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President: Ms. Espinosa Garcés. (Ecuador)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 168

The responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity

Report of the Secretary-General (A/73/898)

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with rule 70 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, I now give the floor to Ms. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Chef de Cabinet of the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, to make a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General.

Ms. Ribeiro Viotti: I welcome this formal debate of the General Assembly on the responsibility to protect. World leaders unanimously endorsed the responsibility to protect at the 2005 World Summit. That was a breakthrough following genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica a decade before. The imperative was clear: do more to protect people, and do so as a united international community.

Fourteen years later, atrocity crimes, regrettably, plague us still. Civilians, including women and children, are being killed, either deliberately or as victims of indiscriminate attacks. We are seeing rampant sexual violence, the denial of life-saving aid and the widespread and systematic targeting of specific ethnic groups, which could amount to acts of genocide. Just a few days ago, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported the highest

levels of forced displacement on record. We must do more — and we must do better — to reverse those negative trends.

None of those crimes is inevitable, or a by-product of conflict. Atrocity crimes are preventable and can never be justified. The prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity remains both a collective priority and an enduring challenge. It is important to build the consensus to mount desperately needed responses to ease suffering and end violence.

Yet we must also acknowledge that there are concerns that the principle could be used to take collective action for purposes other than those agreed in the World Summit Outcome document. There are also concerns about possible double standards and the selective use of the principle in the past. That is why open and frank exchanges such as this are necessary to dispel misconceptions and mistrust. We must forge mutual understanding and establish stronger support for the responsibility to protect as a key tool of protection and prevention. Let us remember three key elements.

First, the primary responsibility for protecting people rests with States. As the World Summit Outcome document states,

“Each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement ... We accept that

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responsibility and will act in accordance with it.”
(*resolution 60/1, para. 138*)

Secondly, the international community has a responsibility to support States in fulfilling that task. The World Summit Outcome document also states that

“The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, to help to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.” (*ibid., para. 139*)

The United Nations will continue to support Member States, especially those that might be facing fragility and stress, in strengthening institutions, defending human rights and fortifying social cohesion. That is an essential part of the Secretary-General’s prevention agenda. The Office of his Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Office on the Responsibility to Protect provide support in that regard.

We know that hate speech is often a precursor to atrocity crimes. Earlier this month, the Secretary-General launched an ambitious United Nations strategy and plan of action on hate speech to coordinate efforts across the United Nations system to identify, prevent and confront hate speech, using all the means in our power.

Thirdly, only when peaceful means have been exhausted and national authorities have manifestly failed to protect their populations might there be a responsibility for further action. The outcome document stipulates that any such action is to be carried out

“through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter including Chapter VII, on a case by case basis” (*ibid., para 139*).

Our overarching challenge is to uphold the principle while preventing its misuse. That means acting promptly, preventively and diplomatically before situations escalate and spiral out of control.

This year’s report of the Secretary-General (A/73/898) responds to the call by many Member States to identify lessons learned and positive examples of prevention. The report outlines a number of specific areas for concrete action, including addressing hate speech, strengthening protection of civilians mandates and nurturing the values of diversity and inclusion. The

report encourages initiatives to ensure that preventive efforts reach rural and marginalized areas. The report also reminds us of recent key lessons.

First, more needs to be done to translate early warning on atrocity crimes into decisive early action towards prevention.

Secondly, States have the primary responsibility to protect their populations and are well-placed to take the earliest action to prevent atrocity crimes.

Thirdly, more needs to be done to actively support initiatives aimed at reducing the risk of atrocity crimes, as well as in support of regional initiatives to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes.

At the country level, States can conduct national assessments of risk and resilience, which can be done as part of existing processes, such as the Universal Periodic Review, or as a stand-alone exercise. At the international level, States can actively support initiatives aimed at reducing the risk of atrocity crimes or responding to the evidence that such crimes might be imminent, including by strengthening partnerships with regional and subregional organizations. At the United Nations, the Secretary-General remains committed to the integration of prevention in agendas connected to our three pillars of work, namely, sustainable development, human rights and peace and security.

The General Assembly is the primary intergovernmental body for deliberation on the responsibility to protect. I reiterate the importance of Member States’ active participation in, and support for, the action of intergovernmental bodies to prevent atrocity crimes, including by making better use of the tools at their disposal. Together, let us deliver our collective responsibility to protect.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Chef de Cabinet for her statement on behalf of the Secretary-General and for the valuable information contained in the report under consideration today.

Mr. Hermann (Denmark): I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which consists of 51 Member States and the European Union, which this year is co- chaired by Qatar and Denmark.

Today marks the third formal debate at the General Assembly on the responsibility to protect. We welcome the support of States Members of the United Nations

for the inclusion of R2P on the formal agenda over the past two years. It also reflects the strong interest among Member States to share ideas and best practices about how we can collectively improve our ability to prevent genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

We believe that the General Assembly should continue this practice of open and frank debate, one repeatedly recommended by the Secretary-General. The most recent report of the Secretary-General on the responsibility to protect (A/73/898) takes stock of past practice and includes lessons learned for prevention. The Group welcomes the Secretary-General's recommendations for implementing and integrating the responsibility to protect as an important part of his broader strategy to prioritize prevention across all pillars of the work of the United Nations. We appreciate his sustained commitment to the implementation of the Human Rights Up Front initiative, thereby strengthening the United Nations system's ability to prevent the most serious human rights violations from happening, including those that possibly lead to the commission of atrocities. The Group commends the Secretary-General and his Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect for their leadership in advancing mass atrocity prevention. As this is the first time that Ms. Smith joins us in the General Assembly as Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, we would especially like to welcome her.

Since 2005, considerable progress has been achieved by Member States and other stakeholders, including civil society, in advancing atrocity prevention at the national, regional and international levels. International and domestic actors have successfully created frameworks to identify triggers and risks in order to develop indicators and early-warning mechanisms and institutionalize prevention mechanisms and partnerships.

As the Group of Friends, we have also worked towards conceptually linking R2P, where appropriate, to other related agendas, including peacekeeping, the protection of civilians, women and peace and security, sustaining peace and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Today's formal debate provides States with an important opportunity to share experiences, best practices and effective strategies for preventing atrocities. In that context, it is worth highlighting that almost one third of all Member States have appointed a national R2P

focal point and joined the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, the largest governmental network dedicated to preventing mass atrocities.

We are currently witnessing a divided Security Council, unable to take timely and decisive action with regard to multiple atrocity situations. At the same time, however, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council can play an important role in responding to atrocity crimes, as demonstrated by the establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011. That success is a direct result of concerted efforts by Member States committed to holding those responsible for atrocities accountable for their actions.

We recognize that the primary responsibility to protect lies with Member States. But, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations, the international community should be prepared to take collective action in a timely and decisive manner through the Security Council. We also commend the initiatives of Member States to bring the perpetrators of atrocity crimes to justice. Such crimes include war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide, as reflected in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Domestic accountability measures for atrocities are among the most effective ways to prevent recurrence. States have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute genocide, torture and other such crimes committed within their jurisdictions. National accountability efforts should be encouraged and supported, including through the strengthening of judicial cooperation among States. Fact-finding missions, investigative mechanisms, commissions of inquiry and hybrid and international courts and tribunals provide complementary avenues to enable accountability when and where options under domestic law prove insufficient.

While accountability is important to prevent recurrence, our ultimate objective is to prevent atrocity crimes from occurring in the first place. Prevention is at the core of each of the three pillars of R2P. Member States should identify complementary agendas where United Nations efforts can assist in preventing atrocities. For example, the interaction between the

Human Rights Council and the Security Council could be strengthened to better inform the latter about situations that may lead to atrocity crimes. Measures taken by States to prevent atrocity crimes can also contribute to national and regional peace and stability and reinforce national sovereignty.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a framework for global cooperation. It is a framework for achieving a better and more sustainable future, one that can provide and significantly contribute to atrocity prevention efforts. Eradicating poverty, providing development assistance and supporting capacity- and institution-building can address grievances and instability that may drive the perpetration of atrocity crimes. No country or region is immune to the risk factors for atrocity crimes. We are increasingly concerned about the rising levels of incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence in all its forms, as well as hate speech and xenophobia, which we see in many parts of the world. As Secretary-General António Guterres has said, hatred is a threat to everyone and is therefore a job for everyone.

We also strongly support an inclusive approach to preventing atrocity crimes, one that recognizes the critical role women play in early warning and in promoting peacebuilding, peacekeeping, capacity-building and more cohesive, inclusive and resilient societies. We should take concrete steps to end all forms of gender-based discrimination and violence and work to empower women as agents of change, including by ensuring that all women have access to quality education and meaningful participation in the decision-making processes affecting their lives. We recognize the important role national and international civil society organizations play in supporting the advancement and the implementation of R2P. In particular, we would like to thank the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect for its invaluable work as the secretariat of the Group of Friends, both in New York and in Geneva.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of forcibly displaced people as a result of persecution, conflict and atrocities is at its highest level since the end of the Second World War — 70.8 million in 2018 — and the number continues to increase. That number demonstrates why upholding the responsibility to protect needs to be at the very heart of our shared mission to advance peace and security. During today's formal debate, we look forward

to hearing from Member States on best practices to end the current climate of impunity and inaction with regard to the heightened risk of atrocity crimes across the globe. Let today's debate be a reminder of the importance of continuing that exchange of information and the need to strengthen our individual and collective prevention and accountability response.

Let me conclude by saying that the era of indifference is over, but the time of consistent and timely action to prevent and protect has not yet begun. As the Secretary-General notes repeatedly in his report, more needs to be done. Let us speed the day.

Mr. Vale de Almeida (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its 28 member States. The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

At the World Summit 14 years ago, all States Members of the United Nations endorsed the principle of a shared responsibility to protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Since 2005, the European Union has been a staunch supporter of the responsibility to protect. We warmly welcome the inclusion of a dedicated debate on this issue in the formal agenda of the General Assembly again this year. We believe that it reflects the topic's importance and allows us to have a full exchange on the current state of affairs in atrocity prevention. We thank Secretary-General António Guterres for his report entitled "Responsibility to protect: lessons learned for prevention" (A/73/898).

There have been important developments since last year's debate. We warmly welcome the appointment of Ms. Karen Smith as the new Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, as well as the active role that she has played since taking up her position. We thank Mr. Adama Dieng, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, for his leadership in the development of the United Nations strategy and plan of action on hate speech, which was launched very recently.

