. We have made system-wide efforts to protect future generations.

- We have developed the Responsibility to Protect (2005).
• We have appointed **Special Advisers** – who are mandated to complement the core mission and work of the UN system as a whole. The Special Advisers are the “eyes and ears” of the Secretary General. The current SA for the Prevention of Genocide is Adama Dieng from Senegal.

• **The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda** In the direct aftermath of the Genocide in Rwanda. During the subsequent 20 years, the ICTR has been at the forefront of the global fight against impunity, prosecuting those considered most responsible for the gravest crimes committed in 1994. As the Tribunal approaches the end of its mandate, its legacy is laying the foundation for a new era in international criminal justice.

• **Rights Up Front** – Human Rights up Front (HRuF) was launched by the UN SG in 2013. Its aim is to ensure that the UN system takes early and effective action, as mandated by the Charter and the UN resolutions, to prevent or respond to large-scale violations of human rights or international humanitarian law.

• **UNSC Resolutions Against Sexual Violence** – The UN Security Council unanimously voted for Resolution 1820 in 2008. This describes rape as a tactic of war and a threat to international security.

The United Nations has done much to learn from the past. We are working – worldwide – to prevent genocide in the future.

**Our Collective Responsibility to promote a “Culture of Peace”**

• But it is not just the UN – or governments – or policymakers – who are responsible for building a culture of peace in our societies. We are all responsible. We all have a role to play in building a “Culture of Peace”.
• As the SG says in his message delivered on 7 April the day we formally remember the Rwandan Genocide: “I call on all to summon the courage to act before situations deteriorate based on our collective moral responsibility.”

• I know that some of you will be sitting there thinking, what can I do? My contribution would only be a drop in the ocean. Is it worth it?

• The answer is yes. We are all responsible to protect ourselves, our families, our neighbours, and our friends. We can all act in a way to prevent conflict.

• Here are some things we can and should do:
  o Don’t be a bystander: don’t look the other way when you see something is wrong.
  o Question unjust authority.
  o Speak out that “hate speech” is wrong.
  o Resist crowd psychology.
  o Show tolerance, respect, inter-cultural understanding, friendship.
  o Stand for something – take personal responsibility – be an “ordinary hero”
  o Value independence – even while you seek group acceptance.
  o “The past is alive in the present” – be aware of history – and think about how it will judge your actions.

Be the Change...

• If we wish to have a peaceful world, a world without genocide, we need to be a part of that change. The small things we do in our every day life will lead to better understanding and a peaceful environment
• Be kind – especially to strangers. As someone once said: “An enemy is someone whose story you have not yet heard”.
• Try to understand and accept other cultures, other religions, other ethnic groups.
• Offer the hand of friendship.
• Smile.
This year is the 70\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary of the UN. The UN was designed to seek peace in this world.

But we are \textit{all} responsible for building that peace. For the line between good and evil, as Solzhenitsyn said, lies at the centre of every human heart.

So I end with the powerful statement of Mahatma Gandhi about how we embody change for the good:

- “Be the change you want to see in the world.”

Thank you all.