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President: Mr. Shahid (Maldives)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 134 (continued)

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

Report of the Secretary-General (A/76/844)

Mr. Pérez Ayestarán (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is firmly committed, both in its national legislation and in practice, to the respect, promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. We therefore express our categorical rejection of the commission of crimes against humanity and war crimes, as well as genocide and ethnic cleansing, while reiterating the central role of States as guarantors of the security of their populations at all times.

Much is said about the importance of prevention — who could object to the prevention of conflict or atrocity crimes when all States, having undersigned the Charter of the United Nations, have pledged to save future generations from the scourge of war, to promote social progress and to ensure respect for fundamental human rights?

That same founding Charter, which is binding on all, also contains principles governing international

relations, including the legal equality of States, the self-determination of peoples, refraining from the use or threat of use of force against the political independence of any State and non-intervention in the internal affairs of States. Therefore, for our country — promoter of the Bolivarian diplomacy of peace — prevention requires respect for all norms of international law and the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

We must therefore make greater use of all the tools offered by multilateralism and diplomacy for the peaceful resolution of disputes, including political dialogue and negotiation, in line with the provisions of Chapter VI of the Charter. In that regard, we reiterate the need to avoid the adoption of positions that, far from contributing to fostering an environment conducive to the peaceful resolution of disputes, have the potential to heighten tensions, deepen divisions and prolong the conflicts that afflict the world today.

The notion of the responsibility to protect may well be a principle that had truly altruistic intentions at first. However, time and the course of history have shown us its disastrous consequences, especially when it has been continuously manipulated to promote and justify interventionist and war-mongering agendas. That highly politicized notion is therefore of serious concern to a significant number of States today, including Venezuela, owing to the lack of agreement, *inter alia*, on its definition and scope.

Still today, certain questions remain unanswered. Who determines whether a State is protecting its

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population or not, and on what basis? Who determines how to act and according to which criteria? How do we prevent implementation from being selective? Why is there no mention of the responsibility to protect when it comes to the Palestinian people, who have been massacred over the course of more than 70 years?

Moreover, if the real objective is to protect populations, why not promote international cooperation and solidarity in the fight against poverty, hunger and inequality? Why not address the root causes of conflicts? Why not opt for dialogue, negotiation, tolerance, understanding and mutual respect? Why not put an end to the illegal imposition of unilateral coercive measures?

Even more serious is the fact that the main promoters of the notion of the responsibility to protect are the same ones who today promote and execute a criminal policy of aggression against Venezuela, which includes the illegal application of unilateral coercive measures. Due to their systematic nature and scope, those measures constitute a crime of extermination, as established in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Among them is Croatia, for example, whose Government is complicit in the commission of atrocious crimes, including crimes against humanity, against 30 million Venezuelan men and women. We cannot help but wonder what makes Croatia think that it has the authority, in the middle of the General Assembly, to openly call out a supposed violation of the Charter of the United Nations and ask for a military intervention against our country? That precisely demonstrates the perversion of that nefarious notion which, under a cloak of humanitarianism, insists not only on justifying, but also on encouraging new armed interventions and ventures. As history has shown, such acts generate only pain, misery, chaos and destruction — uncoincidentally in countries with vast natural resources. To accept that logic of colonial expansion suggested by Croatia would lead only to global chaos.

Again, these are the same people who, today, in practice, have given *carte blanche* to Israel, the occupying Power, so that it may continue with its policies of apartheid and the commission of crimes of genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity in Palestine, whose people have historically been denied their inalienable right to self-determination.

These are the same people who have a selective concern when discussing the duty of States to protect their populations and who seem to turn a blind eye when it comes to those countries neighbouring Venezuela, where there are numerous foreign military bases and where the systematic elimination of social, community, indigenous and political leaders and human rights defenders is taking place, despite the fact that dozens of massacres and thousands of people have disappeared in that brotherly country.

The lack of answers, accompanied by a deafening silence, demonstrates the double standards of the Western Powers' actions, including when it comes to promoting and advancing the infamous notion of the responsibility to protect. Such double standards are characteristic of the racist, supremacist empires and their allies who insist on sustaining their domination with wars of neo-colonization against countries that have decided to be free, independent and sovereign and that will never yield to blackmail, pressure or illegal coercive measures.

In conclusion, by reaffirming our firm determination to preserve, promote and defend the Charter of the United Nations, we underscore that today, in the midst of the current international situation and the great challenges ahead of us, our primary responsibility, if we really seek to protect our populations, is to put a complete and immediate end to the deliberate use of the economy as a weapon of mass destruction against at least one third of humankind in more than 30 countries around the world.

Mr. Bae Jongin (Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to convey my deep condolences to the families of the victims of the earthquake in Afghanistan.

Today is the first plenary meeting on this item since the General Assembly decided to include it on the annual agenda last year. As such, this plenary should serve as a solemn reminder that we, as Member States, owe our populations the responsibility to protect (R2P). But this debate is also taking place as a sobering reminder of the reality that atrocities are still being perpetrated and populations are still being displaced and harmed, not protected. It is therefore high time that we revitalize the commitments we made under the 2005 World Summit outcome document, namely, our individual responsibility to protect, as well as our collective responsibility to respond.

I would first like to express our strong support for the invaluable efforts that the Secretary-General and his Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect have undertaken, and welcome the latest report of the Secretary-General on the matter (A/76/844). As the report rightly points out, children and young people continue to be targeted by and caught up in atrocity crimes, despite the steady mainstreaming of the norm over the past 17 years. We need to put children and young people at the centre of our efforts to uphold R2P, above all by investing in and engaging with children and young people to build sustainable peace, as well as to better address their particular needs.

My delegation would also like to concur with the report's emphasis on prevention and early warning. Hate speech, identity-based marginalization, exclusion and the propagation of intolerance often precede atrocity crimes. In order to operationalize a better early-warning system, it is imperative that the voices of children and young people be listened to and their role in prevention recognized, and the link between early warning and response strengthened.

Equally important is our resolve to ensure accountability and to end impunity for atrocity crimes. Accountability is a duty, not a choice. It is also one of the most effective ways to prevent the recurrence of such grave crimes. States have the main responsibility to hold violators accountable for crimes committed within their jurisdiction, and the international community must spare no effort in supporting national accountability through judicial cooperation and capacity-building assistance. The Republic of Korea takes this opportunity to reaffirm its support for international tribunals and hybrid courts, including the International Criminal Court.

Our responsibility to respond — the third pillar of R2P — should be spearheaded by the Security Council, which bears the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. However, the Council has frequently fallen short when it comes to fulfilling its expected role in taking timely and effective action against atrocity crimes.

The fact that the General Assembly resolution on the veto initiative (resolution 76/262) was unanimously adopted clearly demonstrates Member States' support for voluntary restraint on the use of the veto power and communicates their hope for a more accountable and transparent Council. In that regard, we encourage the

members of the Council to more actively support the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's code of conduct and the French-Mexican initiative. Further, my delegation would like to urge the Security Council to strengthen its efforts to deal with the risk of commission of mass atrocities.

Lastly, I would like to underline that the notion of R2P, especially in relation to genocide, may not serve as an excuse to justify any illegal use of force. That is the diametric opposite of R2P, undermining the core principle and all the painful lessons we have learned from past failures.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity to reaffirm the Republic of Korea's commitment to R2P. Indeed, sovereignty entails the responsibility to protect the population. It is now up to us to enhance the relevance of R2P beyond one mere chapter in the United Nations lexicon. I look forward to continuing to work together with other Member States in our collective efforts to protect our own populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Mr. Margaryan (Armenia): I thank Special Adviser Alice Nderitu for presenting the report of the Secretary-General (A/76/844) (see A/76/PV.86), dedicated this year to the special needs of children and young people in the contexts of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, which outlines recommendations on strengthening their protection from atrocity crimes.

One of the key messages of the report is the human rights-based approach in prevention efforts. Indeed, ensuring the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all should be central in addressing atrocity risks and advancing the protection of younger generations. The Safe Schools Declaration, the Paris Principles and the Vancouver Principles — to which Armenia is a party — remain crucial instruments to promote and protect the rights and dignity of all children, in particular those residing in conflict areas.

Intolerance, discrimination and identity-based hate speech are among the underlying causes of atrocity crimes. A grave source of concern should be the involvement of children in State-led or State-sponsored propaganda of hatred targeting a particular ethnicity or religion. The indoctrination of children with identity-based hate and the incitement of violence and intolerance through educational programmes sow the seeds of hate crimes and atrocities only waiting to happen in future.

Countering hate speech, genocide denial, incitement to violence and warmongering is another crucial priority of the prevention agenda.

I would like to underscore the critical importance of the timely detection and adequate response to early-warning signs of incitement to hate and identity-based violence on ethnic and religious grounds, as well as instances of the justification and glorification of past crimes. The United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech sets a practical framework for enhancing the Organization's monitoring and reporting capacities.

The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide recognizes that, throughout all periods of history, genocide has inflicted great losses on humankind. Despite the continuous efforts of the international community in support of the genocide prevention agenda, mass atrocities continue to persist, often owing to a lack of acknowledgment and condemnation of past crimes. In that regard, education, in particular on human rights and genocide, can play an important role in promoting remembrance and awareness in order to preserve historical memory and promote truth, justice and reconciliation.

Deliberate efforts to deny the historical reality of the Armenian genocide have been employing various narratives, including those based on attempts to reinterpret international law to claim that the killings do not fit the definition of genocide because the events predate their legal concept. However, that fails to account for the well-documented historical fact that it was precisely with reference to the systematic extermination of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire that prominent Polish Jewish lawyer Raphael Lemkin originally coined the term "genocide".

Often, denialists seek to challenge and mischaracterize the existing scholarly consensus as a subject of a legitimate debate protected under the freedom of expression. Whichever methods the denialists seek to apply, they all invariably run counter not only to the vast body of existing historical evidence, but also to the findings of reports mandated by the United Nations. Those reports include the 1948 report of the United Nations War Crimes Commission and the report adopted by the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1985, prepared by Mr. Benjamin Whitaker, which confirmed that the systematic massacres of Armenians in 1915

met, without any question, the criteria for the United Nations definition of genocide.

Armenia has been consistently campaigning to reinforce the implementation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and to advance the prevention agenda. Since 2015, the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of This Crime, established by a General Assembly resolution under Armenia's initiative (resolution 69/323), has become a platform to foster cooperation for the prevention of atrocity crimes and promoting the development of national and international early-warning mechanisms.

The United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect has a key role to play in advancing international cooperation to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, promoting prevention by monitoring grave human rights violations and assessing risks of potential atrocity crimes. We encourage the strengthening of the Office's resilience by equipping it with the necessary human resources and financial capacities to properly deliver on its mandate in an independent and coherent manner. We also support the activities of the Office in coordinating the implementation of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech.

The United Nations system and the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect should be able to monitor, identify and react unambiguously to instances whereby distorted narratives that deny the existence of ethnic and religious groups and their history, culture and heritage are propagated, inciting xenophobia and hate and glorifying the perpetrators of past crimes.

The United Nations Human Rights Council and its mechanisms, including the special procedures and treaty bodies, play an essential role in providing early warnings of the risk factors that can lead to mass atrocity crimes. The resolution on the prevention of genocide presented by Armenia and unanimously adopted by the Human Rights Council in March (A/HRC/RES/49/9) recognizes that early-warning signs may also include an increase in serious acts of violence against women and children and calls upon States to take the legislative and other measures necessary to protect women and children from all forms of intimidation.

The deliberate destruction of cultural heritage is often intimately linked to the preparation and perpetration of mass atrocity crimes. Since culture constitutes an intrinsic part of identity, an attack on cultural heritage is consequently an attack on a particular people and their right to exist. In that regard, we support the involvement of UNESCO in implementing necessary programmes and actions aimed at protecting the cultural heritage of peoples, particularly in conflict settings, and rehabilitating and restoring monuments of cultural, religious and historical value.

Let me conclude by reiterating Armenia's support for advancing the prevention agenda through constructive dialogue with all stakeholders, including civil society, academia and youth organizations.

Mr. Mike (Hungary): At the outset, I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this formal debate.