In his report on the responsibility to protect, the Secretary-General rightly concludes that, while States have the primary responsibility to protect their populations, more needs to be done at the international level. We must make greater efforts to reduce the risk of atrocity crimes and respond promptly to evidence of

their imminent commission. International and regional organizations have a unique role to play in preventing and responding to mass atrocities. As highlighted in the Secretary-General's report, the European Union recently co-hosted, with the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, the ninth annual meeting of the Global Network of Responsibility to Protect Focal Points. This year's meeting had an explicit focus on the specific role that regional organizations can play in the promotion and implementation of the responsibility to protect. It brought together a cross-regional group of senior Government officials from more than 45 countries, as well as representatives of the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the African Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe.

As the first regional organization to formally appoint a responsibility to protect focal point, the European Union warmly welcomes the recent appointment of a focal point for the Organization of American States. We strongly encourage other regional organizations, as well as Member States, to do exactly the same, namely, appoint focal points that will follow the issue of the responsibility to protect as closely as possible.

It is also vital that the Security Council use available tools in the exercise of its responsibility to protect populations from mass atrocities. We welcome the Arria Formula meeting on raising the effectiveness of atrocity crimes prevention convened by Poland — a State member of the European Union — last December. Participants at the meeting highlighted some practical actions on atrocity prevention that could be taken by the Security Council. In that respect, we acknowledge and welcome the initiatives aimed at ensuring that the Security Council is able to effectively prevent or put an end to situations involving the commission of mass atrocities, including the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group code of conduct, and the initiative on the suspension of the veto in cases of mass atrocities presented by France and Mexico.

The Human Rights Council, human rights treaty bodies at large and mechanisms involved must be further mobilized in the prevention of atrocities. Their interaction with the Security Council could be strengthened to better inform the latter about situations that may lead to atrocity crimes. The Human Rights Up Front initiative also has an important role to play in enhancing system-wide capacity to prevent mass violations of human rights and international

humanitarian law. A robust human rights culture within the United Nations system is crucial to fulfilling our responsibility to protect.

The European Union supports the operationalization of the concept of the responsibility to protect through an integrated approach, including diplomatic support at the bilateral and multilateral levels, transitional justice and accountability, human rights, conflict prevention and mediation, as well as development assistance and humanitarian aid. Last year we launched a new EU toolkit on the responsibility to protect and atrocity prevention—an instrument that offers practical guidance on atrocity prevention to our delegations, missions and operations. We are certainly willing and able to share that toolkit with the international community.

We must continue to promote accountability for atrocity crimes. The European Union and its member States remain committed to the efforts at the national and international levels to end impunity for the crime of genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and war crimes. We reiterate our firm support to the international criminal justice system and its institutions. International courts and hybrid tribunals can play an important role where States are unwilling or genuinely unable to do so. We actively promote the universality of the Rome Statute and, through our support for the International Criminal Court, we foster capacities for accountability and reconciliation, which we all know are key elements for non-recurrence. We encourage the Security Council to consider carefully the possibility offered by the Rome Statute to refer situations to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

The responsibility to protect is not only about international responses to domestic crises, but very much also about domestic prevention of home-grown risks. The European Union's framework decision on combating racism and xenophobia criminalizes public incitement to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin. As defined in the framework decision, hate speech is a criminal offence, including when it occurs online. The European Union, its member States, social media companies and other platforms share a collective responsibility to ensure that the Internet does not become a safe haven for incitement to violence and hatred, while at the same time promoting and facilitating freedom of expression online.

In conclusion, there are obviously no easy solutions. But the Secretary-General's report rightly calls for decisive early action towards prevention in order to close the gap between our stated commitment to the responsibility to protect and the daily experience of vulnerable populations around the world. To close that gap, we must ensure that the responsibility to protect is operationalized and implemented in practice. The European Union is committed to working with all stakeholders to help make that a reality. We once again welcome this debate and encourage further dialogue in the General Assembly as we continue to work with our international partners to fulfil the responsibility to protect that we embraced back in 2005.

Mr. Sandoval Mendiola (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of France and my own country, Mexico, in our capacity as promoters of the French-Mexican initiative on the suspension of the veto in cases of mass atrocities.

States have the primary responsibility to protect their peoples. Protecting the population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity is not a matter of political will, but an obligation under international law. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General (A/73/898), which reaffirms the relevance of this agenda for his broader strategy that prioritizes prevention throughout the United Nations system.

Whereas mass atrocities appear in news headlines, prevention does not. We warmly welcome the appointment of Ms. Karen Smith as Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, as well as the appointment of Mr. Adama Dieng, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, as the focal point for the implementation of the United Nations strategy and plan of action on hate speech.

Effective prevention includes a set of tools that interact in specific contexts. We must develop a comprehensive and coherent alignment among the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, promoting peacekeeping operations and the Action for Peacekeeping initiative, protecting civilians and promoting sustainable peace and human rights. Without labelling them as preventive measures, States already implement programmes and policies that address the root causes of conflict and, as a result, atrocity crimes are prevented. Reducing inequalities, combating

discrimination and promoting inclusive institutions play an important role in ensuring that our societies never have to face serious violations.

We must also support regional initiatives to prevent atrocity crimes, including the strengthening of partnerships with regional and subregional organizations. In that regard, the partnership among the United Nations, the African Union and the European Union, as well as links with subregional organizations, such as the Economic Community of West African States and the Latin American Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention, should be enhanced, thereby promoting the exchange of good practices.

In the face of sharp challenges to multilateralism, we must intensify our efforts to ensure that the United Nations fulfils its purposes. It is insufficient to receive early warnings of imminent crises if they are not translated into responses.

Our responses to extreme human suffering have been far from adequate. That is why, in 2014, our Governments presented the Franco-Mexican initiative to suspend the use of the veto in the Security Council as a concrete way to operationalize the responsibility to protect (R2P). We are convinced that the veto is not a privilege but an international responsibility. Our initiative seeks a voluntary and collective commitment by the five permanent members of the Council not to use the veto in cases of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in order to enable the Security Council to take effective action. At the moment, the initiative is already supported by 101 States. We take this opportunity to urge all States that have not yet done so, particularly the other permanent members of the Security Council, to join the initiative. In the face of mass atrocities, political agendas are simply unjustifiable.

France and Mexico firmly believe that we should make better use of existing mechanisms and institutions, such as the Universal Periodic Review, to strengthen our national preventive tools. The Human Rights Council must work hand in hand with the Security Council to transmit early warnings, enable timely action and empower the peacebuilding architecture.

For some, R2P has become synonymous with vigorous disagreements. To overcome them, it is fitting that we hold an open discussion in the same General Assembly, which gave rise to the concept. Another opportunity to continue the discussions will arise at the

Legal Advisers meeting to take place during the Sixth Committee's International Law Week. Our priority should be to operationalize the political commitments that underpin the responsibility to protect. An open dialogue such as this is an opportunity that should be seized by all Member States.

Non-intervention does not mean indifference, and neither is it a blank cheque for impunity. No amount of Security Council action can replace the inherent obligation of States to protect their populations. Our two countries speak with one voice in this debate because we are committed to a rules-based international order that promotes stability and human rights. The loss of human life is too high a cost to pay for a lack of consensus. This is at the heart of our joint initiative — that full respect for the Charter of the United Nations and full respect for human life cannot be mutually exclusive.

Ms. Ioannou (Cyprus), Vice-President, took the Chair.

To avoid the repetition of mass atrocities, we must ensure accountability for perpetrators of crimes and justice for the victims. We continue to urge all States to support and cooperate with missions and commissions of inquiry dealing with mass atrocity crimes, as well as with instruments of international criminal justice. In that regard, we reiterate our call for all States to accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and to cooperate with the Court. The international community must continue to prevent and combat sexual and gender-based violence as a tactic of war.

We deliver this joint Mexican-French statement today as an example of the cooperation that can exist between permanent members of the Security Council and all other Member States that recognize the value of our common institutions. No responsibility is above the responsibility to protect the peoples of our world. We owe it to ourselves, our peoples and our United Nations to live up to our responsibilities.

Ms. Juul (Norway): I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden and my own country, Norway.

The five Nordic countries continue to be firmly committed to the responsibility to protect (R2P). We welcome the inclusion of R2P as a formal agenda item of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session. This marks the third time we held this important discussion

in a formal setting. We believe the General Assembly should continue this practice of open and frank debate, as repeatedly recommended by the Secretary-General.

As this is the first time that Ms. Karen Smith joins us in the General Assembly as the Special Adviser on R2P, we would like to extend her a special welcome. We commend her work and that of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Ms. Adama Dieng.

The prevention of atrocity crimes remains at the core of the three pillars of the responsibility to protect. We welcome the Secretary-General's approach to make the responsibility to protect an important part of his broader strategy to prioritize prevention across all pillars of the Organization's work. We believe that mediation and increasing mediation capacity at the local, regional and international levels, as well as at the United Nations, is an important part of working towards more effective conflict prevention.

It is also crucial to continue linking R2P to other related agendas, including peacekeeping, the protection of civilians, women and peace and security, sustaining peace and the Sustainable Development Goals. With regard to the prevention of atrocity crimes, we emphasize the role of women and youth, as they are crucial for early warning and peacebuilding, as well as the creation of more inclusive societies. We should take concrete steps to end all forms of discrimination on the basis of gender and to empower women, including by ensuring that all girls can go to school.

The growing number of attacks against civilians, hospitals, schools and humanitarian workers is unacceptable. The Nordic countries call on all Member States to uphold all their obligations under international law, including international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international refugee law, at a time when a divided Security Council is unable to take needed action in many serious conflict situations.

While the Security Council is not able to act in many situations relating to international accountability, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council play an important role in responding to atrocity crimes. That was demonstrated by the establishment of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the independent

investigative mechanism for Myanmar. Those successes are the direct result of the concerted efforts of Member States committed to holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. Ensuring accountability remains one of the most effective ways to prevent the recurrence of mass atrocity crimes.

We recall that States have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute international crimes committed within their jurisdictions. National accountability efforts should be encouraged and supported. The Nordic Governments also strongly support the International Criminal Court (ICC) as the most important institutional development in the battle to end impunity for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is well justified to discuss the role of the ICC during this meeting as well, since support for the activities of the ICC may also have a deterrent effect.

Upholding our collective responsibility to protect must remain at the centre of our commitment to an international rules-based order. The multilateral system we have all worked so hard to create deserves our unwavering support and respect. We must urgently increase the speed at which we move towards a prevention-centred analysis and a culture of earlier preventive action when signs of atrocity crimes are identified. There are no excuses for inaction.

Ms. Kabua (Marshal Islands): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 12 members of the Pacific small island developing States. I align this statement with the statement to be delivered on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum.

I would like to thank the President for this opportunity to address Member States. We acknowledge the inclusion of this important topic in the formal agenda of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session.

The protection of people all over the world irrespective of creed, ethnicity and affiliation is at the heart of the United Nations and amply embodied in the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations — We the Peoples. Earlier this year, a ceremony was held in this very Hall to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. It was a stark reminder of what happens when we, as the international community, fail to act.

As we meet today, there are still many around the world suffering as a result of conflicts. They have

suffered either directly or indirectly from deliberate and indiscriminate attacks, experienced the loss of livelihoods, been forced to flee their homes, suffered sexual abuse, or been denied access to humanitarian aid and proper medical care.

The United Nations remains the most uniquely placed multilateral organization for establishing norms and assisting in and enforcing the protection of civilians. The outcome of the 2005 World Summit on the responsibility to protect (R2P) empowers the United Nations to play that leading role on R2P. Earlier this year, in his address to the Security Council at the debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, the Secretary-General highlighted that “while the normative framework has been strengthened, compliance has deteriorated” (*S/PV.8534*, p. 2). The Secretary-General’s report in June on the responsibility to protect highlights that gaps continue to exist between our stated commitment and the reality on the ground (*A/73/898*). We therefore urge action to address those gaps. Respect for international conventions, awareness and accountability should be the foundation of R2P.

We acknowledge the link between the Human Rights Council and the Security Council and encourage the further strengthening of such links. Our institutions and mechanisms based in Geneva can play an important role in preventing mass atrocity crimes. We are encouraged that one of our own from the region currently sits on the Human Rights Council, thereby demonstrating the importance we place on such bodies. The unique experiences and challenges within our Pacific Islands region provide us with a heightened sensitivity towards ensuring that the voices of the most vulnerable are not overlooked.

The Pacific has in place a number of regional security cooperation arrangements, the most recent being the Boe Declaration, which was adopted by our Pacific leaders in Nauru in September 2018. The Boe Declaration recognizes that prevention and collective action is critical for the protection of our peoples. The Boe Declaration goes even further in recognizing the multidimensional nature of security, cutting across a number of areas, including the environment. The existence of our regional security cooperation arrangements is a testament to our commitment as a region.

Mr. Pildegovičs (Latvia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of Estonia, Lithuania and my own

country, Latvia. We align ourselves with the statement made by the Head of Delegation of the European Union.

We welcome this annual General Assembly debate on the responsibility to protect (R2P). The implementation of the responsibility to protect should be a standing item on the General Assembly agenda, as it provides an opportunity to take stock and hold a dialogue among the States Members of the United Nations on the topic.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have supported the principle of the responsibility to protect since its adoption at the 2005 World Summit, and we reaffirm our commitment today. Protecting populations from acts of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity must be a global priority. However, the responsibility to protect should not be perceived as an international issue alone. Sovereignty entails responsibility; it is the primary responsibility of individual States to protect all populations within their territory from atrocity crimes.

We thank the Secretary-General for his latest report on the responsibility to protect, which focuses on lessons learned for prevention (A/73/898). The Baltic States — staunch supporters of international law, democracy and human rights — fully support the Secretary-General for placing the issue of prevention at the centre of the United Nations agenda. Regrettably, the report reaffirms the negative trends in the implementation of the responsibility — the growing gap between our words of commitment and actual protection of populations against atrocities.

We are extremely concerned about deliberate attacks against civilians, civilian infrastructure, journalists, humanitarian and medical personnel and infrastructure during armed conflict. The illegal proliferation of arms and weapons, easily accessible to atrocity perpetrators, also has a negative impact on the protection of civilians. We continue to advocate the protection of populations against atrocities and express our deep concern at attempts to downgrade atrocities committed by former totalitarian regimes — memories that are still alive in our countries.

We, as individual Member States and as the international community, must do our utmost to translate our words of commitment into practice and to improve the effectiveness of atrocity-crimes prevention. Greater focus and energy should be put into prevention rather than response, before atrocities are carried out. Once

the point of acute violence has been reached, options to respond to crises are quite limited. The political will to act swiftly is essential.

Despite certain setbacks, we recognize the progress achieved in operationalizing the R2P concept, which can save lives. We note the successful measures taken to strengthen resilience to atrocity crimes at the national and regional levels. The report of the Secretary-General, as with all 10 previous reports on the responsibility to protect, provides useful practical policy recommendations based on best practices and lessons learned from past situations.

With the help of available prevention tools we must better translate early-warning signs into timely preventive action to avoid repeating the tragic mistakes of the past. That can be done by developing and integrating early warning in national policies and by addressing the root causes of risks, with, inter alia, education, training and building resilience to atrocity crimes.

For us, human rights, good governance and the rule of law are central to prevention. With strong national institutions, transparent and accountable political leadership and respect for the rule of law, efforts to prevent atrocity crimes can be more effective. Atrocity prevention is deeply linked to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 16, on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies.

The protection of human rights is imperative to the prevention of conflicts. Furthermore, systematic human rights violations are often important warning signs of political crises. Regional and international human rights mechanisms and their recommendations, as well as the Human Rights Council, can provide useful support and guidance to Member States. In addition, civil society, media and journalists positively contribute to developing early-warning and response systems by raising public awareness about human rights violations and crimes against humanity.

We appreciate the ongoing efforts to improve the system-wide capacity of the United Nations to prevent and respond to serious and systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. In that regard, we are pleased that the Secretary-General remains committed to the Human Rights Up Front initiative, which can help ring the alarm bell before abuses escalate into atrocity crimes.

We welcome the recent appointment of Ms. Karen Smith as the new Special Adviser on R2P. We wish her success in advancing the R2P agenda across the United Nations system and with Member States. We also appreciate the dedicated work of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng.

The early action and response of the United Nations is critical to R2P implementation. Operationalizing the R2P concept through the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations is among the most direct ways by which organizations can prevent atrocity crimes. We applaud the innovative ways of the United Nations political and technical support to civil society organizations in enhancing prevention efforts at the grass-roots level.

The Security Council, which has a special responsibility to take timely and decisive action in situations of imminent risk of atrocity crimes, should use all available tools to prevent such crimes, including United Nations early-warning capacities and mechanisms. In order to ensure a more effective Security Council response to the outbreak of brutality against innocent people, we strongly support both mutually reinforcing initiatives — the French-Mexican proposal to voluntarily limit the use of the veto at the Security Council in situations involving mass atrocity crimes and the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. We are encouraged by the major support for those important initiatives.

Finally, we wish to express our deep concern about impunity for mass atrocity crimes. Accountability must be ensured through thorough national investigations and prosecutions of persons responsible for the most serious crimes. Furthermore, independent international accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court, and better judicial cooperation between States and the Court are essential elements in delivering justice. We concur with the Secretary-General that atrocity crimes are preventable. Swift and concerted action for the responsibility to protect is the answer to how we can do so. We call on all Member States to uphold that important political commitment and stand against inaction and impunity regarding mass atrocity crimes.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Australia was proud to partner with Ghana to propose last year's important debate on the responsibility to protect (R2P), the first in the

General Assembly for a decade. More than 100 States from every region participated. Support for the R2P principle and its implementation was overwhelming, as was the desire for ongoing dialogue in the Assembly on how we can better protect populations from mass atrocities. Such a response was fitting. After all, when our leaders agreed the R2P principle, in 2005, they envisaged a leading role for the Assembly. We also appreciated the opportunity to hear those who have questions or harbour misgivings. Let me reaffirm that the R2P principle is not a stalking horse for other agendas or an attempt to reinterpret the Charter of the United Nations. It is about reinforcing the need to work collectively in line with the Charter to protect populations from mass atrocities.

Australia agrees with the Secretary-General that regional organizations are essential to operationalizing R2P. Pacific Islands Forum leaders—via the declarations made in Biketawa in 2000 and Boe in 2018—have long recognized our collective vulnerability and the need to address such challenges at the regional level, as the Permanent Representative of the Marshall Islands just reminded us.

The Biketawa Declaration served as the foundation for regional assistance efforts, including a successful mission to Solomon Islands—the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands—which ended in 2017, a meaningful example of pillar 2 in action. The 2018 Boe Declaration reaffirms the critical importance of a rules-based international order, with the Charter at its heart. It commits to strengthening regional security and stability, including by identifying and addressing emerging security challenges and improving early-warning mechanisms.

Regional organizations can learn much from each other in their respective atrocity prevention efforts. That is why Australia supports innovative regional initiatives such as the Asia Pacific Partnership for Atrocity Prevention. Australia will host the first regional meeting of Asia-Pacific R2P focal points later this year. Such collaboration is bolstered by global forums such the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, in which Australia is active. With 61 focal points, the Network shares ideas and policies and builds capacity for implementing R2P.

Australia thanks the Secretary-General's Chef de Cabinet for the insightful remarks today and for this year's report of the Secretary-General on R2P

(A/73/898). We pay tribute to the efforts of the Special Advisers for the Prevention of Genocide and R2P, Mr. Adama Dieng and Ms. Karen Smith. We agree that the United Nations principal organs and its Member States have a critical role in implementing R2P. But it is important also to evaluate the role of the Secretariat.

Recent independent reviews have highlighted the critical importance of United Nations officials speaking for the Organization as a whole in situations of mass atrocities. It is also essential that the Secretariat ensure that reporting from the field provides an accurate and complete picture of developments on the ground. In that regard, we wholeheartedly support the Secretary-General's ongoing reform agenda.

The Charter endows the Security Council with unique powers. With such powers comes special responsibilities. That is why we joined 118 others to support the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's code of conduct, which is a commitment to refrain from vetoing Security Council action in cases of mass atrocities. We also encourage all States, but especially current and prospective Security Council members, to join Australia and 100 other States in supporting the France-Mexico initiative on veto restraint. In instances where a permanent member blocks Council action in cases of mass atrocities or atrocity risk, we believe that we should explore possible ways to use the Assembly for further dialogue.

Mr. Guillermet-Fernandez (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour to stand at this rostrum under the presidency of Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés.

My country aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

Allow me, first of all, to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this important meeting. Costa Rica was pleased to see the responsibility to protect included on the agenda of the General Assembly at its previous sessions, thereby giving us repeated opportunities to discuss this issue. This is especially pertinent given the turbulent times we are currently experiencing at the global level, with millions of people being displaced due to violence, persecution and oppression.

We bear witness to terrible crimes on a daily basis: sexual violence and hunger are used as weapons of war, specific ethnic groups are the targets of genocide and children do not have access to education or the most basic services because their schools and medical centres have been unscrupulously destroyed. My country reiterates its legal, political and, above all moral commitment to achieving the full implementation of this principle and its three pillars outlined in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document, so as to increase the capacity of the Organization and States in matters of prevention, early warning and effective and rapid response.