It is my honour to speak on behalf of Hungary, which aligns itself with the statements delivered by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect (see A/76/PV.86). I wish to make a few observations in my national capacity.

Hungary welcomes this year's focus on children and young people in the annual report of the Secretary-General on the responsibility to protect (R2P) (A/76/844) and shares the Secretary-General's growing concerns with regard to the negative trend whereby the number of victims of atrocity crimes is increasing. Therefore, as a supporter of last year's resolution (resolution 75/277), Hungary highly appreciates the fact that the principle of R2P was afforded its rightful place on the agenda of the General Assembly. As a proud and active member of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect in New York and in Geneva, Hungary is fully committed to raising awareness on the issue at both the national and international levels.

At the international level, Member States should strengthen the United Nations response by adopting specific measures to improve internal United Nations coordination in the area of R2P. That is why Hungary strongly supports the work of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect. As this is the first debate since Mr. George Okoth-Obbo was appointed as the Special Adviser on R2P, we would especially like to welcome him and commend his efforts.

Hungary is fully committed to such international investigative and judicial organs 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 and the International Criminal Court, in order to end impunity and bring perpetrators to justice.

As a member of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency (ACT) group, Hungary supports efforts aimed at making the Security Council more efficient, inclusive and legitimate. We advocate voluntarily refraining from the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities, and we encourage all Member States to sign the code of conduct elaborated by the ACT group. We are proud that the General Assembly adopted by consensus the landmark resolution aimed at holding the five permanent members of the Security Council accountable for use of the veto (resolution 76/262).

As the ultimate guarantor of international peace and security, the Security Council has a major role to play in preventing and appropriately responding to mass atrocities. We keep on saying that the enhancement of the Security Council's performance by further improving its working methods and increasing its transparency is more essential than ever. Moreover, we are party to all important conventions related to mass atrocities and war crimes, and our commitment to the implementation of the principle of R2P remains strong. Our ultimate goal should be to ensure peaceful and secure living conditions for everyone in their homelands, without any possibility of being victims of atrocity crimes. However, that can be achieved only by tackling the root causes of conflict.

Let me mention some of the measures that the Hungarian Government is taking to better implement the principle of R2P at the national level.

Hungary deems it especially important that States place greater emphasis on prevention and early action through various measures, including early warning, political mediation, empowering the victims of crimes, enhancing domestic and international capacities for ending impunity, and finding new ways to ensure more effective compliance with international humanitarian law. In addition, there needs to be a focus on strengthening society. We are of the view that existing human rights mechanisms, together with the Human Rights Up Front initiative, can effectively contribute to timely action.

Hungary strongly supports utilizing the prevention mechanisms of the Human Rights Council. One of our priorities is to work towards the prevention of atrocity crimes by attributing special attention to the protection and promotion of fundamental rights, especially the rights of minorities, women and children.

Education is also a cornerstone of lasting peace. We need to protect schools, students and teachers from attacks. Not only does that ensure their safety today, but it is also key to securing the future of societies, especially those affected by armed conflicts. To that end, Hungary introduced the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship programme in 2014, which funds a full cycle of tertiary education in Hungary for international students from all over the world. In the framework of the programme, approximately 5,000 foreign students study in Hungary every year, a large percentage of whom come from conflict-affected regions.

The persecution of minorities around the world, many of whom are children, is of special concern to Hungary. We are engaged in helping children belonging to the Christian minority. The Government of Hungary launched a scholarship programme for young Christians experiencing persecution and discrimination. Furthermore, within the framework of the Hungary Helps programme, the Government provides humanitarian aid to restore educational and health infrastructures in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Nigeria, just to mention a few countries.

In conclusion, we truly believe that this fifth formal debate at the General Assembly offers an excellent opportunity to renew and enhance our pledge to build a stronger global partnership for the prevention of mass atrocities. We share the opinion that stronger political will is needed to make R2P a living reality. We can assure the Assembly that Hungary has the requisite will, and we will further continue to encourage others to implement the principle of R2P.

Mr. Hollis (United Kingdom): Let me begin by thanking Special Adviser Nderitu for her statement today (see A/76/PV.86). We also welcome Special Adviser Okoth-Obbo to his new role and wish him every success. Let me also thank the Secretary-General for his timely report (A/76/844) on advancing the responsibility to protect (R2P), with its focus on children and youth. It is a stark reminder of the challenge ahead, as well as the imperative for us to succeed. I will make three points today in this regard.

First, on the importance of the responsibility to protect and prevent mass atrocities, the world is facing alarming levels of violence and displacement, with children and youth disproportionately affected. Millions of children are suffering now, and millions more face the risk of mass atrocity crimes. Their safety, protection, dignity and welfare are fundamental to humanity, and the responsibility to protect provides a framework for helping them.

Young people are powerful agents of peace and security, and their voices must be heard and harnessed to inform atrocity-prevention efforts. Youth-led movements are demanding change to shape the world they will inherit.

All States can contribute to the prevention of atrocities by identifying drivers, triggers and risks of atrocity crimes, institutionalizing early-warning and prevention mechanisms, and by coming together to break this cycle of violence. As part of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, we support the United Nations in its efforts to get parties to conflict to enter into concrete action plans.

That takes me to my second point. We can no longer accept hesitation or inaction. Russia's unjustified and unprovoked attack on Ukraine has resulted in appalling and horrifying violations against children, including credible allegations of sexual violence by the Russian military. In Myanmar, abhorrent violence has been committed against children, with credible reports of the military regime killing and torturing children. In Syria, children born in the last decade have been subjected to terrible hunger, deprivation and violence. And in northern Ethiopia, the situation for women and girls remains deeply concerning, and there are reports of the continued use of sexual violence in western Tigray.

Those responsible for these atrocities must be held accountable whether through domestic prosecutions, the International Criminal Court or otherwise. The United Kingdom will do all it can to hold these criminals to account.

My third point is that the United Kingdom remains committed to atrocity prevention and response. Let me give a couple of examples. Last November, we launched a call to action to ensure the rights and well-being of children born of sexual violence in conflict. This is a first step in galvanizing international action to improve the situation for this vulnerable group. We call upon all States to endorse this call to action. In

addition, the United Kingdom is building international action on conflict-related sexual violence in a way that supports survivors and strengthens existing structures. In particular, we are seeking to strengthen the international legal architecture, build global political will, and drive action and best practice on accountability for relevant crimes.

In conclusion, there is a vocal minority that wishes to debunk the responsibility to protect by ignoring the unanimously agreed 2005 World Summit outcome document and by claiming falsely that it is a cover for illegal intervention. We must not let this distract us. Atrocity crimes are happening right now, and there are risks of further crimes elsewhere.

The responsibility to protect simply calls on us to seek to prevent and respond to these crimes. That is why the United Kingdom will call out atrocities and atrocity risks. We expect others to do so too, and, in this vein, we would like future reports of the Secretary-General on R2P to cover specific country situations. How can we protect children and youth from atrocities if we only speak about them in the abstract? We need practical case-by-case actions and not a debate about theory.

Mr. Kim (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): I express hope that the current plenary discussion on the agenda item entitled "The responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity" will be take place in conformity with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

My delegation takes this opportunity to make clear its position on the responsibility to protect (R2P), which is as follows. The responsibility to protect a people from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity falls entirely under the sovereignty of a State, and the international community should encourage and help States to fully exercise that responsibility. However, despite the absence of an intergovernmental agreement on the concept of the R2P, some Western countries continue to misuse and selectively apply this concept for their political reasons.

By its nature, the concept of R2P is a variation on the concept of humanitarian intervention, which was rejected by the international community in the past. Accordingly, it is nothing but a political instrument to ignore respect for sovereignty and the right to self-determination and allows for broad intervention in internal affairs of other sovereign States. We are deeply

concerned that, under the pretext of R2P, some Western countries unilaterally pursue political, economic and military interventions in order to target and undermine the social systems of other sovereign States.

Owing to the unlawful interference in internal affairs by the Western countries, such great upheavals as armed conflicts, terrorism, genocide and mass destruction are long standing in the Middle East and some African countries. As reality proves, it is self-evident that small and developing countries will fall victim to the R2P. Consequently, genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity are not attributable to a State's inadequate ability to protect its people, but to the flagrant infringement of the sovereignty of a sovereign State.

The sovereignty of a State is sacred. Respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in internal affairs of States is the cornerstone of international relations. R2P, which violates the aforementioned principles, is none other than a sophism to justify interference in the internal affairs of small and developing countries. If the United Nations, which is mandated to establish a fair international order based on sovereign equality, turns its face away from reality and continues to tolerate the false claims of Western countries, it will clearly trigger further miserable outcomes.

In conclusion, my delegation reiterates that the principles of respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs should be strictly observed, and the issue of R2P should be dealt with in keeping with the shared demands and interests of all States Members of the United Nations.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): We thank the President of the General Assembly for convening today's thematic debate on the responsibility to protect, and the Secretary-General for presenting his report on this item (A/76/844).

The concept of the responsibility to protect was reflected in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit outcome document. The scope of this responsibility was restricted to genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The primary responsibility for protection rests with the State concerned. Only if the national authorities manifestly fail to protect their population could the international community, acting through the Security Council, take collective action.

Unfortunately, after 17 years, there is still no consensus on the scope, application and modalities of the responsibility-to-protect concept. It is not difficult to discern the reasons why this concept has continued to be controversial. First, from the outset, the proponents of the concept have sought its application beyond the narrow parameters that were agreed in 2005 to reach violations other than those specifically enunciated in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the Summit outcome document. Secondly, the responsibility to protect has been sought to be applied in situations where it cannot be proven that despite its primary responsibility the State concerned has manifestly failed to offer protection to its own population against these listed crimes. Thirdly, any collective action must be authorized by the Security Council. As we know, some have continued to argue for the application of the responsibility to protect even in the absence of an express Security Council authorization. Such a dangerous interpretation assumes a right to intervene in the internal affairs of sovereign States. This is contrary to Article 2, paragraph 7 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Perhaps the most egregious aspect of this endeavour expand the grounds for intervention is its selectivity and double standards. While high-sounding pronouncements are made about the situations in some targeted countries, which are mostly developing or Islamic States, there is a complete silence with regard to other situations that clearly fall within the purview of paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 Summit declaration. One specific circumstance where those provisions would apply is in situations of foreign occupation or alien domination. Such situations are often rife with pressing human rights emergencies and can easily spiral into genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Yet, we have not heard from the concept's sponsors about the need for collective action to protect the people of occupied Palestine or of Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

For more than 7 decades, India has, through force and fraud, denied the right of self-determination to the Kashmiri people, in violation of multiple resolutions of the Security Council prescribing a free and fair plebiscite. India has continued to commit widespread and systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including war crimes and crimes against humanity in occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

Last year, Pakistan released a comprehensive and well-researched dossier covering accounts

corroborated by audio and video evidence of 3,432 cases of war crimes perpetrated by senior officers of Indian occupying forces in Jammu and Kashmir since 1989. The scale and magnitude of these crimes have increased manifold since India's illegal and unilateral actions from 5 August 2019 to impose what India's leaders have themselves ominously called "a final solution" for Jammu and Kashmir. Unfortunately, we have heard a deafening silence from the proponents of the responsibility to protect.

The concept of the responsibility to protect should also be invoked to prevent the danger of an impending genocide against the 200 million Muslims in India. There is a systematic campaign under way in India by the ruling adherents of Hindutva to suppress Muslims and eliminate the rich legacy of Islam in India. In this campaign, Muslims are murdered by lynch mobs, subjected to periodic pogroms and robbed of their livelihoods and citizenship, under the patronage and with the encouragement of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Government.

Most recently, hundreds of thousands of Muslims who took to the streets to protest the Indian Government's complicity in the denigration of and insults to the Holy Prophet of Islam (Peace Be Upon Him). These protesters have been arbitrarily arrested, and their homes have been unlawfully bulldozed as a form of collective punishment. Noticing this dangerous trend in India, Professor Gregory Stanton, the founder of Genocide Watch, has warned that a genocide of Muslims could very well happen in India.