In exercising their sovereignty, States have the primary obligation to protect their populations. For that reason, it is necessary to establish comprehensive measures by designing policies that foster equitable and inclusive societies that promote non-discrimination and the empowerment of women, where hate speech is condemned and tolerance is encouraged. That is how strategies should be developed — in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — in order to promote the integral development of our populations while avoiding factors that lead to conflict, such as exclusion and discrimination.

It is also essential to strengthen institutions, the rule of law, access to justice and existing capacities. In that regard, it is crucial that the assistance provided by States and regional and international organizations, as well as civil society organizations, be adapted to fit national priorities and reflect society as a whole, taking into account the existing structures on a case-by-case basis.

Likewise, in order to prevent the reoccurrence of atrocities, it is imperative to deal with post-conflict national conciliation processes through transitional justice, the preservation of memory and the reconstruction of social peace. It is therefore necessary to put an end to impunity and bring those responsible to justice, while refraining from granting immunity and amnesty to the perpetrators of such crimes. My country strongly advocates that eliminating impunity and ensuring accountability are just as important as preventive measures themselves.

In the same vein, Costa Rica reiterates its full support for the International Criminal Court. We call on those States that have not yet done so to join the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and its amendments, and call on those of us who are

States parties to comply with the Court's decisions in accordance with our international obligations.

Similarly, we believe that collective international action to prevent mass atrocities must be based on impartial information collected in such a way that ensures it is not subject to political pressure. For that reason, Costa Rica supports initiatives such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, as well as the Human Rights Up Front initiative.

The principle of the responsibility to protect was conceptualized in line with States' obligations — under international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law — to not commit systematic human rights violations against the civilian population. Those obligations must therefore be incorporated into the internal legal frameworks of States. Likewise, in order to strengthen internal early-warning mechanisms and others for the prevention of atrocities, coordination between the principal organs of the United Nations and the mechanisms established under resolutions of the Security Council must be strengthened.

It is of concern to note that, as a consequence of political divisions and geopolitical interests, the principal organs of the United Nations have failed to take the necessary and effective actions to prevent or halt attacks against the civilian population. In that regard, the members of the Security Council, whether permanent or elected, must honour the Charter of the United Nations and comply with its mandate to ensure prompt and effective action, in line with its primary responsibility to maintain international peace and security. We therefore call on the members of the Security Council to support the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group code of conduct against genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. We also urge the permanent members to refrain from using the veto in such cases, in line with the code of conduct.

We also reaffirm the decisive and relevant role that the Human Rights Council, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the treaty bodies must play in those aspects. We support the development of initiatives such as the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, which aim to tackle risk factors and protect populations. Similarly, we highlight

the efforts undertaken by the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect and express our strong support for their work.

My country considers prevention and early action to be the most effective ways of protecting vulnerable populations and, in line with that position, we are making various efforts to that end. They include the holding of a workshop in May, in collaboration with the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, on strategies against discrimination based on an approach geared towards the prevention of mass atrocities and focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. Its aim was to provide theoretical tools and prevention practices aimed at State police and security forces, as well as prison authorities.

Costa Rica is also an active participant in several initiatives with the aim of furthering the implementation of the responsibility to protect, such as the Latin American Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention, and Global Action against Mass Atrocity Crimes. And, together with Denmark, Ghana and Australia, we are part of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points. Costa Rica welcomes the fact that, to date, 61 members — in addition to the European Union and the Organization of American States — have appointed a focal point for the responsibility to protect, thereby strengthening their preventive capacities. We urge those States that have not yet done so to nominate their focal point and join the Global Network. At its latest meeting, the Global Network called to integrate the implementation of R2P within the prevention agendas in both New York and Geneva. My country fully supports that.

I would like to thank the President once again for having convened this important debate, which we hope will help to encourage a more in-depth reflection on this topic, as well as inspire greater progress and the strengthening of the implementation of this principle. This is all the more relevant at a time when the implementation of the responsibility to protect and the multilateral commitments that accompany it are becoming increasingly necessary.

Mr. Leal Matta (Guatemala) (*spoke in Spanish*): We welcome the convening of this plenary meeting so that we can address an issue to which Guatemala attaches great importance, that is, the responsibility to protect. This meeting is taking place against a controversial international backdrop, which makes it necessary to

return to the standard of international security and human rights conceived at the 2005 World Summit, with the aim of preventing the most atrocious war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

We take note of the report (A/73/898) of the Secretary-General entitled “The responsibility to protect: lessons learned for prevention”. We would also like to make several additional remarks in that connection.

The General Assembly has recognized that every State, as a society organized on the basis of laws, bears the primary responsibility for protecting its population and preventing atrocities such as those we have seen in the past. That underscores the genesis and the relevance of the responsibility to protect in terms of its implementation today. It is a principle that is rooted in the fundamental purpose of the Charter of the United Nations, which is to prevent the scourge of war and to promote peace among peoples and nations.

We would like to express our appreciation of the fact that the responsibility to protect is on this session’s General Assembly agenda. That demonstrates the membership’s broad interest in the issue being discussed in this forum. We therefore believe that the inclusion of this item on the agenda of the General Assembly shows the appropriateness of the forum to discuss its implementation as an exemplary mechanism for protecting populations from barbarity and guaranteeing them the enjoyment of their human rights.

From our national perspective, the responsibility to protect is a norm that corresponds with our constitutional principles, since the State of Guatemala was established to protect individuals and families and its ultimate goal is achieving the common good.

Seventy-one years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the responsibility to protect must be recognized as the exemplary way to protect populations from mass atrocities. It must therefore be strengthened, particularly given the new hotbeds of tension in which similar trends prevail, in the worst cases leading to new crimes against humanity and cases of ethnic cleansing. My delegation is proud to be part of the code of conduct initiative to prevent the use of the veto in the Security Council in cases of genocide and crimes against humanity, and we urge other States to join it.

We therefore reiterate our call to uphold international obligations under international human rights law, international law and refugee law, since protecting the civilian population is intrinsically linked to them. In that context, in order to support the protection of civilians, Guatemala is honoured to be a country that contributes to United Nations peacekeeping.

Guatemala recognizes that the principle of the responsibility to protect is complemented by the concept of sustainable peace, since it prioritizes respect for and observance of human rights, based on a preventive approach in order to avoid confrontations. We welcome the concerted efforts of the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect and its vital work in such a significant area. In that vein, my delegation highlights the individual and collective capacities to prevent mass atrocities, which are enhanced by the Global Network of the Responsibility to Protect Focal Points.

In conclusion, as a promoter of the responsibility to protect, Guatemala reaffirms its commitment to the principle and urges that we step up our efforts towards its full implementation.

Ms. Bavdaž Kuret (Slovenia): Slovenia strongly welcomes today’s General Assembly formal debate on the responsibility to protect (R2P). We would like to thank the Secretary-General for this year’s report, entitled “Responsibility to protect: lessons learned for prevention” (A/73/898). We once again welcome the inclusion of R2P and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity on the formal agenda of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session and express our support for its inclusion as a standing agenda item of the General Assembly.

Slovenia aligns itself with the statements delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union (EU) and by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

No matter how many times we reiterate that the failure to protect human beings from mass atrocities and systemic violations of human rights should not be repeated, we still witness events that shock our human conscience time and again. It is important that today’s dialogue is taking place and that the dialogue should continue on a regular basis. The different views, many of which we will hear in the Hall today, must not inhibit our joint determination and commitment to protecting

populations from atrocity crimes in the future. It is important that we also scale up our efforts at the national and regional levels.

We fully support the use of preventive diplomacy and we call for prevention and a better response to large-scale violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. Slovenia believes that prevention remains the key to protecting populations from situations that may lead to mass atrocity crimes.

At the national level, we are therefore organizing awareness-raising events on R2P, using the United Nations Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, which we have translated into the Slovenian language. For a number of years Slovenia has also been organizing biannual regional R2P focal point meetings and academic conferences on R2P. Following the 2013, 2015 and 2017 events, Slovenia hosted the fourth academic conference entitled “Responsibility to Protect in Theory and Practice” in May. We would like to especially thank Special Adviser Ms. Karen Smith for her contribution at the conference.

The Slovenian R2P focal point joined the steering group for R2P in 2019 with the objective of mobilizing the effective implementation of R2P through the Global Network of the Responsibility to Protect Focal Points. Let me use this opportunity to reiterate the call to all Member States and partners that have not yet appointed their national R2P focal point to do so.

At the regional level, we support the EU-level activities and, in that respect, we are especially proud of the document entitled “Recommendations on promoting and operationalizing the Responsibility to Protect by the EU and EU member States” and the EU R2P Mass Atrocity Prevention Toolkit. We are also very pleased that other regional organizations were invited to the Meeting of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points held in Brussels in May.

We believe that the Security Council can have a decisive role in preventing and addressing situations of mass atrocity. Slovenia supports the idea of better utilizing the Security Council to more efficiently address human rights violations as threats and early indicators of atrocity crimes. We encourage the Council to invite Special Advisers to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect and other experts on a regular basis for briefings, especially regarding early warning.

Geneva-based institutions such as the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, for example, the Universal Periodic Review and special procedures mandate holders, can play an important role in increasing early awareness and early-action efforts. Regular Security Council briefings by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as by chairs of fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry, can further strengthen the necessary cooperation to prevent mass atrocities.

In order to improve the international community’s ability to take timely and decisive early action, we strongly support the code of conduct developed by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group and the French-Mexican initiative, which calls on the permanent members of the Security Council to voluntarily refrain from using the veto in situations of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Slovenia wishes to reiterate that no effort should be spared to systematically invest in the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Ensuring accountability for atrocity crimes and other serious abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law is and remains an important aspect of preventing the recurrence of conflict.

But ensuring accountability remains a major challenge. In this regard, the role of international criminal justice has been recognized, in particular the role of the International Criminal Court. We continue to express our firm support for the work of the International Criminal Court as well as of regional and State mechanisms to counter impunity.

The Rome Statute offers an important legal framework for national legal systems and acts as a deterrent to the most heinous crimes. Individual criminal accountability is a crucial element for breaking the vicious circle of impunity. Slovenia will continue to advocate for the universality of the Rome Statute.

In a broader framework, Slovenia believes that numerous activities, including efforts to ensure the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and preventive measures such as the World Programme for Human Rights Education, can contribute to atrocity prevention and respect for human rights and the rule of law. Here let me reaffirm our support for the Secretary-General’s Human Rights Up Front initiative.