These Indian crimes fall squarely within the ambit of the World Summit's decisions on the responsibility to protect. We call upon the international community, in particular the proponents of the responsibility to protect, to come forward and offer protection to the people of Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir and to the oppressed minorities, especially the Muslim minority, in India.

In conclusion, universal and consistent adherence to the purposes and principles set forth in the United Nations Charter is imperative to ensuring the legitimacy of such doctrines as the responsibility to protect and to upholding universal accountability and justice for all, particularly in relations to systematic violations of human rights and international law. Justice and protection cannot be selective and blind.

Mr. Lagos Valle (Honduras) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, I would like to express my country's pleasure at the holding once again of a formal debate on the responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It is a unique opportunity for the States Members of the United Nations to promote dialogue on actions to implement the responsibility to protect on the basis of the 2005 World Summit outcome document. Allow me to express my country's appreciation and welcome the report of Secretary-General António Guterres entitled "Responsibility to protect: prioritizing children and young people" (A/76/844), and the work of the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect.

We may have made it to the twenty-first century, but the human condition remains the same. We stand at this podium to address those heinous crimes against human dignity itself, always with the hope that the United Nations system will be an alternative in the maintenance of peace. In these difficult times that humankind is facing owing to the coronavirus disease pandemic, where vulnerabilities have worsened, as the Secretary-General mentions in his report, Honduras believes that it is necessary to strengthen international cooperation to respond to the great challenges of protection currently facing developing countries and prioritize respect for universal human rights, international humanitarian law and the rights of refugees and migrants. Similarly, the responsibility to protect should not be dissociated from the efforts made to achieve true sustainable peace, ensuring the full participation of women, girls, boys and young people in all spheres of society, specifically in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

In compliance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and my country's commitment to the protection of fundamental human rights and the maintenance of international peace and security, Honduras has joined the Secretary-General's calls for a global ceasefire, as it is convinced that a peaceful situation is indispensable, particularly amid a global health crisis and its serious impact on the most vulnerable groups. As a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and their Additional Protocols, Honduras is unequivocally committed to protecting the rights of children both in times of peace and during armed conflict.

For my country, the responsibility to protect is a priority, and children and young people are at the centre of efforts aimed at preventing any of these atrocities. The Government of Honduras is currently crafting public policies for socioeconomic inclusion and equality with the direct participation of children and young people. Likewise, a public policy is being created with the objective of preventing and reducing the migration of unaccompanied children, ensuring protection measures, social reintegration and generation of opportunities for returnees so as to improve their quality of life.

Likewise, joint actions are being carried out within the public sector, including the National Congress of Honduras, the Government's Human Rights, Security and Defence Secretariats, academia and civil society. My country has incorporated the topic of genocide and prevention of mass atrocities in the training curriculum for public servants and members of the Armed Forces of Honduras. Training materials have also been published with a focus on the prevention of discrimination in this area. It is also important to note that Honduras is part of and actively participates in the Latin American Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention, an initiative focused on the development of public policies at the regional level in the area of human rights and the fight against discrimination, with a special focus on the prevention of atrocities.

Mr. Seah (Singapore): At the outset, allow me to join others in expressing sympathy to Afghanistan for the lives lost to yesterday's earthquake.

I thank the Secretary-General for his report entitled "Responsibility to Protect: prioritizing children and youth" (A/76/844), which considers the special needs of children and youth in the context of atrocity crimes. This report is both timely and substantive, as the world is unfortunately witnessing a dramatic increase in the frequency and scale of mass atrocity crimes.

Singapore has been a member of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect since the group was established. We joined because we subscribe to the core principle of the responsibility to protect (R2P), that fundamentally it is the responsibility of each State to protect its own population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It is also important that the international community be prepared to take collective action in a timely and decisive manner to help protect populations against

such crimes, should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to do so.

Its core principle, namely, that each country must protect its population from atrocity crimes, seems to state the obvious. However, nearly two decades after the adoption of the 2005 World Summit outcome document, consensus on R2P is tenuous at best. History has shown us that it is difficult, if not impossible, to reach consensus on whether and how the international community can take timely and decisive action. It is difficult for the normative agenda of R2P to advance if the concept is undermined to serve the interests of one country or a group of countries.

It is in this context that Singapore would like to recall and restate our understanding of the three pillars of R2P that form the foundation of our debate today. First, the primary responsibility for the protection of populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity rests with States. National Governments cannot abdicate their responsibility to protect their citizens. Instability and extremism flourish when the needs and aspirations of citizens are not met. Singapore places significant emphasis on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16, on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. We are committed to building an inclusive and harmonious society regardless of race and religion and to guard against fault lines that could emerge from within or without.

Secondly, the international community has a responsibility to support States in their national efforts to improve resilience. In line with the Secretary-General's vision for a network multilateralism, the United Nations, regional organizations and civil society must work together to build the necessary institutions and capacities for a resilient and inclusive society. Prevention is better than cure. We must collectively ensure that the conditions for instability and conflict never arise in the first place.

This leads me to the third pillar of R2P, namely, that the international community has a responsibility to protect when a national authority has manifestly failed to protect its population. Small States such as Singapore look to the Security Council to live up to its global responsibility to maintain international peace and security. Unfortunately, the veto has been used too often in the past to prevent action to address crimes of atrocity at the cost of innocent lives. We welcome initiatives calling on members of the Security Council

to respond to and address the risk of atrocity crimes, including the code of conduct of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group and the French-Mexican initiative on the use of the veto in case of mass atrocities. Singapore was also pleased to co-sponsor the resolution to create a standing mandate for the General Assembly to hold a debate whenever a veto is cast in the Security Council (resolution 76/262). That would ensure greater transparency and accountability each time a vote is cast by a permanent member.

Singapore calls on the permanent members of the Security Council to make a commitment to refraining from using the veto to block Council action aimed at preventing or ending genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. That would not only signal the resolve of the Council to address mass atrocity crimes but would also enhance the credibility and legitimacy of the Council.

Mr. Keçeli (Türkiye): At the outset, we would like to extend our condolences to the people of Afghanistan.

At the 2005 World Summit, Member States made a landmark commitment with respect to their responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This plenary meeting provides an invaluable opportunity to take stock of our ongoing efforts to implement the promise that we all made 17 years ago.

At a time when atrocities committed in various corners of the world continue to cause unprecedented human suffering, it is vital that the international community address the occurrence of such crimes. Therefore, we supported the inclusion of the responsibility to protect as a standing agenda item of the General Assembly last year.

We thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report (A/76/844), which constitutes a solid basis for our deliberations today. We welcome the report's focus on children and youth, who are uniquely and often disproportionately affected by conflict and atrocities. We also appreciate the report reiterating the importance of prevention and highlighting priorities that could be transformative for the protection of children and youth.

Indeed, prevention is one of the most effective instruments in our toolbox. With that understanding, my country leads mediation efforts not only in the United Nations but also through regional and bilateral initiatives.

When efforts for prevention do not prevail, United Nations organs, including the Security Council, must remain ready to assume their responsibilities as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. We hope that the discussions on the responsibility to protect and its implementation will also contribute to the efforts aimed at restraining the use of veto in the Security Council when mass atrocities are in question.

As highlighted in the report, incitement to violence and hate speech are risk factors and potential early-warning indicators of atrocity crimes. Unfortunately, hate speech, racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia are on a disturbing rise throughout the world. Those threats require urgent action at both the national and international levels.

As to the protection of children and youth during armed conflicts, we need to step up our efforts to ensure that the United Nations country task forces on monitoring and reporting on grave violations against children have adequate resources to fulfil their mandate. We also need to ensure that child-protection provisions and capacity are included in all relevant mandates of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions.

Meeting the fundamental humanitarian needs of children in conflicts and emergencies, including the provision of health-care and education services, must be one of our main priorities. Türkiye, for its part, is taking all necessary measures to alleviate the suffering of children fleeing armed conflict in its region and beyond.

The responsibility to protect is yet to be an established norm of international law. Its definition, scope and implementation need to be defined and refined. Efforts in that regard should be based on the widest possible consensus among the international community and should not be carried out in such a way as to reinterpret or renegotiate the well-established principles of international law and the existing legal framework.

The crimes of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity are well-defined legal concepts. We should implement the relevant legal framework in a faithful and consistent manner. We therefore call on all Member States that have not done so to consider becoming a party to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which is the key international instrument in that field.

Mr. Gatete (Rwanda): Rwanda aligns itself with the statement delivered by His Excellency Ambassador Rodrigo Carazo, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica, on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, and we also appreciate the statement of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide (see A/76/PV.86).

It is fitting that we are gathered here to discuss the responsibility to protect at a time when the world is being confronted with unprecedented levels of violence, precursors to genocide and mass atrocities.

Since 2005, Member States have taken important steps to strengthen their responsibility to protect at both the international and domestic levels. Since 2011, the Security Council has also invoked the responsibility to protect when authorizing measures to protect civilians. More than 75 resolutions invoking the international community's responsibility to protect have been adopted by the Council since 2006.

Despite those efforts, a big gap remains between words and deeds, and mass atrocity crimes continue to be committed. All too often the effectiveness of the United Nations in responding to mass atrocity situations is hampered by partisan political interests.

Last week, the Office of the Human Rights Council and the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect released a statement expressing concern about the proliferation of hate speech targeting Rwandaphones and Congolese Tutsi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That statement was echoed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Bintou Keita, Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Those followed the statement issued by Rwanda during the 31 May Security Council meeting on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (see S/PV.9051).

As we have observed in the last few weeks, on numerous social media outlets and on the ultra-xenophobic Beni Lubero online local platform, hate messages, images and videos have been posted targeting Congolese Tutsi by civilians, professionals, intellectuals, Government officials, military personnel and clergymen. We have witnessed calls for killing and extermination, intimidation and stigmatization, xenophobic and inflammatory rhetoric, genocide ideology and political manipulation targeting Congolese

Tutsi, in particular Rwandans in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In response to those calls for violence, individuals believed to be Tutsi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are being heavily stigmatized and assaulted as well. A specific example is the murder in May of a group of Hema in northern Democratic Republic of the Congo suspected of being Tutsi. A few days ago, the popular singer Shako, based in Goma, released a song called “Rwandans Must Go Home”. And less than two weeks ago, an extremist group opposed to Tutsi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo organized a march in Kinshasa that was attended by tens of thousands of people, including from civil society, brandishing signs that read “Rwandans must go home”. That march was directly followed by individuals burning churches and businesses owned by Congolese Tutsi.

The Belgian-based KoPax organization marched in Kinshasa on 30 May, and during that march they burned Rwandan flags along the way. Last weekend, a group of young people calling themselves the Special Brigade, which is the ruling party youth brigade, roamed the streets of Kinshasa holding machetes in search of Congolese Tutsi. That was on almost every channel that could be watched internationally. Also, a week ago a Tutsi Congolese man was lynched in Kalima. Those are just a few tragic events that encapsulate the dangerous implications of hate speech.

In view of the aforementioned, Rwanda welcomes the outcomes of the Heads of State meeting held in Nairobi on 20 June, last Monday, which called on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to cease the use of all offensive language, hate speech, threats of genocide and other inflammatory language, with immediate effect. We all know that incitement to violence, discrimination and hostility are precursors to genocide crimes. In that regard, we call on States Members of the United Nations to establish strong legal procedures to prevent and criminalize hate speech and genocide ideology. The United Nations must do more, and sooner, to expose such human rights violations and seek justice for their victims.

For Rwanda, the prioritization of genocide prevention remains as critical as ever. Rwanda knows that peacekeeping, when done with a clear mandate for the protection of civilians, helps to create an environment for the prevention of atrocity crimes and allows for political solutions to conflicts.

Rwanda’s commitment to United Nations peacekeeping and the protection of civilians, wherever we are called to serve, is informed by the tragic history of the failure of the United Nations to prevent and stop the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. In that regard, we call on MONUSCO to step up efforts to protect the vulnerable populations that are being persecuted.