It is up to us, the Member States, to get prevention right, to be aware of and recognize early-warning signs such as human rights violations, and to respond appropriately. We hold the primary responsibility to protect our populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Once again, let me reaffirm Slovenia's support for the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect and the committed work of Special Advisers Mr. Adama Dieng and Ms. Karen Smith to mainstream the responsibility to protect within the United Nations system. We also thank the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect for its efforts and support in the area of awareness-raising.

As we will be celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of R2P next year and taking stock of the efforts made to implement it, we would welcome a General Assembly resolution in this respect.

Let me conclude by stating Slovenia's strong commitment to remain an advocate of R2P and of the wider promotion and protection of human rights.

Mrs. Zappia (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

At the outset, Italy would like to express its gratitude for the advocacy on the responsibility to protect (R2P) that the Secretary-General continues to provide, including through his annual reports.

I would also like to congratulate the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, Karen Smith, for her active leadership, and to thank the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Adama Dieng, for his tireless efforts.

We welcomed the inclusion of the responsibility to protect in the formal agenda of the General Assembly at its seventy-third session, and we support its inclusion as a standing item in the Assembly's agenda.

The principle of a shared responsibility to protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and war crimes should continue to inspire our action today, when we are facing a general erosion of respect for international law. The Security Council has a clear responsibility in this respect. We support the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's code of conduct and the French

and Mexican declaration on refraining voluntarily from the use of the veto. We support the Secretary-General's 2019 report on the responsibility to protect (A/73/898).

Prevention and early action are of the essence. We need to implement this principle by strengthening the rule of law and ensuring accountability for past atrocity crimes, supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 16, but also by securing proper livelihoods, as economic risk is one of the main triggers for atrocity crimes.

Addressing the root causes of such crimes is a big part of the solution. That is why we see great merit in a cross-cutting strategy linking the various United Nations agendas, from the protection of civilians to women and peace and security, from sustainable development to the wider human rights agenda and peacekeeping.

Prevention is also about detecting the early signs of potential disruption. Atrocity crimes do not happen overnight, as the Special Envoy correctly pointed out; they are carefully prepared and organized. Hate speech plays a big role in the build-up to atrocity crimes. We therefore commend the leadership of Under-Secretary-General Adama Dieng in the elaboration of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, which is a much-needed and timely step in the right direction.

We need to strengthen civil society and recognize the paramount role of women in building pluralistic, inclusive societies that provide the best protection against mass atrocities. Protecting women is a categorical imperative, especially when sexual and gender-based violence are increasingly used as a deliberate political strategy by State and non-State perpetrators.

We are all called upon to step up our efforts to defend human rights and uphold our responsibility to protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Italy continues to do its part: we have consistently been a strong supporter of R2P in the Security Council and as a former Chair of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect, and we remain fully committed at this time of escalating international tensions. As the top Western troop-contributing country for peacekeeping operations, we believe that the effective protection of civilians requires properly

trained troops, adequate equipment and a strong political commitment.

Since 2005, through the Center of Excellence for Stability Police Units in Vicenza, we have trained more than 10,000 police personnel units, many of which have deployed in peacekeeping operations in Africa.

We joined the Circle of Leadership on the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in United Nations Operations launched by the Secretary-General, and we are the largest contributor to the United Nations Trust Fund in Support of Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. We have appointed an R2P national focal point, and we encourage all Member States and regional organizations to do the same.

Finally, at the end of May, Italy hosted a conference in Rome on SDG 16 in preparation for the upcoming High-level Political Forum, and we were pleased to welcome the Special Envoy, who stressed the fundamental link between SDG 16 and R2P.

Italy will continue to work in this direction and will continue to support the efforts of the United Nations to ensure that our founding values remain at the basis of our societies.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Pakistan's delegation thanks you, Madam President, for having convened this meeting of the General Assembly on the responsibility to protect (R2P) and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

But the responsibility to protect as a principle evokes differing responses. We feel that maintaining the fragile consensus on the issue is critical. Any reinterpretation of this understanding or initiatives lacking broad support are counterproductive and should be avoided. That is why we have been concerned at the way this process has developed since we met in what was characterized as a "one-off" plenary meeting in June 2018. Our focus should be on bridging the substantive gaps between respective positions rather than on specific modalities to hold these discussions.

Paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome document provide the cornerstone of our collective commitment to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. That responsibility to protect is in essence a political expression of what is already an obligation for States, as their sovereign responsibility to their citizens. While some have attempted to project this re-iteration

of the existing provisions of international law into a new legal instrument, we believe that is misplaced and unwarranted.

For if there is one lesson to be readily drawn from the depressing litany of failures of the international community in recent years, it is not the lack of legal means to prevent egregious crimes, but instead the lack of political will to do so. Despite enthusiastic espousal by its proponents, there is scant little to suggest that the notion of the responsibility to protect has catalysed into an abiding change in the disposition of Member States. In fact, as decisions by the international community continue to betray the high standards of objectivity and impartiality, the already fledgling edifice of R2P has become more tenuous.

If we are indeed to stem that tide, what is needed is to summon our collective resolve and our collective will and to act in a consistent and uniform manner towards all transgressions. Otherwise, the purity of motive notwithstanding, the resultant actions will continue to lack the legal and moral legitimacy to gain wider acceptability.

If the notion of the responsibility to protect is indeed to become the voice of conscience of the international community, we must all play our part. Foremost in that regard, we should not allow human suffering to be selectively prioritized for political convenience, or to serve narrow interests. There cannot be any moral ambivalence on this issue. Therefore, as much as we express our deep concern at the plight of people caught up in conflict, we cannot become oblivious to the well-being of those who have been forced to flee their homes and seek protection and shelter elsewhere. They cannot be left to the mercy of the elements, or contained beyond high walls of exclusion or separation.

Similarly, our declarations on human rights will remain unfulfilled without highlighting the systematic and gross violations of fundamental human rights, in particular in occupied territories, which relate to issues that are the subject of repeated Security Council resolutions.

As we approach the landmark seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, my delegation considers that the best measure of our commitment to the vulnerable is to recommit ourselves to the abiding values of the Charter of the United Nations, which we commemorated yesterday in such an elegant ceremony, based on the inherent dignity and worth of the individual

and the provision of fundamental human rights, including the right of peoples to self-determination.

Secondly, the Charter's vision of achieving a life of dignity for all is postulated on international cooperation and the harmonization of policies within the United Nations. That objective can be best served by operationalizing the principle of the right to development, which encompasses the right to food, shelter, fair terms of trade, debt relief and adequate access to financing and technology. After all, in a world beset by socioeconomic inequalities, many situations that lead to turmoil and conflict are the result of deprivation, underdevelopment and poverty.

Thirdly, a prevention-centric focus must be prioritized as the cornerstone of any protection-oriented approach, for it costs far more to pick up the pieces after a crisis than it does to prevent one. We have taken note of the useful lessons learned for prevention drawn by the Secretary-General in his latest report (A/73/898). Of particular significance is the insidious role played by hate speech as incitement to violence, including atrocity crimes. Islamophobia has become the most prevalent contemporary expression of this vile narrative. We know only too well from our neighbourhood how the abiding lure of communal politics has become the most assured pathway to power. We must make concerted efforts to reverse the tide of hate and bigotry that threatens to undermine social cohesion and peaceful coexistence within societies.

At its core, the responsibility to protect is not a license to intervene in external situations, but is instead a universal principle of non-indifference in keeping with the historical contexts and cultural norms of respective settings. It is predicated upon the express recognition that the responsibility for the protection of civilians lies first and foremost with Member States.

Set against the overarching principle of State sovereignty, the responsibility to protect cannot become a basis to contravene the principles of non-interference and non-intervention, or question the national sovereignty or territorial integrity of States. That remains the sole point of departure for our discussion on the responsibility to protect.

Ms. Bassols Delgado (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain aligns itself with the statement delivered by the observer of the European Union and with the statement delivered by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

I would like to begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his report (A/73/898). We agree with his approach, which is focused on prevention and on national measures aimed at addressing the risk of atrocity crimes.

Spain is in favour of making today's debate part of the agenda of the General Assembly on a regular basis every year. No society is immune to the risk of atrocity crimes. That is why no society should lower its guard. We are concerned about the increase in extremist political positions in many parts of the world, including in Europe, the region to which we belong. Those are positions that are strengthened and fuelled by xenophobic and racist discourse — fallacious denials of the equality of all people and of the humanity in each of us. Given that phenomenon, we must vigorously and persistently defend the dignity and equality of all individuals. With that concern in mind, we again warmly welcome the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, which was presented on 18 June.

Spain believes that the responsibility to protect should have an approach that respects human rights and international humanitarian law, above all through concerted action by the international community. Valuable examples of that, in our opinion, are the Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, both of which offer a framework for cooperative and valid action that is beneficial because of its preventive potential.

Prevention is always more effective when it is part of a joint, multidisciplinary and cross-cutting approach that favours the synergy of different agendas. That conviction informs our commitment to bringing the responsibility to protect to the women and peace and security agenda, in line with what has already been included in the report of the Secretary-General. In our view, it is also necessary for that synergy to lead to a systematic consideration of the responsibility to protect in the work of the Security Council and in the monitoring of specific situations.

In that connection, we welcome the joint statement on attacks against civilians in central Mali issued by the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Spain is therefore in favour of those Special Advisers and Special Representatives being heard

when the Security Council discusses measures to be taken in situations of this nature, including in closed-door consultations.

Atrocity crimes cannot go unpunished, and those responsible must be brought to justice. There is no doubt that each State has the responsibility and competence to investigate and prosecute atrocity crimes. But let us not forget that international cooperation among States in that regard often facilitates, and sometimes even makes it possible, for States to exercise that responsibility and competence. However, that does not obviate the existence of, and support for, the International Criminal Court and complementary mechanisms and measures, such as the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission. Spain firmly believes that mechanisms for investigating and verifying facts have an invaluable preventive role. In addition, those mechanisms perfectly match the subsequent demand for criminal responsibility for the gravest violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that, in our opinion, this is not merely a conceptual debate about procedure or competence. States always have the responsibility to protect their populations and have no justification for dodging that responsibility or exonerating those responsible. It is a responsibility that must be enforced by all means at our disposal, and does not affect the need to further explore preventive measures under the three equal, complementary and non-sequential pillars of the responsibility to protect.

Mr. Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil): At the outset, allow me to congratulate Karen Smith on her appointment as the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, as well as to voice my appreciation for the work done by her predecessors. I also take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his third report on the responsibility to protect (A/73/898), which adequately focuses on lessons learned and prevention. Those two interrelated elements are instrumental for the future implementation of the responsibility to protect (R2P). The lessons learned from past experiences confirm that prevention should always be our primary focus in protecting populations from genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing.