Atrocity crimes do not happen overnight. They are not spontaneous or isolated events. They are processes with histories, precursors and triggering factors that, combined, enable their commission. Given the alarming rise in atrocity crimes globally and the specific risk of genocide against the targeted communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda expresses its full support for the work of the Special Advisers on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. We call on the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect to issue statements on specific country situations and to regularly share its analysis of various developing crises with the wider United Nations membership and share recommendations on atrocity prevention. We call also on the Secretary-General to make concrete recommendations to the Security Council on substantial actions to prevent genocide in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Let me conclude by stating that the debate today compels us not only to reflect on but also to uphold our collective responsibility to protect. Rwanda believes that the protection of vulnerable communities should be at the heart of our shared and common mission.

Mr. Geisler (Germany): Germany aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and the statement delivered on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect (see A/76/PV.86).

Seventeen years ago, we as the international community unanimously agreed on the principle of the responsibility to protect and on our joint responsibility to save populations from genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

We thank the Secretary-General for his latest report (A/76/844). We also thank the Secretary-General’s two Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect for their leadership. We join others in welcoming the new Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect. We look forward to working with Mr. Okoth-Obbo in the years to come.

Despite the various commitments and promises made, children and young people continue to be caught

up in conflicts and to fall victim to atrocity crimes across the world. Pictures of children killed, of child soldiers, for example, in West Africa and East Africa in the 1990s horrified us and are deeply engraved in our collective memories. It was a major step forward in international justice and cooperation that perpetrators of such despicable crimes have been brought to justice.

Thirty years later, atrocity crimes against children still occur around the globe. From Yemen to Afghanistan, from Syria to Myanmar, the latest report on children and armed conflict lists a total of 21 situations of concern, a number that is far too high and likely to increase in the coming years.

Allow me to say a few words on Ukraine.

Russian troops have killed a significant number of Ukrainian children. They have destroyed schools and hospitals. Russian officials recently admitted that more than 300,000 children had been evacuated since the beginning of the war. Reports suggesting that that happened against their will are extremely disturbing and must be scrutinized.

In the meantime, Russian officials keep denying Ukraine the right to exist. Many examples from history teach us that the worst atrocity crimes, including genocides, begin with words. Germany, therefore, will remain extremely vigilant in order to prevent a genocide from happening and remains staunchly committed to bringing Russian perpetrators to justice.

The developments in Ukraine remind us that we need to do more to protect children and youth from atrocity crimes not only in Ukraine but all around the world. First and foremost, we must strengthen prevention. We agree with the Secretary-General's assessment that the most effective way to guarantee the safety of children and youth from atrocity crimes is to prevent such crimes from occurring in the first place.

To that end, it is imperative to strengthen the global protection of human rights. The children and armed conflict mandate is crucial in that regard, and we thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Virginia Gamba de Potgieter for her tireless efforts and important work.

We agree with the Secretary-General that Member States should put effective early-warning systems in place that include the collection of age- and gender-specific data. We encourage the Secretary-General to include recommendations for responses, including

for country-specific situations, in future reports. We encourage the two Special Advisers to advance atrocity prevention and highlight atrocity risks throughout the world.

Strengthening accountability is both a critical deterrent for future perpetrators and a necessary response to the atrocity crimes already committed. Germany will remain committed to supporting and funding international accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court and commissions of inquiry.

I also commend all collectors of evidence for their important work.

Mr. Ipo (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting and to congratulate the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, on his edifying report on the responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (A/76/844).

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect (see A/76/PV.86) and would like to add the following comments in its national capacity.

According to the available statistics, the Second World War was the most lethal military conflict in history, with more than 80 million people killed, which represents more than 2.5 per cent of the world population at the time. That sad human toll led to the establishment of the United Nations, with the promise to save succeeding and present generations from the scourge of war.

Despite the notable progress made, the United Nations is still hampered by conflicts of interest and ideology that jeopardize the promise of international peace and security. Unfortunately, this year's debate is taking place in a context marked by security challenges, giving rise to the commission of mass atrocities and the mass displacement of populations. Children pay the highest price for that, separated from their parents and used as sexual objects, forced to work or to support war efforts and deprived of education and health care as a result of population displacement or the destruction of schools and public health infrastructure. They are enrolled as fighters and forced to commit all kinds of atrocities.

In that context, it is vital that we act to protect humankind from tragedies such as those that took place in Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990s.

In an interconnected world that is increasingly faced with hate speech and violence, young people can still play a key role in the prevention of conflicts, particularly by helping to strengthen early-warning and awareness-raising mechanisms. Schools and educational programmes based on a culture of tolerance, human rights and international humanitarian law and the empowerment of young people could also help to strengthen the prevention of conflicts and mass atrocities.

On 30 March 2011, fully taking into account the atrocities that had taken place in my country following the 2010 presidential elections, through resolution 1975 (2011) the Security Council authorized an operation that allowed for peace to be restored. Moreover, on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect, in 2012 Côte d'Ivoire demonstrated its commitment to those principles through its actions and its support for the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect.

My country's support for that principle was also reiterated in its resolute participation, with military and police units, in peacekeeping operations in Mali, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to mention just a few.

If, in the case of the commission of mass atrocities, the use of force authorized by the United Nations is justified, that is the best way to properly implement the principle of the responsibility to protect. To that end, the United Nations could rely on regional organizations, as well as civil society, by strengthening their operational capacities, while also making use of national and international accountability mechanisms, which is a clear way to prevent the commission of atrocities. In that regard, we can limit the use of coercive force, whose deployment is costly in financial and human terms and does not always enjoy consensus within the international community.

In conclusion, I would like to note that, in addition to the budgetary constraints faced by the United Nations, troops are sacrificed to protect humankind from atrocity crimes. We should therefore heed the current reductions in the peacekeeping budget to ensure that we

do not lose that valuable tool for the implementation of the responsibility to protect.

Ms. Rompoti (Greece): Greece aligns itself with the statement by the representative of the European Union (EU), in its capacity as observer (see A/76/PV.86), and would like to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

At the outset, we would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report "Responsibility to protect: prioritizing children and young people" (A/76/844/), and we urge him to continue prioritizing the prevention of atrocity crimes. We also express our full support for the work of the Special Advisers to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect.

On the occasion of the fifth formal General Assembly meeting on the responsibility to protect (R2P), I would like to reiterate Greece's commitment to the protection of populations affected by genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

By nature and definition, R2P aims to protect populations against atrocity crimes. As such, it is an expression of multilateralism par excellence and occupies a central place in our common effort to promote international peace and security.

Greece spares no effort, both at the national level and in the framework of collective action and as a member of international organizations, to offer assistance to countries that need to protect their citizens from atrocity crimes. We will keep on that track. We also recognize the decisive role that the Security Council can play in the case that populations become victims of such crimes, and invite it to act accordingly.

Given that atrocity crimes are triggered and exacerbated by a practically inexhaustible number of factors, ranging from war, political instability, forced displacement, irregular migration and hate speech to pandemics, gender discrimination, famine, extreme poverty and severe energy shortages, our response should be firm and holistic.

First, prevention remains key to the elimination of such crimes and our primary responsibility through the promotion of international humanitarian law and human rights. However, in cases where we do not succeed in preventing atrocities, the promotion of justice and accountability should be the only alternative

in order to make sure that no crime and no perpetrator goes unpunished.

Although atrocity crimes do not discriminate against their victims, we are particularly concerned about the well-being of the most vulnerable groups, such as children and young people, and, in that regard, we support international tools and mechanisms aimed at their protection. Moreover, we firmly believe that children and young people can leave their imprint on reshaping society and leading it into the future. We therefore developed two national action plans — one on children and the other on young people, aimed at their well-being and empowerment.

In conclusion, I wish to reassure Member States that, in tandem with its EU partners, Greece will keep supporting the promotion and operationalization of the responsibility to protect, as well as the protection of, and full respect for, the rights of children and young people.

Mr. Musayev (Azerbaijan): At the outset, I would like to thank the President for convening this meeting. I also thank the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide for presenting the report (A/76/844) (see A/76/PV.86).

The report recalls the commitments made, and repeatedly reaffirmed, by States to ensure protection, advance the prevention agenda and develop normative and institutional frameworks. As the Secretary-General has noted, the responsibility to protect is, in essence, a restatement of commitments already enshrined in international law.

We take note of the priorities identified in the report to protect children and young people from atrocity crimes and to provide guidance for the international community in supporting national Governments in meeting their responsibility to protect. As civilians, including children and young people, continue to be targeted by, and caught up in, atrocity crimes, effective prevention and protection remain a constant global challenge and an ongoing imperative.

Hate propaganda, coupled with policies aimed at sowing dissension on religious and racial grounds, building mono-ethnic societies and promoting the ideas of ethnic incompatibility and supremacy, fuel identity-based intolerance, destabilize societies and increase the risk of atrocity crimes. It is critical that the United Nations continues to promote a culture of tolerance and respect, while mobilizing the world against racism

and confronting hatred of all kinds and incitement to discrimination and violence.

The topic under discussion is of particular importance for my country and for our region as a whole. In the late 1980s, all Azerbaijanis — more than 200,000 people — were expelled from their historical homeland in Armenia. Hundreds were brutally killed; the property of those expelled was seized; they were not allowed to return; and the Azerbaijani historical and cultural heritage was consistently and deliberately eradicated.

Those actions were followed by a full-scale war, unleashed by Armenia against Azerbaijan in the early 1990s, at the core of which were the aggressor's ultranationalist ideology, fabricated historical narratives and misinterpretation of international law. As a consequence, a significant part of my country's territory was seized and remained under unlawful occupation for nearly 30 years, notwithstanding the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The aggression was accompanied by multiple war crimes, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians and massive ethnic cleansing and cultural erasure of the occupied areas. Thousands of Azerbaijani civilians were executed in acts of mass murder.

In February 1992, a horrific massacre was committed in the town of Khojaly, where hundreds of Azerbaijani civilians, including children, were brutally killed within a few hours by invading Armenian forces. That tragedy, which independent experts recognized as the largest and the worst single atrocity of the war, was condemned internationally as a crime against humanity and an act of genocide. The scale, frequency and timing of violations demonstrate that they were not isolated acts but were part of a widespread and systematic policy of atrocities aimed at terrorizing, killing and expelling Azerbaijanis based on ethnic animus.

The deliberate tactic of targeting the civilian population was used again by Armenian forces in the course of hostilities in the autumn of 2020. Direct and indiscriminate missile attacks, which struck Azerbaijani cities and districts, including with the use of internationally banned cluster bombs, killed and wounded hundreds of civilians and destroyed numerous civilian objects.

The 44-day war put an end to 30 years of aggression, occupation and ethnic cleansing. The liberated territories provided compelling evidence as to the range, variety and consistency of violations of

international law. During the years of occupation, most of the cities, towns and villages of Azerbaijan were razed to the ground. Thousands of cultural objects and religious sites were looted, vandalized and destroyed.

Mass graves were found in the liberated territories. However, the fate of almost 4,000 citizens of Azerbaijan who went missing in connection with the conflict remains unknown. Among them are 719 civilians, including 71 children. Armenia refrains from clarifying the whereabouts of the missing persons who fell into its hands but have not been seen since.

Moreover, despite the end of the conflict, many civilians were killed or injured by mine explosions. Armenia refuses to share accurate and comprehensive information about the hundreds of thousands of landmines that it laid on Azerbaijan's territory, thereby continuing to deliberately and indiscriminately target civilian lives.

With the exception of a few individuals brought to justice by Azerbaijan for war crimes and terrorist and mercenary activities, most of the perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity, as Armenia fails to prosecute and punish them and offer redress for its breaches.

Furthermore, Armenia has taken no action to prevent anti-Azerbaijani hatred and disinformation and to prohibit and punish racist hate groups, formed for the specific purpose of inciting and committing violence, from and for operating openly and notoriously on its territory, instead defending and supporting them, in violation of international law and in apparent disregard for the order on provisional measures adopted by the International Court of Justice on 7 December 2021.

Accountability is undeniable and must be an inevitable consequence of the offences committed to ensure justice and prevent the resurgence of conflicts and the commission of new offences. It is critically important that the international community insist on accountability for atrocity crimes, as required under the international law of State responsibility, international humanitarian law, international human rights law and international criminal law.

Azerbaijan is determined to continue efforts towards advancing post-conflict peacebuilding, reconciliation, reintegration, peaceful coexistence and development in the region, as well as ensuring justice and preventing and eliminating, by all legitimate means, any threats to the safety and well-being of its people and the State's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Mr. Kulháněk (Czech Republic): The Czech Republic aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, and on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect (see A/76/PV.86). As a member of the core group on last year's resolution 75/277, on the responsibility to protect (R2P), Czechia is particularly pleased to speak at this meeting today.

My country has been a staunch supporter of the responsibility to protect since its inception. As we all know, the 2005 World Summit unanimously adopted its Outcome Document (resolution 60/1), which enshrines the R2P principle in its paragraphs 138 and 139.

However, it is of great concern to us that, given the current state of affairs in the world, R2P is no less relevant now than it was 17 years ago. Our world faces an alarming number of conflicts, violent takeovers and, indeed, even military invasions of neighbouring countries. A conflict sometimes stems from long-lasting impunity, a legacy of atrocities and the persecution of minorities. A case in point is the military coup in Myanmar, which led to the horrific and indiscriminate violence against the civilian population, and it continues to this day.

It is also worth noting that, in some cases, the pretext of the need to protect the population against genocide is given as a feeble justification for an invasion and atrocity crimes. The atrocities committed by the Russian forces in Bucha and Borodyanka are all too real. Accountability for such crimes is the best prevention of further atrocities.

Let us put aside our political differences and focus on protecting civilian populations on the ground, as we all agreed in the 2005 Outcome Document. While States have the primary responsibility for protecting their citizens, there are several things that we, as the international community, can do.

First, the United Nations system must better assist Member States in implementing their human rights obligations and increase their capacity to meet such obligations. The role of the Universal Periodic Review, special procedures, mandate holders and other mechanisms play a crucial role in prevention and early warning. Furthermore, such efforts must be adequately funded.

Secondly, in order to remain relevant for the people on ground, the Security Council must use all means at its disposal to respond to crisis situations to

protect civilians and support peace processes without undue politicization.

Thirdly, let us create a safe and enabling environment for civil society at the national, regional and international levels. Civil society and human rights defenders are often the most exposed in crisis situations.

Lastly, in his report (A/76/844), the Secretary-General not only highlights the risks children and youth face in conflict and fragile settings, but he also pointed out the potential that they have to achieve a peaceful future if they are protected and empowered. Ensuring prevention, monitoring and accountability for grave violations against children is the bare minimum that all of us can do in terms of protection. Education can then play its role in fostering better informed and more inclusive, respectful and therefore more resilient societies for the future.

Ms. Mudallali (Lebanon): Before I start, I would like to express my heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims, especially the children, of the earthquake in Afghanistan, and appeal to everyone in this Hall who is able to send aid to Afghanistan.

We are meeting in this Hall today to discuss the report of the Secretary-General (A/76/844) and answer the call of world leaders who met at the United Nations in 2005 and pledged their political commitment to end the worst forms of violence, persecution and genocide. They acknowledged the world's responsibility to protect vulnerable populations. The world leaders conferred a responsibility upon us when they stressed the need for the General Assembly to continue consideration of the responsibility to protect (R2P).

I am honoured to be in this Hall to participate in this conversation. Despite all the speeches and the debates, since its inception, we have not succeeded in protecting the vulnerable, and the world has failed in upholding that responsibility. The responsibility to protect is a noble idea born of the twentieth century's cruel wars and genocides, but its objectives are rooted in the principles and purposes of the Organization and the Charter of the United Nations. The responsibility to protect is also like the United Nations itself, which, in the words of the second Secretary-General, Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld,

“was not created in order to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell” (SG/382).

Since 2005, when the historic World Summit produced an outcome document warning that the

world is watching, the number of perpetrators, conflicts, crimes and violations of international law and international humanitarian law has increased, not abated. Unfortunately, the world has not protected those in need or prevented atrocities and genocide.

Today, despite all the expressions of the goodwill and commitment by a large number of countries around the world to R2P, crimes continue because the political and economic pillars of a peaceful and prosperous world are shaking. Democracy is in retreat. There is a rise in nationalism. Multilateralism is being challenged every day. Conflicts are raging. Respect for international law is waning, and journalists and human rights defenders are targeted and killed. In addition to all of that, we live in a post-truth world where fake news and disinformation are disrupting societies and national narratives.

The Security Council, which is entrusted with safeguarding peace and security in the world, is mostly gridlocked when it comes to stopping or preventing conflicts. Where should we go from here? Despite the gloomy picture, this is not the time to get discouraged; it is time to double down on R2P. This is exactly when people need it: when victims cling to the words of the world leaders who met in the General Assembly and promised them protection. They continue to look up to the Organization to save them.

In the outcome document, world leaders made each State responsible,

“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” (*resolution 60/1, para 138*).

They entrusted the international community to encourage and help States to exercise this responsibility. They also supported the United Nations in establishing an early-warning capability.

There seems to be a convergence of two principles set forth in the outcome document: helping States and supporting the establishment of a United Nations early-warning system. The document reminds us that the primary responsibility for protecting people rests with States, but everyone is asking the question: what happens if the State is the perpetrator of such crimes against its population? Who protects those populations?

That brings us to the controversial third pillar of R2P — translating that responsibility into action. This pillar raises concerns about the sovereignty of States and non-intervention in their domestic affairs. The issue of sovereignty is sacred to the overwhelming majority of States, as it should be. But, as former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon argued, sovereignty and responsibility are mutually reinforcing principles, and the United Nations can assert its moral authority when appropriate (see A/63/PV.96). There is a very clear consensus that any response to protect populations should be through the United Nations using appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with the Charter. The document advocates collective action in a timely and decisive manner through the Security Council on a case-by-case basis. It also advocates helping States build capacities to protect their populations.

But in discharging the responsibility to protect, it is very important that there is no abuse of the concept or any change of mandate or objective as we move forward. The goals should be clear, and those pursuing them should adhere religiously to its mandate. Regional organizations and actors should be given a leading role in any effort because nothing compares to local knowledge and ownership. Involving civil society is also an important element in any effort to protect and prevent conflict. In addition, reaching consensus among the international community is critical to success.

The responsibility to protect should no longer be confined to war crimes and ethnic cleansing. There are new threats posed to States and populations that are economic and financial in nature, and they lead to human rights abuses and conflict. The prevention of the economic collapse of such States should be one of the aims of R2P. Bad governance and corruption that rob people of their lives and dignity should fall under R2P. A population under the mercy of a State destroying its economic and financial well-being deserves protection.

The R2P response is very clearly in the hands of the Security Council, but, when the Security Council fails to uphold its responsibility or goes outside the principles of the Charter, who protects populations and saves lives? There are new efforts in the General Assembly to play a more assertive role in holding the Security Council accountable, especially when cases of atrocities and crimes against humanity and human rights are at stake.

In that regard, Lebanon has supported the French-Mexican initiative on limiting the use of the veto and the code of conduct of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group on the Security Council's response to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Recent resolution 76/262 on the use of the veto is one example of the General Assembly telling the Security Council that we will not stand for genocide or crimes against humanity and that Council members must explain their use of the veto to block action that would otherwise protect populations. The 10 non-elected members in the Security Council could also play a more active role in making the responsibility to protect a reality in the Council and put it in practice.

Prevention is at the heart of the Secretary-General's agenda. In the outcome document, world leaders advocated prevention. The United Nations can work seriously on establishing the early-warning system that world leaders entrusted it to do in 2005. How can we prevent conflicts if we lack the intelligence, analysis or human assets that raise the alarm and put people on notice?

The responsibility to protect is a promise whose time has come. In order to live in a more peaceful world, we need to prevent that which makes it more violent. We all have responsibility to protect the vulnerable and be one another's saviours. The time for talk has long passed. It is time to act. It is time to protect in a responsible way.

Mr. Chatrnúch (Slovakia): At the outset, I would like to thank Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide Alice Wairimu Nderitu for her introductory remarks (see A/76/PV.86) and welcome Mr. George Okoth-Obbo, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect.

Slovakia allies itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, and of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, respectively (see A/76/PV.86). I will add a few remarks in my national capacity.

Slovakia welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (A/76/844) focused on prioritizing children and youth. This emphasis fully corresponds with Slovakia's own foreign policy priorities, as demonstrated by our country's current vice-presidency of the Executive Board of UNICEF. We fully concur with the Secretary-General that prevention is the most important part of

the responsibility to protect populations from atrocity crimes. I would like to emphasize in particular the importance of establishing an early-warning system both at the national and international levels. The 2014 Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes is a critical tool in that regard.

However, the rise of digital technologies and use of the Internet have significantly altered the environment in which atrocities happen, increasing in particular the vulnerability of children and youth. Therefore, Slovakia fully endorses the plan to update the Framework and reflect on those and other developments. In order to facilitate the prevention of atrocity crimes, early-warning information must feed into processes that will enable an adequate response,

In the absence of a response at the local or national level, the Security Council must be able to take action. In that context, we recall the code of conduct of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group and the French-Mexican initiative involving the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities.

Another important element of prevention is the proper implementation of existing international criminal law and of human rights law obligations. While strong and robust domestic legislation criminalizing atrocity crimes primarily imposes individual criminal responsibility, it also pursues filling the specific and general function of prevention, thereby deterring any further violation. In terms of international regulations, Slovakia recognizes the legal gap created by the lack of a comprehensive treaty on crimes against the humanity and therefore strongly urges all Member States to take a step towards the elaboration of such a convention this fall.

If efforts to prevent atrocities are not successful, perpetrators of atrocities will have to be brought to justice. Universal access to justice and non-selective accountability are key if we want to ensure the protection of all individuals, including children, against discrimination, exclusion and other human rights violations. In this regard, I would like to emphasize the role of the International Criminal Court as an independent and impartial judicial body stepping in where national jurisdictions are unable or unwilling to investigate and prosecute atrocity crimes. Slovakia takes this opportunity to reiterate its call on all Member States that have not yet done so to ratify the Rome Statute and its amendments.

As the representative of the European Union said today, prevention is key to guaranteeing the safety of children and youth from atrocity crimes. But the converse also applies: children and youth are equally crucial to preventing atrocity crimes. They can become champions of and have a critical role to play in detecting the early-warning signs of atrocities — as well as in reconciliation — in their educational and social environments and through social media. Their meaningful inclusion in those processes is therefore imperative.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention the situation in our neighbouring country, Ukraine, where atrocities are being committed, as we speak, including against innocent children and young people. There is, however, an easy and quick way to prevent their further commission: the immediate cessation of Russian military activities in Ukraine and the unconditional withdrawal of all Russian troops from the entire territory of that country. We urge Russia to do so.

Lastly, I would like to express Slovakia's enduring support for the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect.

Mr. Fox Drummond Cançado Trindade (Brazil): I would like to thank the Secretary-General, as well as the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, for this year's report (A/76/844) on prioritizing children and youth in the context of the responsibility to protect (R2P). Let me also welcome the Secretariat's initiative of consulting Member States on their preferences for the theme of this year's report.

We are proud to have co-sponsored last year's resolution 75/277, which included the item on the responsibility to protect in the agenda of the General Assembly. The resolution confirmed that the General Assembly is the main locus to discuss R2P. It also reflected the recognition that there is a need to collectively discuss the protection of populations from R2P crimes, which provides us with the opportunity to take stock on our progress and to assess where we have failed and how to correct the course.

The Secretary-General's annual report provides guidance on a key issue: the protection of children and youth from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. That requires the proper observance of obligations of international law, including international humanitarian law, international

human rights law and international refugee law. It also involves the promotion of socioeconomic inclusion and equality, as well as the mobilization of adequate resources to assist Member States in mainstreaming the prevention and protection of children in their policies, particularly in peacebuilding strategies.

The report highlights the distressing reality faced by children and youth at risk of becoming the victims of R2P crimes. In particular, it points out the dire situation of children who have been forcibly displaced owing to armed conflict. Children account for more than 40 per cent of all forcibly displaced people. Stateless, refugee and displaced children are at a higher risk of facing violations and abuses and have limited access to basic services. The report also presents worrisome data on most of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict, as well as its specific impacts on girls.