In the 2005 World Summit Outcome document, Member States stressed the need for the General Assembly to continue its consideration of the responsibility to protect. Yet, in the almost 15 years

since then, this is only the third formal debate held by the Assembly on the matter. Brazil welcomes the inclusion of R2P on the formal agenda and expresses its support for the formal discussion of this topic in future General Assembly sessions. As the most democratic organ of the United Nations, the Assembly should assert ownership and shape the debate on the protection of the world's populations from the most serious crimes of international concern. The emphasis on prevention reinforces the key role that the General Assembly plays in R2P debates, given that many United Nations initiatives with preventive effects take place in this forum.

Besides looking at the past, the most recent report of the Secretary-General also invites Member States to look inward. That is wise and often forgotten advice, grounded in the origins of R2P, the essence of which is precisely each State's responsibility to protect its own population. As the report accurately points out, viewing R2P as an exclusively international issue reinforces the erroneous notion that it is primarily about international responses to domestic crises. On the contrary, for R2P to overcome criticism, its implementation should not focus on the exceptional and sporadic imposition of coercive measures, but rather on the ongoing development of structural policies that contribute to more peaceful, inclusive and tolerant societies. Such policies include actions on human rights education, the promotion of a culture of peace and tolerance, measures against xenophobia and racial discrimination, reparation programmes for victims of serious human rights violations and the promotion and protection of the human rights of the most vulnerable segments of the population.

The second part of the report addresses the role of the international community. Brazil welcomes the initial emphasis on long-term and structural prevention, in line with an approach that tackles the root causes of R2P crimes. Nevertheless, we would have preferred it if the report had drawn a clear dividing line between prevention and response, so as to avoid conflating pillar II, related to prevention, with pillar III, related to response. While the former refers to international cooperation to build the capacity of States to protect their populations from R2P crimes, the latter encompasses potential responses to the manifest failures of national authorities to attain that objective. It is only when preventive measures fall short that response action comes into play.

When response action is deemed necessary, there is a range of non-coercive measures that can help prevent R2P crimes, including mediation, negotiation, counter-narratives to incitement to violence and actions to reduce the vulnerability of civilian populations. In the worst case scenario, if coercive measures are considered and duly authorized in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, their implementation must be judicious, proportionate and strictly limited to the objectives of the mandate. Moreover, Security Council resolutions that authorize military action should include sunset clauses, demand adequate reporting and provide for the monitoring of its implementation.

Brazil considers that R2P is, first and foremost, about implementing existing provisions of international law. In that regard, as we have flagged in previous speeches, it is important to avoid the temptation of proliferating imprecise concepts. The oft-used term “atrocities crimes” is not defined in international law or in multilateral resolutions or decisions. The four crimes mentioned in the 2005 Outcome document are undoubtedly atrocity crimes but so are others that are not included under R2P, such as aggression. Moreover, despite generally being dealt with as a homogenous group, each kind of crime may derive from different factors and therefore require distinctive strategies for prevention. However, one common trait is the frequent correlation between R2P crimes and armed conflicts, which reinforces the argument with regard to the atrocious nature of the crime of aggression and recalls the importance of conflict prevention.

In conclusion, as the Secretary-General correctly highlights in his report, R2P crimes are preventable. The fact that they still occur and cause so many victims shows that we need to do more to protect our populations with long-term preventive measures and structural policies that promote more inclusive, diverse and tolerant societies.

Mr. Mlynár (Slovakia): At the outset, I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting today and for her introductory remarks.

Slovakia fully aligns itself with the statements delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect. My statement will therefore be very brief. I will focus

on three main points that we would like to add to today’s debate.

First, Slovakia welcomes the eleventh report of the Secretary-General (A/73/898), which comes at a time when the actions of the international community and Member States fall short of fully deterring atrocity crimes. There is a much-needed shift from reactive to preventive actions. Slovakia fully supports the views and recommendations of the Secretary-General aimed at strengthening preventive efforts. After all, prevention is inherently incorporated within the pillars of the responsibility to protect (R2P). R2P should be perceived as an opportunity to anticipate atrocity crimes and to act early to prevent them. Addressing the root causes of such crimes needs to be a priority because the best way to protect is to prevent.

In 2005, all Member States made a strong commitment to the responsibility to protect. That commitment binds Member States to act as primary protectors of their own populations and to shield them from potential mass atrocities. In that pursuit, with the consent of the host State, and preferably at its own request, the international community can, and should, extend a helping hand to assist the efforts of individual States.

Secondly, anchoring the protection of individuals and groups against discrimination and exclusion is as an essential step, which must be accompanied by universal access to justice and non-selective accountability. In that context, we believe that it is vital to reiterate the role of the International Criminal Court as an independent and impartial judicial body that steps in where national jurisdictions are unable or unwilling to address the issue of accountability. In that capacity, it serves as a deterrent and a guarantor of the non-recurrence of mass atrocities. Therefore, we call on all States Members of the United Nations that have not yet done so to ratify the Rome Statute and its amendments and thereby help to achieve its universality and bolster preventive efforts.

Thirdly and lastly, as co-Chair of the Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform, Slovakia believes that fostering that agenda can contribute to a secure and just environment and provide guarantees of non-recurrence. Effective security institutions, together with a system based on the rule of law, can ensure that the rights of individuals are respected and perpetrators are brought to justice. The enhancement of national capacities and the building of strong institutions are key to the pursuit

of resilient systems and, by extension, early action to prevent atrocities. Strengthening security sector reform efforts in the aftermath of violence can act as a catalyst for change towards the overall stabilization and reconstruction of societies in transition in particular.

In conclusion, Slovakia is firmly committed to the implementation of all pillars of the responsibility to protect. Only united action can effectively prevent atrocities and protect the innocent.

Ms. Shaheen (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for having convened this important meeting on the responsibility to protect (R2P) and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. I also wish to note that the United Arab Emirates welcomes the fact that such a meeting is being held for the second consecutive year thanks to the efforts of the Secretary-General and the international community to focus on the principle of R2P in a world of more protracted conflicts that is more dangerous to its peoples.

The United Arab Emirates associates itself with the content of the Secretary-General's report (A/73/898) on the importance of being committed to multilateralism and international law in order to entrench and activate the conceptual framework of R2P. We therefore reiterate our international commitments within the framework of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and we call on Member States to do the same. The United Arab Emirates also underscores the importance of a foreign policy based on humanitarian action so as to support States to enable them to shoulder their responsibility and protect their societies.

My country believes that R2P is first and foremost the obligation of States, as well as a right in itself, which is linked to specific responsibilities, the most important of which is to protect the entire population and ensure their well-being. That must be the key focus of Governments, as well as prioritizing diversity, pluralism and multilateralism. We must enhance and build societies that counter hate speech and support national authorities in strengthening their capacity to prevent brutal crimes, as the Secretary-General clearly points out in his recent report.

The United Arab Emirates believes that effective prevention is the basis and that the sovereign State has a responsibility to provide protection that includes

addressing the root causes of conflicts. Since we believe that incitement to hatred is among the root causes of conflicts, my country adopted an approach based on tolerance and has declared 2019 as the Year of Tolerance in our country. We have enacted laws to criminalize hatred and discrimination based on differences between religions, races and sects in order to bolster coexistence and tolerance in our society.

The United Arab Emirates also stresses the fundamental importance of the rule of law in ending impunity and ensuring accountability for collective atrocity crimes in order to prevent their recurrence. Enhancing early-warning systems is an important step towards the elimination of genocide. Verifying crimes through the establishment of integrated and agreed data-collection mechanisms represents another fundamental step towards ensuring a quick and appropriate response to any developments.

Our meeting today reflects our collective commitment to R2P. Before I conclude, I wish to share with other members the following points.

First, we must support the Secretary-General's agenda on prevention. The issue of preventing brutal crimes should be included as a priority item in other common agendas linked with the three pillars of United Nations action.

Secondly, we must strengthen national resilience, in particular through national assessments of risks and resilience, taking into account gender considerations, including the enhancement of the role of civilians, especially women and youth, in prevention efforts and addressing atrocities.

Thirdly, we must multiply debates and efforts on prevention and R2P in the regions concerned, including capitals and regional centres. The United Arab Emirates believes that regional and national solutions will enable us to take important steps towards ending brutal crimes and preventing their recurrence in the future.

Mr. Kayinamura (Rwanda): At the outset, I wish to align myself with the statement delivered by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

We wish also to thank Ms. Karen Smith and Mr. Adama Dieng for their tireless efforts to prevent atrocities and to protect the people of the world against them.

As most speakers have noted, it is fitting that we are gathered here again to discuss the responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. I think that the key word here is the responsibility to protect, because we have seen that gaps exist and that the need for prevention and for protecting the people of the world has become a necessity for us all.

We reiterate that the duty to prevent and to halt genocide and mass atrocities lies primarily — I stress “primarily” — with Member States, by committing to protect their own populations against genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The international community has the moral authority and the obligation to assist Member States in fulfilling this primary responsibility. Based on our own experience in 1994, we find it morally justifiable, if a State has manifestly failed to protect its own citizens from mass atrocities and genocide and all peaceful measures have failed, for the international community should shoulder the responsibility to intervene through coercive measures, including military means, in order to halt acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

We cannot just sit around and grapple with theories and principles when the reality is that innocent citizens are being massacred by those who are supposed to protect them. In principle, we must agree on the fact that intervention is warranted.

However, this should not legitimize the use of unilateral coercive measures. The international community as a whole should be encouraged to expand multilateral options in order to streamline the nature and the scope of such interventions. The architects of such interventions should also refrain from any attempt to focus their efforts on regime change; rather, more effort should be put into saving lives and protecting innocent people.

It is of the utmost importance that Governments, regional organizations and the international community focus their attention on addressing the underlying causes of conflict. At the national level, our post-conflict experience in Rwanda has shown that this requires the development of strong institutions that establish the foundations of good governance based on the rule of law, democratic principles, shared values and accountability.

Allow me to touch on a few points from the Secretary-Generals report on “Responsibility to protect; lessons learned for prevention” (A/73/898), which was released earlier this month.

First, we support the emphasis on preventive action, which is preferable to responding only after crises have erupted. We need to avoid the United Nations being used as a fire extinguisher. Preventive measures should be an integral part of national, regional and international mechanisms to prevent atrocity crimes. At the national level, strengthening the rule of law is an integral element of prevention. In addition, it is important for post-conflict States to invest in efforts aimed at sustaining peace, such as justice and reconciliation measures.

Secondly, we endorse the key recommendations made in the report of the Secretary-General, including combating hate speech in the digital space. My country is well aware of the devastating impact that hate speech can have if left unchecked.

I should like to conclude with several recommendations in three related areas.