The Secretary-General's report demonstrates the need to prioritize long-term strategies based on prevention, which forms the basis for the first and second pillars of R2P implementation. The report rightly focuses on the collection of data and information, the observance of international instruments related to the protection of children and youth, the promotion of socioeconomic inclusion and the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the critical role of the education sector and the importance of accountability as a deterrent for future crimes.

However, Brazil wishes to register its concern that, once again, the Secretary-General's report adopted the expression "atrocities crimes" as a synonym for the horrendous acts associated with R2P. As Brazil has flagged in previous interventions, Member States and the United Nations alike should avoid the temptation to proliferate imprecise concepts. The expression "atrocities crimes" is not defined in international law nor in multilateral resolutions or decisions. The four crimes mentioned in the 2005 outcome document are undoubtedly atrocious, but so are other crimes that are not part of the definition used in the Secretary-General's report, such as aggression.

In conclusion, I would like to recall that Brazil is a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. Brazil has also endorsed the Paris Principles, the Vancouver Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration. Last year, Brazil co-sponsored Security Council resolution 2601 (2021) on the protection of education.

As an elected member of the Security Council, Brazil will host, during its presidency next month, the annual high-level open debate on children and armed conflict. The debate will provide Member States with an opportunity to consider the findings in the Secretary-General's annual report on children and armed conflict. Brazil looks forward to continuing discussions on the best strategies to advance the prevention and protection of children in armed conflict, as well as to increase capacity-building and long-term measures capable of promoting more inclusive, diverse and tolerant societies.

Mr. Oddone (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, we would like to reiterate our support for the statement made by the representative of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, which comprises a large number of States, including Argentina. We would also like to make a few remarks in our national capacity on the topic under consideration today.

The responsibility to protect (R2P) is fundamentally about prevention. It is a crucial obligation to be upheld by States. Regrettably, through our own tragedy, we have learned that no society is immune to mass atrocities. Prevention and the fight against all forms of discrimination have been our flagship causes and are reflected in our most robust State policies. We believe in early warning. We firmly believe that all available tools are useful. We unreservedly support all intergovernmental initiatives within the international community but, at the same time, we believe that cooperation with civil society is of particular importance, be it with non-governmental organizations, academic organizations or individuals who can share experiences to address prevention challenges.

In that same spirit, in 2014, together with Costa Rica, Denmark, Switzerland and Tanzania, as well as a large number of civilian-led organizations, we established Global Action against Mass Atrocity Crimes. The network is currently chaired by Argentina, under the leadership of the former President of the International Criminal Court, Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi. We view the network as global, inclusive and State-led, supported by institutions working in the area of protection. Through the network, we have been able to forge ahead in building national and regional prevention architectures. It is an initiative that is open to any State that wishes to join it.

Our results have been encouraging. Secretary-General António Guterres has acknowledged Global

Action against Mass Atrocity Crimes as a valuable network for developing partnerships, mechanisms and good practices and as an important platform for international cooperation and for making progress in prevention efforts. In addition, in 2012, the Latin American Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention was established in Buenos Aires. It is comprised of 17 countries of the region and is another State- and civil-society-led initiative. The Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities has provided support to our Technical Secretariat. This shared effort has led to the training of more than 800 civil servants from member States, thereby creating an extensive network of staff specialized in the area of prevention, building relationships, sharing national experiences and participating in national and regional initiatives. Its dynamism and ability to train more human resources has led the United Nations to recognize the initiative as an example of a good practice.

We would like to conclude in the way we started. The responsibility to protect means, above all, prevention, and prevention means cooperation. It means sharing experiences and involving all those that can contribute in some way or other in an enterprise that is incumbent upon us all and from which no one is excluded.

Mr. Stefanile (Italy): Italy aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of the European Union, in its capacity as observer, and of Costa Rica on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, respectively (see A/76/PV.86), and would like to add the following remarks in its national capacity.

Italy remains a staunch supporter and advocate of the principles of the responsibility to protect (R2P). The commitment to the responsibility to protect is first and foremost a commitment to preventing and mitigating the risk of the most heinous crimes. Atrocities can and must be prevented, and all possible efforts should be devoted to identifying and addressing their root causes. We need early-warning mechanisms, as well as structural policies and comprehensive strategies to build more resilient societies based on respect for human rights for all.

We welcome the focus on youth in this year's report of the Secretary-General (A/76/844). These are appalling times for the protection of civilians, and young people and children are particularly exposed to the burden of violence and conflicts. Thousands of

young people face the reality of fleeing their homes and seeking refuge. Young women and girls are disproportionately vulnerable to rape and other forms of sexual violence.

Prioritizing prevention means, first, strengthening the protection of children, preventing and ending violations of their fundamental rights and ensuring accountability when those crimes are committed. The main responsibility in preventing and halting mass atrocities lies with the Security Council and must not be hindered by the exercise of the veto. For that reason, we support all initiatives aimed at self-restraint in the use of the veto, including the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's code of conduct relating to Security Council action on genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes and the French-Mexican initiative.

Mass atrocities and crimes find a fertile ground where hate is cultivated. Strengthening civil society and building pluralistic and inclusive societies provide, therefore, a major safety net against that risk. States have the main responsibility to address discrimination in all its forms, prevent and fight hate speech and value and manage diversity, through effective legislation and targeted policies. A crucial role is played by education, which is the most powerful tool against hate, as it nurtures the ability to discern the truth, raise awareness of fundamental rights and recognize, fight and report abuses, as a precondition for holding perpetrators accountable.

The upcoming Transforming Education Summit will be a unique opportunity to promote such an approach. In this context, it will be particularly important to reaffirm the role of schools as safe environments in which to cultivate the fundamental value of tolerance. Italy stands ready to provide its contribution as co-lead of Action Track 1 of the Summit, dedicated to inclusive, equitable, safe and healthy schools.

In the same spirit, we support the institution of the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth as a valuable tool for promoting the active participation of younger generations in multilateral decision-making, including with regard to peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. The contribution of civil society is also key, and we support the efforts of all those non-governmental organizations that work hard in Italy and elsewhere to build bridges and train young leaders to engage in conflict prevention and be ambassadors of the culture of peace.

To achieve all those objectives and to effectively implement our commitments, we need 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 broader human rights agenda. Keeping a gender perspective is also essential, as women and girls are disproportionately affected by humanitarian crises and are among the main victims of the atrocities perpetrated in those contexts. That is why we welcome the regular discussion on R2P and will continue to support the work of the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect.

Mr. Beleffi (San Marino): San Marino reaffirms its commitment to the principle of the responsibility to protect, which is essential in the prevention of atrocity crimes. In this respect, we would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening today's important meeting and the Secretary-General for his report (A/76/844) and efforts on the prevention of mass atrocity crimes.

We are facing difficult times marked by an unprecedented level of violence, mass atrocities and displacement. San Marino is deeply concerned about the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, but also about the crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, South Sudan, Venezuela, Yemen and elsewhere. We would like to express our support for the work of the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect. We encourage them to promptly share their accurate analysis of developing crises with the wider United Nations membership and provide early warning and recommendations on atrocity prevention in the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council.

While stressing that States have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute crimes committed within their jurisdictions, I would also like to express San Marino's support for mechanisms, such as commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions, which help collect evidence of atrocities and play a fundamental role in holding perpetrators accountable. Accountability is indeed another factor that plays an important role in preventing and stopping such crimes.

San Marino reaffirms its full commitment to the principle underpinning the norms of the responsibility to protect and to obligations under human rights law and humanitarian law, such as the Convention on the

Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the Rome Statute and the Geneva Conventions.

San Marino reaffirms its full support for the International Criminal Court (ICC), whose work is crucial in the fight against impunity for genocide and crimes against humanity. It represents one of the core elements in the implementation of the responsibility to protect. Through its work, the ICC fosters accountability and therefore promotes prevention and reconciliation.

The Republic of San Marino would also like to reiterate its support for such initiatives as the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes and the French-Mexican initiative on voluntary restraint by the permanent members of the Security Council in the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities.

As the Secretary-General wrote in his report, while the international community has made significant progress in the protection of children's rights in general, few of those measures address atrocity prevention. Children and youth are uniquely and often disproportionately affected by conflict and atrocities. We stress the need to strengthen child-protection capacity and to put children and youth at the centre of efforts to prevent atrocities. In this respect, we believe that the implementation of the seven priorities indicated by the Secretary-General in his report could guarantee better protection of children and youth from atrocity crimes. At the same time, we also encourage Member States to adopt the relevant protocols on the protection of children, including the Paris Principles and the Safe Schools Declaration.

Moreover, San Marino is deeply disturbed about and firmly condemns the growing number of deliberate attacks against schools, hospitals and places of worship. We are deeply worried about the weaponization of food and about sexual and gender-based violence, which, regrettably, have become more frequent. We also firmly condemn attacks on peacekeepers, journalists, humanitarian workers, human rights defenders and peacekeepers. As these stakeholders and civil society actors can play an important role in the areas of reconciliation and prevention and in establishing early-warning mechanisms, they should be supported and protected.

The Republic of San Marino believes that hate speech and incitement to discrimination and violence

are both an early-warning indicator and a trigger for atrocity crimes. In the past year, we have seen an alarming increase in such cases. San Marino is therefore fully and actively committed to combating hate speech, while protecting the freedom of expression.

Finally, we firmly believe that poverty and instability, together with disrespect for the rule of law and human rights, are a trigger for atrocity crimes. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the most effective tool at our disposal for preventing crises and building a better, fairer and more sustainable future for all, and to ensure peaceful and inclusive societies and, ultimately, to prevent human suffering and atrocity crimes.

The Republic of San Marino is fully committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda and to preventing genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Mr. Espinosa Cañizares (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by recalling that my delegation supported resolution 75/277, which led to the inclusion of this item on the General Assembly's agenda. In 2005, Ecuador also supported the adoption of resolution 60/1, which clearly endorsed, by consensus, the World Summit Outcome document that outlines the three pillars that should underpin the principle of the responsibility to protect.

As we have previously noted, we believe that only the General Assembly has the authority to advance a consensus-based definition on the responsibility to protect and, in particular, to set the conceptual, institutional and political dimensions of the task of effectively applying it.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report this year (A/76/844), which prioritizes the responsibility to protect children and young people. It underscores early warning and the early adoption of measures, such as promoting socioeconomic initiatives, inclusion and equality, addressing intolerance, based on identity and hate speech, and strengthening the education sector to promote tolerance and respect for diversity.

Discrimination, marginalization and exclusion exacerbate the emergence of conflicts around the world. These conflicts can be prevented through respect for international law and by rejecting the use of force. Ecuador underscores the peaceful settlement of disputes as the best method for preventing the escalation of conflicts, which could lead to the commission

of atrocity crimes. We support the rule of law at the national and international levels. At the international level, we support the International Court of Justice.

With regard to combating impunity, we underscore and support the special role played by the International Criminal Court in helping to maintain international peace and justice, as an essential element in preventing the most serious crimes and providing redress to victims. For that reason, we reiterate our support to the Court and call on all States to accede to the Rome Statute and achieve its universality. I will elaborate on that issue during tomorrow's Arria Formula meeting, which was convened on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Court.

For Ecuador, the three pillars of the responsibility to protect should follow a strict line of political subordination, succession and chronological sequencing. The primary responsibility of each State to protect its population should be observed as the first pillar. The responsibility of the international community to cooperate with States is the second pillar. We understand that the third pillar on the potential use of force should be employed only in exceptional circumstances, as a last resort. It should be applied only through a Security Council resolution, in line with Chapters VI and VII of the Charter of the United Nations and other norms and principles established therein.

As a member of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, Ecuador supports the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes. Similarly, we support the French-Mexican initiative to limit the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities. Ecuador believes it necessary to apply Article 27, paragraph 3 of the Charter of the United Nations, as it addresses voting by Security Council members, stating that a party to a dispute shall abstain from the voting.