First, concerning accountability, holding those involved in atrocity crimes accountable is fundamental to maintaining a credible international system in which States interact on an equal footing.

Secondly, with respect to peacekeeping, Rwanda, as a top troop- and police-contributing country, believes that peacekeeping can be a catalytic tool to stabilize countries where they are deployed, allowing for a conducive atmosphere for such actors to establish peace. The Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians enhance peacekeeping missions by placing the protection of civilians at the heart of peacekeeping missions. We encourage more Member States to endorse these Principles.

Thirdly, and lastly, I turn to the issue of women and peace and security. It is unfortunate that sexual and gender-based violence is a constant feature of conflicts around the world. States must therefore carry out interventions that focus on victims of sexual and gender-based violence, and they must hold those responsible to account.

Mr. Prasad (Fiji): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the members of the Pacific Islands Forum represented at the United Nations, namely, Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua

New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

The Forum members would like to thank the Secretary-General, through his Chef de Cabinet, and the President of the General Assembly for their statements. We also commend the Secretary-General for his report (A/73/898) and its focus on the importance of early warning and early action in response to the risk of mass atrocities.

We agree with the Secretary-General that the implementation of the principle of the responsibility to protect (R2P), as set out in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome document, must be our collective focus. Our task is not to renegotiate or reinterpret the commitments our leaders made in 2005; it is to implement them. We therefore welcome the debate in the Assembly today. Our hope is that this can be part of an ongoing dialogue in the Assembly about how we can better protect populations from mass atrocities, including by sharing experiences, perspectives and lessons learned to help improve practice internationally, regionally and domestically. We also agree with the Secretary-General that the implementation of R2P and the prioritization of prevention in the United Nations system are interlinked and complementary. As his report highlights, preventive capabilities need to be cultivated at all levels so that early warning also means early action.

Pacific Island Forum members believe that early dialogue, partnership and action, in particular at the regional level, are critical to delivering on our responsibility to protect. The importance of early warning and early action was recognized and enshrined by Forum members in the Biketawa Declaration, which was agreed in Kiribati at the beginning of this century. That important document recognizes the vulnerability of all Forum members to civil unrest and other threats to our population's security. The Declaration articulates a common commitment to resolving conflicts through regional cooperation. It has served as the springboard for a number of regional assistance missions, including a highly successful mission — the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) — that commenced in 2003 and concluded last year.

RAMSI was a partnership between the people and the Government of Solomon Islands and 15 contributing countries from the Pacific region. The mission's mandate was to help lay the foundations for long-term

stability and prosperity in Solomon Islands, including by restoring civil order, rebuilding the machinery of Government and helping rebuild its economy. The consent of, and partnership with, Solomon Islands was a prerequisite for the mission and an essential element of its success. RAMSI's regional identity was its core underlying strength. Every Pacific Island Forum country participated in RAMSI, and the mission benefited from the diverse cultures and experience of contributing members. Since 2003, thousands of police, military and civilian personnel from across the region served with RAMSI, walking side by side with Solomon Islanders.

Another critical reason for RAMSI's success is that assistance was requested and provided in the early stages of unrest, lawlessness and violence. The warning signs were present and action was taken. This is an example of pillar II of R2P in action.

Pacific Islands Forum leaders have committed to negotiating an updated Biketawa plus declaration to guide regional responses to emerging security challenges. At the heart of that commitment is a recognition that no one country alone can meet the security challenges we face.

Mr. Drobnyak (Croatia): Croatia aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the European Union and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect. I will add several points in my national capacity.

The responsibility to protect (R2P) remains one of the most suitable principles around which the international community can rally when populations at risk face the threat of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. States have undertaken a number of measures to date to strengthen their resilience to atrocity crimes. At the national level, more than 60 States and two regional organizations have appointed focal points and reviewed or adopted mechanisms to strengthen resilience to atrocity crimes, and are continuing to explore and establish national arrangements to prevent serious crimes. Croatia is proud to be among them.

Croatia encourages regional organizations to take a more active role in promoting and implementing this concept. We stand ready to engage strategically with all stakeholders in order to promote general awareness of R2P through public awareness campaigns and sharing national best practices in this regard.

We welcome this year's report of the Secretary-General (A/73/898), focused on lessons learned for prevention. All around the world we are witnessing a dangerous increase of hate language used by radicalized groups, or even political leaders, which can easily slide into incitement to hate crimes, as we have seen in recent attacks against religious and minority groups particularly exposed to these challenges. It is high time that we finally draw lessons from this and recognize and expose such dangerous narratives appropriately and on time.

Croatia pays particular attention to conflict prevention, the rule of law and the promotion of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, while recognizing that such efforts are an investment in addressing root causes of conflict and fostering prevention. Prevention and national accountability for protection are cornerstones in reducing atrocity crimes. Putting our national commitments to this concept into practice, Croatia has positioned its national accountability for prevention and resilience at the top of its priorities.

It has become increasingly difficult to reach consensus in the Security Council when it comes to issues concerning the protection of human rights. Therefore, we call for better utilization of the Council's working methods to take potential mass atrocity situations into consideration as early as possible. We support open debates on R2P and attach great importance to briefings from the Secretary-General's Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect regarding early warning on situations where populations are at risk.

As a current member of the Human Rights Council, Croatia encourages further strengthening of links between the Human Rights Council and the Security Council for early warning and early action. Geneva-based institutions and mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review and special procedures mandate holders, as well as appointed fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry, play a unique role in preventing mass atrocity crimes.

Equally important, the work of the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect makes it possible to mainstream R2P within the United Nations system. Croatia encourages continuing this progress and welcomes the appointment of Ms. Karen Smith as the

new Special Adviser on R2P. We are confident that her knowledge and experience will contribute to the further advancement of the implementation of R2P within the United Nations system.

We are especially concerned over the worrisome trend of forced displacement being used as a military tactic, as well as sexual and gender-based violence being increasingly employed as a strategy by State and non-State perpetrators. When committed in a widespread or systematic manner, such acts may amount to crimes against humanity, war crimes or acts of genocide. That applies in particular to disastrous events, at great expense of minority populations, who are always among the most vulnerable.

Croatia reiterates the need for all Member States to uphold their obligations under international human rights law, international humanitarian law and international refugee law, as a foundation of upholding the principle of R2P. Last year, we marked the seventieth anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. We urge Member States that have not yet ratified or acceded to the Convention to do so as a matter of priority.

Finally, we cannot stress enough the importance of States upholding their primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute crimes committed within their jurisdictions. Croatia voices its support for the International Criminal Court, which remains the most important institutional development in the battle to end impunity for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Mr. Moncada (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Venezuela, both in its national legislation and in practice, is committed to respect and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms. We therefore reject the commission of crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide and ethnic cleansing, all of which are specified in the Rome Statute, to which we are a signatory party. We reaffirm the role of the State as guarantor of the security of its population at all times, and voice our support for justice to be done in cases where such crimes have been committed.

Much is said about the importance of prevention. Who can really oppose the prevention of conflicts or atrocity crimes, when all States, by signing the Charter of the United Nations, undertook to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to promote social progress and to ensure respect for fundamental human

rights? The same founding Charter, which is binding on all, also includes principles governing international relations, such as the legal equality of States, the self-determination of peoples, abstention from the use or threat of use of force against the political independence of any State, and non-intervention in the internal affairs of another State. For our country, prevention implies respect for all of the principles of international law under the Charter. We must make greater use of the tools of multilateralism and diplomacy for the peaceful resolution of disputes, including political dialogue, in line with Chapters VI and VII of the Charter.

The notion of the responsibility to protect is of concern to States because of the lack of agreement on its definition and scope. Many questions continue unanswered to this day. Who, and on what basis, determines what State is not protecting its population? Who determines, and on which criteria, what action should be taken? How can we prevent its selective implementation? How can we prevent the responsibility to protect from being used as a pretext for politically and economically motivated interventions, including those disguised as humanitarianism? Why do we not speak of the responsibility to protect when the Palestinian people are massacred?

In practice, this notion has been used to promote invasions that have resulted in suffering, death and destruction in countries that today still suffer from their consequences. The peoples were never protected — they were only an excuse to bring about regime change and plunder the resources of sovereign nations. This notion, which at first might have had good intentions behind it, today lacks total legitimacy, since it is used to intervene in the internal affairs of States and destroy their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.

If the real objective is to protect the population, why not promote international cooperation in the fight against poverty, hunger and social inequality? Why not put an end to the illegal imposition of unilateral coercive measures and so-called secondary sanctions? The world will not continue to be deceived by talk about human rights, on the one hand, and the imposition of economic measures that are acts of aggression and crimes against humanity, on the other. That is the double standard of racist and supremacist empires that sustain their domination through wars of colonization against free and sovereign countries.

Those who manipulate the notion of the responsibility to protect have destroyed the consensus that began in 2005, with the World Summit Outcome document, and ended in 2017, when a vote was forced here in the Hall (see A/72/PV.2). The naive phase of humanitarian interventionism is over.

In conclusion, we reject the inclusion of this item on the agenda of the General Assembly since Venezuela, as a nation, has been the target of attacks by the same colonial Powers that perverted the notion of the responsibility to protect in order to plunder our national assets and apply economic terrorism against our people. There are no armed conflicts in Venezuela today. We are not a threat to anyone. And our public order is guaranteed by our democratic institutions. Respect for all the principles set out in the Charter of the United Nations is the only way to protect our freedom and our right to peace.

Mr. Kawamura (Japan): At the outset, I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this debate. I also commend the engagement of eight Member States — Afghanistan, Denmark, Guatemala, the Netherlands, Romania, Rwanda, Ukraine and Uruguay — for bringing this agenda to a formal debate at the General Assembly, together with Japan.

The number of attacks on medical staff and facilities are on the rise, and forced displacement is at an all-time high. Sexual and gender-based violence in conflict has also increased significantly. It is therefore all the more important for all Member States to discuss how the international community can prevent atrocities from taking place, and what concrete actions each Member State can take to achieve that end. Today I will talk about Japan's contribution in the area of the responsibility to protect with regard to the assistance we provide to other Member States with a view to preventing atrocities.

I agree with the mention in this year's report of the Secretary-General (A/73/898) of the provision of support to national authorities. Japan believes that strengthening the capacity of security and judiciary sectors at the national level and empowering women would ensure the protection of human rights, improve the planning and management of criminal justice related to institutions and contribute to the stabilization of the situation on the ground, and thereby help to prevent atrocity crimes. Japan has been an active player

in the field, assisting national efforts of Member States to protect their people through the mobilization of our official development assistance for capacity-building and the protection of women.