In conclusion, my delegation underscores the need to find synergies to promote the protection of civilians, accountability and action-oriented efforts, in particular as we mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions in 2024.

Mr. Lim (Indonesia): At the outset, allow me to reiterate that my delegation always appreciates the General Assembly's deliberations on the concept of the responsibility to protect (R2P). Indonesia recognizes the principles and norms that underpin R2P and the fact that they are not confined to certain States, specific

groups of States or regions. Indeed, in 2005, Indonesia joined the consensus that adopted the concept of R2P, as outlined in resolution 60/1.

As has been reiterated in Indonesia's statement at the plenary meeting held in 2021 (see A/75/PV.66), Indonesia believes that the discussion on R2P is not and should not be intended to derail the thresholds or criteria prescribed under resolution 60/1, adopted in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document. It is time for countries to focus on its implementation, including by strengthening the prevention framework at the national level.

With respect to the Secretary-General's report on R2P this year (A/76/844), we could not agree more that Governments need to ensure the protection of children and youth from atrocity crimes. My delegation therefore shares the view on the importance of international cooperation to support States' capacity to protect their populations, as articulated at the World Summit held in 2005. Against that background, we wish to highlight the following points.

First, Indonesia believes that the concept of the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, which was agreed by the World Summit in 2005, is solid enough to withstand any and every assault and should remain the basis of criteria for discussion on the matter. The task of the international community is not to reinterpret or renegotiate the conclusion of the World Summit; rather, it is to find a way of implementing its decisions. However, it is worth emphasizing that, over the years, the divergent views that were announced in the Hall and the contentious application of R2P are a testament to the fact that greater caution is necessary. In the same vein, we also wish to recall and underscore that the third pillar of R2P encompasses non-coercive and non-violent responses, in line with Chapters VI and VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

Secondly, with regard to the effort to prioritize the protection of children and youth from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, Indonesia wishes to reiterate the fact that child protection has been an integral part of its policy. It sets the tone for our stance in condemning atrocity crimes against children and youth. Our national policy has been reflected in several instruments, including our national ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols; Law No. 35 of 2014, on child protection; and Government regulation

No. 78 of 2021, on special protection for children; and other strategies or guidelines on the strengthening of children and family capabilities to emphasize the protection of children from violence.

In that same spirit, strategic partnerships between national authorities and the international community should be enhanced to ensure, inter alia, the delivery of assistance to children and youth affected by atrocity crimes. Children and youth have the right to be protected from violence wherever they live. It is in their best interest, especially for those living in armed conflict. Our approach should be clear and constructive, and we should find the best solution to end and prevent grave violations perpetrated against children in conflict or any other situation.

Thirdly, Indonesia is of the view that the general discussion on R2P should include a comprehensive and clear strategy, aimed at strengthening capacity-building. In that regard, we believe that clear strategies concerning the partnership between States and the international community must be defined. Without a doubt, the elements of international assistance and capacity-building, which are outlined in the second pillar of R2P, will greatly influence whether the strategy for implementing R2P will succeed or fail. Whether it is with regard to R2P in general or specifically efforts to protect children and youth from atrocity crimes, partnership is indeed essential.

Finally, the Assembly can be assured of Indonesia's commitment to supporting cooperation to ensure sustainable peace and preventing people from becoming victims of atrocity crimes, in line with the World Summit Outcome of 2005.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in today's debate on this item.

Before giving the floor to speakers in exercise of the right of reply, I would like to remind delegations that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. Bhat (India): I am constrained to take the floor to exercise India's right of reply to respond to Pakistan's blatant abuse of this forum.

Pakistan has made a habit of abusing the sanctity of every United Nations forum by spreading falsehoods. For a nation that is encouraging sectarian violence

against minorities, sponsoring cross-border terrorism, harbouring a deep sense of insecurity and orchestrated hatred for India and our secular credentials, we expect nothing new from this delegation.

Pakistan has made a number of futile and unsubstantiated allegations against India, including in relation to Jammu and Kashmir. These do not merit a response, as they pertain to matters internal to India. However, let me make it clear that the entire Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh, including the territories under illegal occupation by Pakistan, are and will always remain an integral part of India.

As an epicentre of terrorism, Pakistan is the biggest destabilizing force in the world. It has spurned calls for a global ceasefire by sponsoring cross-border terrorism. It has broken each and every principle for which the United Nations stands.

Even as terrorists thrive in Pakistan and roam its streets with impunity, we have heard it lecture about the protection of human rights in India. The world does not need lessons on democracy and human rights from a country whose contribution to the globalization of terror is unparalleled.

Today, we are discussing the responsibility to protect in cases of serious violations of international law. The irony is totally lost on the representative of Pakistan, given his country's shameful history of committing genocide in what was then East Pakistan and what is now Bangladesh over 50 years ago, for which it has not once even offered a modicum of apology. Innocent women, children, academics and intellectuals were treated as weapons of war in an act of calculated genocide carried out by the Pakistan army, in what it called Operation Searchlight. The reign of terror unleashed by Pakistan on the population of then-East Pakistan saw hundreds of thousands brutally killed and several thousands of women raped. Today, we were all witness to the absurdity of a serial violator of minority rights commenting on the treatment of minorities in another nation. The world has been witness to the systematic persecution of minorities, including Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Ahmadis by Pakistan.

The Government of India accords the highest respect to all religions, unlike Pakistan, where fanatics are eulogized and have monuments built in their honour. We call on Pakistan to focus on the safety, security and well-being of its minority communities, instead

of engaging in alarmist propaganda and attempting to foment communal disharmony in India.

It is time to hold Pakistan to account and not let it misuse United Nations platforms to spread disinformation and hate or to incite violence. I know that the representative of Pakistan, as it is his delegation's habit, will probably take the floor once again to continue his country's tirade of falsehoods, but we will not be dignifying his comments with any further response.

Mr. Sharif (Pakistan): My delegation is exercising its right of reply in response to the statement just made by the representative of India.

Deflection and disinformation define India's diplomacy today, and a country where its minorities, including Christians, Muslims and Dalits, are publicly lynched at the hands of Hindutva zealots is surely not qualified to give sermons to others. Today the Hindutva-inspired Bharatiya Janata Party-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (BJP-RSS) Government has launched a programme to cleanse India of all the vestiges of its Islamic heritage, including through the destruction of Muslim mosques, shrines and monuments, and through the transformation of India's Muslims into oppressed second-class citizens and even into non-citizens. The recent call for Muslim genocide, State complicity in extrajudicial measures and State-sponsored grave human rights abuses against Muslim protesters against the backdrop of hate-driven derogatory remarks made towards the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) by senior BJP officials are alarming and highly condemnable.

As for Jammu and Kashmir, I would urge the Indian representative to look at least once beyond obfuscation and denial. The truth of the matter is that Jammu and Kashmir is not in an integral part of India. It never was and it never will be. This is evident in all United Nations maps and official documents.

In the fourth preambular paragraph of resolution 47 (1948), the Security Council noted

“that both India and Pakistan desire that the question of the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India or Pakistan should be decided through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite”.

This call for a plebiscite was reiterated in the Security Council resolutions 91 (1951) and 122 (1957), inter alia, and in the resolution of the United Nations Commission

for India and Pakistan, specifically its resolutions of 13 August 1948 and 5 January 1949.

India accepted these decisions and is bound to comply with them in accordance with Article 25 of the United Nations Charter. So much for Jammu and Kashmir being an integral part of India.

If India had any respect for international law and moral courage, it would end its reign of terror, withdraw its troops and let the Kashmiris freely decide their future in accordance with the Security Council resolutions.

One can grant that India knows a lot about terrorism. It has the dubious distinction of being one of the world's pioneers and largest purveyors of State terrorism. It has instigated, sponsored and abetted State terrorism in each of its neighbouring countries, including against my country.

Let me reiterate the facts as they stand and recall the four types of terrorism being carried out by India, as highlighted by my delegation in its earlier statement. First, India is conducting State terrorism against the people of occupied Jammu and Kashmir. Secondly, Indian State sponsorship of Security Council-listed terrorist entities to carry out cross-border terrorist attacks against the Pakistani military and civilian targets is an undeniable reality. We expect the international community to take immediate steps to end Indian sponsorship of terrorism against Pakistan. Thirdly, India is financing and organizing mercenary terrorist organizations to destabilize Pakistan and impede its economic growth. This is yet again an irrefutable fact, publicly admitted by India's own senior Government officials. Fourthly, guided by a supremacist ideology that has mainstreamed Islamophobia and bigotry against minorities in the political discourse, the current BJP-RSS Government in India is engaged in a campaign of violence and intimidation against 200 million Muslims.

For lasting peace and stability in South Asia, the world must act, and act now, to end all types of terrorism that India continues to indulge in with impunity. There must be no double standards.

Mr. Knyazyan (Armenia): I am taking the floor in exercise of our right to reply to the delegation of Azerbaijan.

We reject the usual distortions and allegations by Azerbaijan in their entirety. The misinformation and ill-minded narratives voiced by the representative of Azerbaijan is an affront to this august body. The aim of

the traditional mantras and self-victimizing approach is to draw an equivalence between the aggressor and the victim and distract the attention of the international community from the State-led policy of instigating hatred and violence against the Armenian people, which, in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, has resulted in numerous atrocity crimes.

In the digital age, it is not difficult to look through the country reports of United Nations human rights bodies and relevant regional organizations and see the contrast between the fairy tales spun by representative of Azerbaijan and the appalling record of his country in exactly those spheres where he attempts to attribute violations to Armenia. With regard to the root causes of the conflict, which the representative of Azerbaijan desperately attempts to portray as an inter-State conflict, I would like to stress that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was preceded by preplanned atrocities for the Armenian population in the cities of Sumgayit, Baku, Gandzak and others, and the ethnic cleansing of the entire population of the Shahumyan region, in response to the peaceful appeal of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to self-determination.

The massacres of the Armenian population in some Sumgayit in February 1988 were the first identity-based mass crimes in Europe since the end of the Second World War. The meticulously organized pogroms resulted in forcible deportation of more than 400,000 Armenians. The legitimacy of the peaceful demands of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh in the face of an existential threat was increasingly recognized by the international community, including the European Parliament in 1988.

I am not going to entertain manipulations of the Azerbaijani delegation with regard to the history of the region but will confine myself to one point. The appearance of the Azerbaijani Republic on the world map in 1918 was manifested by barbaric atrocities of the Armenian population in the territories under its control, the most notorious examples of which are the massacre of the Armenian population in Baku in September 1918, in Agulis in December 1918 and 1919, and in Shushi in March 1920. The atrocities were accompanied by the destruction of Armenian churches, monasteries, shrines and other cultural and religious monuments.

The authorities of modern Azerbaijan have consistently followed the policies of their predecessors by finalizing the complete extermination of any traces of Armenian Christian civilization in its ancestral

homelands, in particular Nakhichevan, occupied parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and other areas.

The most notorious example is the barbaric destruction in 1998 and 2005 of the old Julfa cemetery with its over 5,000 khachkars or medieval Christian cross-stones. It is documented that Azerbaijan denied all requests by the European Parliament and other international structures to send a fact-finding mission to Nakhichevan to investigate this crime.

Equally deceptive are the arguments of Azerbaijan in an attempt to justify the preplanned and well-prepared aggression against the people of Nagorno-Karabakh in the fall of 2020, with the involvement of foreign terrorist fighters and mercenaries, which resulted in massive violence, destruction, war crimes and atrocities, in gross violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. From the first day of aggression, Azerbaijan widely used such prohibited weapons as cluster munitions and incendiary weapons to conduct targeted attacks on the civilian population and infrastructure, which was widely documented by Human Rights Watch. Videos of public executions, mutilations, inhuman treatment of prisoners of war and civilian hostages have been widespread in online media and publicly glorified at the highest political level.

In the aftermath of the aggression, Azerbaijan continues to blatantly disregard its obligations under the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols in relation to the return of prisoners of war and civilian detainees, ensuring safe and unimpeded humanitarian access to Nagorno-Karabakh and protection of cultural and religious heritage, contrary to the calls of the international community.