First, with regard to our contribution to capacity-building in the security and judiciary sectors, I am proud to share with colleagues today that Japan will continue to lend assistance through its training course “Criminal Justice for French-Speaking African Countries” for another five years, starting this year. The programme is designed to support participants from African countries — namely, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Senegal — who work in the field criminal justice.

Secondly, with regard to providing assistance for the protection of women, Japan has been working closely with UN-Women as well as the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict regarding women’s leadership, empowerment, access and protection in Kenya, Egypt, Iraq and Jordan and on projects to address sexual violence in conflict in Iraq, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In August, we will host the seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Yokohama, Japan, where we will discuss how to strengthen peace and stability as one of the pillars, as well as the issues that I just mentioned. We strongly believe that the collective efforts of the international community in such areas will help to advance the implementation of the prevention agenda.

Thirdly, in addition to the assistance that I just mentioned, I would like to add that Japan believes that the Security Council should play an active role in preventing conflicts. Unfortunately, we have witnessed some cases where the Security Council failed to fulfil its function to prevent or end mass atrocities owing to the use of the veto. In that regard, I emphasize that Japan continues to support the initiative by France and Mexico on veto restraint in cases of mass atrocities, as well as the code of conduct developed by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group.

We should all redouble our efforts to protect people from atrocities. The international community needs to take stock of past practices and share lessons learned, as the Secretary-General mentions in his report. Japan is ready to collaborate with the international community on this critical issue.

Mr. Ja’afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My country’s delegation took note of the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/73/898. We support in principle some of the report’s content about the primary responsibility of States to protect their citizens and the role and responsibility of the United Nations, as a collective organization, to bolster the early-warning systems aimed at preventing genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

With regard to today’s meeting, my delegation, supported by a significant number of Member States, still rejects this exclusionary and unprofessional approach in convening such a meeting, repeatedly called for by certain States in order to exploit and politicize the concept of the responsibility to protect (R2P). That exacerbates the dispute in the General Assembly regarding humanitarian issues, which are both noble and just.

Everyone in this Hall knows that the world in which we live today is far from ideal and that the United Nations is going through a critical but crucial phase in its work and performance. That is due to the significant phenomenon of political and financial polarization. At the same time, everyone knows the catastrophic consequences and the war crimes perpetrated by the Governments of certain Member States as a result of individually misusing the concept of R2P without a United Nations mandate in order to implement their own foreign policies, leading to aggression and military invasion outside international legitimacy.

From this rostrum, we will continue to remind all Member States that, in one of his reports on R2P, the Secretary-General explicitly recognized the serious concerns arising from the misuse by certain Governments of the concept of R2P in Libya, which is a country rich in resources and people. That country is now tragically living in a state of destruction, chaos, political disputes, bloody conflict and the spread of terrorism due to the military operations and air strikes of the armies of certain Governments that claim to be protecting civilians in Libya. In fact, they are destroying Libya and its capabilities and resources while fragmenting its people and undermining its national political unity.

However, the great disaster today is that the same Governments, which have sent their military planes, fleets and destroyers to Libya, Iraq, Syria and

other States throughout the world, are determined to repeatedly commit the same war crimes in other regions of the world under the same pretext of exercising R2P and bolstering democracy and human rights, as they say.

Every time we debate these issues, representatives of the Governments that have long carried out occupation and committed aggression reiterate the same sentence again and again, namely, that the pretext of national sovereignty of certain States will not prevent these Governments from protecting the peoples of those States against violations of human rights. We ask the representatives of these Governments what logic would make us accept their exploitation of the concept of R2P as a pretext to wage aggression against Member States, killing tens of thousands of civilians, destroying the capabilities of States, displacing millions of people and drowning thousands of them in the seas, while disseminating terrorism throughout the world and creating and expanding the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters. It is an important question addressed to all Member States.

When we simply read some of the details of the recent Secretary-General's report on the concept of R2P, we certainly see that there is a suspicious trend to promote the three artificial pillars of the concept of R2P, in particular the third pillar, which is always exploited in order to carry out military aggression and wars against many States in the world. Even worse is the fact that the authors of the report are determined to ignore the lack of significant agreement among Member States on the parameters and guarantees in implementing R2P. They are also determined to ignore the practical concerns over a lack of assurances and constraints that would ensure the non-recurrence of exploiting the concept of R2P as a pretext to undermine the sovereignty of States and interfere in their domestic affairs.

We in the Syrian Arab Republic resolutely respect the Charter of the United Nations and, as the English saying goes, we go by the book. The book is the Charter, which contains binding provisions for all Member States. The Charter is the one and only book. That is why we say that we go by the book. We will also continue to refuse the politicization of the 2005 World Summit Outcome document.

In that context, we emphasize once again that those responsible for the widely differing views of Member States on R2P that we are seeing today are the Governments that are working, together with certain

Secretariat personnel, to establish the erroneous pillars and legal basis for R2P.

The majority of Member States are totally convinced that paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome document do not recognize R2P as a principle. Rather, they have emphasized the established, fundamental and genuine principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations and linked to the maintenance of international peace and security; saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war; recognizing the fundamental human rights and the dignity of the human person; and promoting social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom while respecting the sovereignty of States and non-interference in their internal affairs.

Some want to go back to the time of League of Nations, to legalize the concepts of mandate, trusteeship, occupation and colonization. That is the main difference between the League of Nations and the United Nations. The United Nations has put an end to the historic mistake represented by the undertakings of the League of Nations, which legitimized occupation and war. That is why the League of Nations failed and the United Nations was created to put an end to that historic mistake pertaining to the performance and conduct of the League.

My country, Syria, along with other significant number of Member States, continues to reject this exclusionary approach and to oppose the inclusion of the R2P item on the agenda of the General Assembly, especially since the informal consultations held have not yet overcome the core differences between Member States or moved towards engaging positively in discussing the real concerns related to this issue.

The Syrian Arab Republic, as a founding Member of the Organization, is determined to remain faithful to the Charter and to not give in to practices of intimidation and polarization at any cost. That is why the crisis in my country has continued for eight years now. For eight years we have rejected policies of polarization, extortion and intimidation. Based on that, we will keep opposing those who promote controversial issues, and we call upon all Members to admit that the United Nations remains unable to shoulder its serious responsibility of protecting the Syrian and Palestinian peoples from the Israeli occupation and its supporters; that the United Nations is unable to activate an early-warning system to protect the Syrians

and the Iraqis from the acts of terrorism perpetrated by Da'esh, Al-Qaida, the Al-Nusra Front and other terrorist organizations; that the United Nations has also failed in activating an international early-warning and cooperation system to combat the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters, which involves Governments and intelligence services; and that the United Nations is unable to exercise the R2P or to address the crimes that are being committed by the illicit international coalition, led by the United States, against the Syrian people. Those crimes have led, according to United Nations reports, to the total destruction of the city of Raqqa and the semi-destruction of the ancient city of Palmyra, the killing of thousands of civilians in Syria and the destruction of infrastructure, bridges and electrical and water plants under the pretext of combating terrorism. The destruction of monuments has become part of combating terrorism. The destruction of States Members of the Organization has become part of combating terrorism. The total destruction of cities has become part of combating terrorism. The critical question is: What terrorism are they speaking about? Is it the terrorism that they themselves created?

When the Secretariat and the Governments of certain Member States recognize that these issues reflect the failure of the United Nations to respect and implement the purposes and principles of the Charter, then and only then will Syria and many other Member States that cherish, in words and in deeds, the principles of freedom, justice and equality be prepared to transparently debate R2P, so as to reach a consensus on the parameters of the concept and guarantees on its non-use for political objectives that run counter to the purposes and principles of the United Nations and its Charter.

In conclusion, we call on Members, with great positivity and openness, to return to the format of informal consultations on this issue, as that is the only practical way forward where we can express our concerns and reach the desired consensus. Let us all remember that our duty as Member States is to support the status and capability of the United Nations so that it can remain the collective platform that allows us to debate our serious disputes and concerns related to controversial and sensitive concepts and principles that can have a negative impact on the future and the horizons of the Organization, which must remain the only international umbrella under which we gather.

All Members know that certain Governments are exploiting this situation so as to not commit themselves to the mandate of the competent organ of the United Nations responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, namely, the Security Council. Their aim is to carry out personal, selfish political and military practices that run counter to the purposes and principles of the Charter, practices that which eventually threaten international peace and security.

Mr. Jinga (Romania): Romania aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Denmark on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

Romania commends the inclusion of the subject of today's debate, on the responsibility to protect (R2P), in the formal agenda of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, as my country was one of the nine Member States that made this request.

We welcome the most recent report of the Secretary-General on the responsibility to protect (A/73/898) and its focus on lessons learned for prevention, as we believe that the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity is fundamental for the peace and stability of our world. We welcome also the recommendations made by the Secretary-General and the measures proposed to be taken both at the national and international levels in order to advance this agenda.

In our national capacity, we are determined to work for the prevention of international crimes, and in this respect my country has taken several measures. We appointed a national contact point from the Romanian Public Ministry to the European network for investigation and prosecution of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. In 2005, we established the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, and in 2018 the Network for Genocide Prevention and Multidisciplinary Research into Mass Graves, aimed at building the capacity to prevent and investigate genocide. Romania is also an active member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, including in the area of the prevention of genocide.

My country ratified the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and has enacted national legislation in accordance with its provisions. Romania disseminates knowledge about

the principles of the Convention, including judicial training through courses on public international law and through seminars for justice professionals. The Romanian Public Ministry, in cooperation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and other Government agencies and non-governmental organizations, organizes training for judges and State officials involved in criminal investigations on topics pertaining to the Holocaust, genocide prevention and mass grave investigations.

In 2015, Romania submitted its unilateral declaration accepting the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice, as part of our commitment to international law and in recognition of the prominent contribution of the Court to international peace. We encourage others to consider taking action in support of the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.

We share the Secretary-General's focus on the importance of early action when it comes to responsibility to protect. Romania is fully committed to the protection of civilians, supports humanitarian action and has joined several international initiatives aimed at protecting the population, especially

vulnerable groups, such as children. We are also engaged with police officers and military personnel in ensuring that peacekeeping missions have a protection of civilians mandate.

My country believes that regional organizations have to play a key role in preventing and responding to mass atrocities, as they can assess the situation on the ground and the regional context at first hand. That was stressed during the ninth annual meeting of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, which took place in May.

In conclusion, I would like to add my voice to those who showed support today for the principle of the responsibility to protect and acknowledged the importance of developing preventive capacities. Allow me to also express my appreciation for the activities of the Global Centre for R2P, both as secretariat of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points and as a United Nations partner in promoting R2P globally.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers this afternoon at 3 p.m. here in the Hall.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.