Azerbaijani authorities have initiated illegal judicial processes against the prisoners of war under fabricated charges, in violation of their legally binding obligations under international law. Furthermore, there are well documented cases of enforced disappearances with indisputable facts of the capture of Armenian prisoners of war. Yet Azerbaijan refuses to provide any information on these prisoners' whereabouts. It has applied the terrorist practice of using prisoners of war and civilian detainees as hostages for political purposes.

A source of serious concern is Azerbaijan's obstruction of humanitarian assistance to the people of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is seen in the politicization and denial of unimpeded access to United Nations agencies in line with the humanitarian principles, as

well as denial of access to the independent fact-finding mission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Azerbaijan is not interested in independent monitoring and assessment of the human rights and humanitarian situation on the ground, as it would reveal that all the allegations voiced in this Hall by its delegation are mere propaganda.

In the meantime, the leadership of Azerbaijan continues to instigate hatred and violence against Armenians. The opening of a military trophy park by the President of Azerbaijan in Baku is a case in point. Displaying helmets, equipment and personal belongings of Armenian soldiers and wax mannequins of dying or captured soldiers, this trophy park resembles Nazi-era propaganda and has been labelled by the international media as a hatred park. The long queues of Azerbaijani young people and children at the entrance to the park depict the level of radicalization of the society, which has made war crimes in style of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant possible.

Clearly this military trophy park is not just one extreme isolated incident, as the leadership of Azerbaijan has been dehumanizing Armenians for at least three decades, starting from the school desk, in an effort to indoctrinate Azerbaijani citizens, especially children and youth, with Armenophobia.

I am also obliged to refute the manipulations by Azerbaijan with regard to the orders of the International Court of Justice. Armenia instituted proceedings before the Court under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, submitting a request for provisional measures against Azerbaijan.

On 7 December last year, the International Court of Justice affirmed the well-founded nature of Armenia's request and unanimously ordered that Azerbaijan

"take all necessary measures to prevent the incitement and promotion of racial hatred and discrimination, including by its officials and public institutions, targeted at persons of Armenian national or ethnic origin"

As the Court observed,

"propaganda promoting racial hatred and incitement to racial discrimination or to acts of violence against any group or persons based on their national or ethnic origin can generate a pervasive racially charged environment within society, particularly

when rhetoric is posing racial discrimination is employed by high-ranking officials of the State”.

We encourage Azerbaijan to, instead of distorting the Court orders, fully comply with its obligations under them.

And the last piece of misinformation that I am obliged to refute, was related to the maps of minefields. Armenia has handed over all the maps of minefields to Azerbaijan as a humanitarian gesture. We reject all allegations that the maps are inaccurate. Armenia’s proposal on the independent international investigation of these allegations has remained unanswered.

Ms. Ahangari (Azerbaijan): This is not the first time that Armenia has shied away from overtly attempting to mislead the international community as to the causes, course and consequences of the war that it unleashed against Azerbaijan. The comments made by the Permanent Representative of Armenia just a few minutes ago, which is full of a standard set of fabrications and distortions, also demonstrate how Armenia is far from complying with its international obligations and from promoting peace, stability and cooperation in our region.

While Azerbaijan has prioritized post-conflict peacebuilding, rehabilitation and reconstruction after the three-decades-long occupation by Armenia, as well as advancement of the peace agenda to ensure the normalization of bilateral relations based on international law and the limitation and demarcation of the State border between the two countries, the current statement by the representative of Armenia is illustrative of the deep crisis and division within the Government and society of his country. His statement is clearly consonant with the slogans of those protesting on the streets throughout Armenia these days, demanding that their Government resign merely for thinking about peace with Azerbaijan and the need to turn the page on hostilities.

With regard to the fabricated narrative we just heard from the Armenian delegation, I am compelled to remind the Assembly that, as is well known, in the early 1990s, Armenia unleashed a full-scale war and committed aggression against Azerbaijan. By May 1994, when the ceasefire was established, a significant part of the territory of Azerbaijan had already been occupied by Armenia.

In its resolutions 822 (1993), 853 (1993), 874 (1993) and 884 (1993), the Security Council explicitly

condemned the use of force against Azerbaijan and the resulting occupation of its territories and demanded the immediate, complete and unconditional withdrawal of Armenian occupying forces from all the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. However, key demands by the Security Council, including, first of all, the withdrawal of occupying forces, were not implemented by Armenia. The resumption of hostilities in the fall of 2020 became a logical consequence of the impunity that Armenia had enjoyed for 30 years, its continuous disregard for international law, obstruction of the peace process, numerous armed provocations on the ground and inflammatory statements.

In addition, with regard to the Armenian allegations as to the hostilities of 2020, Azerbaijan did not unleash aggressions against anyone. The assertion that the opposite is true is contrary not only to international law and the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council, but also to elementary logic.

The legality of Azerbaijan’s recourse to force is indisputable. We also reject Armenia’s allegations about Azerbaijani violations of the laws and customs of war. Azerbaijani military action was carried out in accordance with international humanitarian law.

With regard to the Armenian allegations against Azerbaijan on so-called anti-Armenian hatred, we resolutely reject them. The purpose of such allegations is evidently to mislead the international community, disguise all hate crimes and long-standing and deep-rooted racist policies. Azerbaijan is a model ethnic country, and all citizens and residents are entitled to the full enjoyment of human rights and freedoms on an equal and non-discriminatory basis, in accordance with the Azerbaijani Constitution and national legislation. We consider diversity to be riches, and we will continue our efforts aimed at maintaining civic cohesion and promoting inclusiveness and human rights.

As to Armenia itself, the relevant United Nations bodies and other international organizations have more than once expressed their serious concern about the spirit of intolerance prevailing in that country and discriminatory policies and practices pursued there. In its concluding observations in the periodic reports on Armenia, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern about

“racist hate speech and discriminatory statements in the public discourse, including by public and political figures in the media, in the particular on

the Internet, mainly against religious minorities, asylum-seekers and refugees”.

In its report on Armenia, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance noted in particular the intolerant statements made against Azerbaijan.

It is no accident that, given that Armenia is a monoethnic country that still has not retracted the infamous statement of its former president about the ethnic incompatibility of Armenians and Azerbaijanis, it refuses to investigate and punish the numerous hate crimes committed by its officials and armed forces and that it continues to allow racist hate groups formed for the specific purpose of inciting and committing violence against Azerbaijanis to operate openly and notoriously on its territory.

I would also like to comment on the allegations made by the Armenian delegation with regard to the Sumgayit unrest in February 1982. The official investigation created to study these events established that it had been a well-prepared provocation masterminded by Armenian extremists forces to discredit Azerbaijan and cover up Armenia's unlawful and annexionist objectives and violent methods to achieve them. The investigation found that one of the organizers and perpetrators of these criminal acts committed in Sumgayit, which claimed the lives of 32 people, 6 of whom were Azerbaijanis, was Eduard Grigoryan, an Armenian and resident of the city. Among the evidence collected by the investigation, the testimonies of the witnesses, including Armenians, provided irrefutable proof of his role and direct participation in the violence. Eduard Grigoryan was sentenced to long-term imprisonment.

On the complex mine threats, we would once again like to reiterate that to hold Armenia accountable for its violations of international law, Azerbaijan has instituted legal proceedings, including at the International Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights. Additionally, several individuals have prosecuted and punished for war crimes and terrorist and mercenary activities. At the same time, we have prioritized rehabilitation and reconstruction processes. However, minor problems still exist in our liberated territories. Since 10 November 2020, more than 220 Azerbaijan civilians and military have been killed or injured by mine explosions, and Armenia has failed to share accurate and comprehensive information about the landmines it indiscriminately laid in Azerbaijani territories.

With regard to the so-called detainees, the allegation that Azerbaijan holds several dozen Armenian citizens in captivity, contrary to the provisions of the November trilateral statement, is false. Azerbaijan returned all detainees to Armenia under the terms of the statement. For its part, Armenia violated the statement by deploying sabotage and other armed groups in the territory of Azerbaijan following the cessation of hostilities.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate that Armenia must first and foremost fully comply with its own international obligations, redress the harm caused to Azerbaijan and its people, faithfully commit to the normalization of inter-State relations based on international law and implement the trilateral statements in their entirety. Strict compliance by States with their international obligations is imperative for building, preserving and sustaining peace and stability, and for developing and enhancing cooperation. Azerbaijan is eager to continue its efforts aimed at ensuring these fundamental objectives for the benefit of all peoples of our region.

Mr. Knyazyan (Armenia): My statement will be shorter than that of my Azerbaijani colleague.

I am taking the floor for a second time to respond to the representative of Azerbaijan. In view of the time limitations and bearing in mind that we have addressed these baseless allegations in detail during previous meetings, I will confine myself to making the following four points.

First, the representative of Azerbaijan refers to public discourse in Armenia. Indeed, in Armenia, we have representative institutions, we have an opposition, and we have a vibrant society, which is entitled to exercise its human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of opinion and the freedom of peaceful assembly. We have free media, and we have an independent civil society. I of course understand that that sounds surprising for the representative of an authoritarian regime, where political life is limited to operating within the framework of one ruling family. In this regard, I understand the surprise of my colleague and can assure her that public discourse is very useful for constructing peaceful, fair and inclusive societies.

Secondly, with regard to the allegations on hatred in Armenia, and so on, I would like to quote the assessments of international organizations on the topic of our discussion in relation to Azerbaijan.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance has observed that

“Azerbaijan’s leadership, education system and media are very prolific in their denigration of Armenians... An entire generation of Azerbaijanis has now grown up listening to constant rhetoric of Armenian aggression...”.

The Council of Europe’s Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities has observed

“widespread discriminatory behaviour against persons of Armenian origin”

and noted that the term “Armenian” in fact appears to be understood as an insult.

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has expressed its concern at

“the repeated and unpunished use of inflammatory language by [Azerbaijani] politicians speaking about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and at its adverse impact on the public’s view of ethnic Armenians”. (CERD/C/AZE/CO/7-9, para. 27).

In December 2020, Azerbaijan took another remarkable step by producing a commemorative stamp proudly depicting Nagorno Karabakh in the process of being chemically fumigated for insects. The stamp’s reference to ethnic cleansing was so blatant and obvious that the Universal Postal Union refused to register it, noting that it contradicted the provisions of the Union’s conventions and code of conduct.

A final point is that we constantly hear allegations that we are mono-ethnic. Such allegations are hypocritical coming from the representative of a mono-ethnic country that is only 8 per cent national-minority. When it comes to national minorities and their rights, our point of reference is their full protection, rather than using them for window-dressing exercises. Armenia is home to a number of ancient national minorities — just like my people — including Yazidis, Kurds, Assyrians, Greeks, Jews and Russians, who preserve and promote their languages, religions, cultures and traditions in an environment that is conducive to respect for human rights and human dignity.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): The representative of Azerbaijan has asked to speak in right of reply for a second time, and I would like to remind the Assembly that the time limit for that is five minutes.

Ms. Ahangari (Azerbaijan): I apologize that I have been compelled to take the floor a second time, but this time I will be very brief.

The personal attacks on a Member State of the United Nations and its leadership that we just heard from the delegation of Armenia are a reflection not only of its members’ ill breeding and performance but also their Government’s irresponsibility and inadequacy vis-à-vis commonly agreed norms and values. Indeed, it would be unrealistic to expect adherence to such norms and values from Armenia, whose leaders unabashedly declared Armenians and Azerbaijanis ethnically incompatible and repeatedly ordered the brutal killings of thousands of Azerbaijani citizens, including children, women and the elderly.

Instead of wasting time and energy here lecturing others about the principles, values and norms that it has consistently opposed and violated, Armenia should realize that the goal of establishing a peaceful, developed and sustainable region will not be achieved by endlessly replicating obsolete and false narratives, misinterpreting international law and pursuing a policy of hatred, animosity and territorial claims. Now that the more than 30-year conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has been resolved, it is important for Armenia to commit to normalizing inter-State relations, based on international law, comply with its international obligations, fully implement the relevant agreements signed by both sides and faithfully engage in efforts aimed at building, strengthening and sustaining peace and stability in the region.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting. We shall hear the remaining speakers tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. in this Hall.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 134.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.