



**The United Nations and Mass Atrocity Prevention:
A Review of Current and Potential Capacity**

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1. Executive Summary

At the World Summit in 2005, United Nations Member States unanimously endorsed the ‘Responsibility to Protect’. This acknowledged the responsibility of states to protect their populations from genocide and mass atrocities, but also that of the international community, acting ‘through the United Nations’. A strong focus of the statement is on the necessity of prevention, and the appropriate ‘diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means’ the United Nations (UN) can employ in its service. Yet there has been very little analysis of the capacity of the United Nations to fulfil this mandate. This report explores the current and potential capacity to meet the preventive component of the responsibility to protect across the United Nations system. The report analyses the capacity for mass atrocity prevention of key components of the United Nations system, including the Security Council, General Assembly and organs of the Secretariat. It identifies areas of strength that might be more explicitly utilised in support of prevention measures, and areas in which there are opportunities for improvement. The report also explores how a wider range of UN bodies, not typically associated with mass atrocity prevention, can and do contribute to furthering this core goal of the United Nations. Finally, it considers the potential of mainstreaming Responsibility to Protect considerations across the United Nations system, and the potential for greater UN involvement in contributing to longer-term, structural prevention.

[The United Nations and Mass Atrocity Prevention: A Review of Current and Potential Capacity](#)



2. Introduction

It is a testament to the strength of world opinion on the necessity of mass atrocity prevention that the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ was unanimously endorsed by the international community at the World Summit in 2005. The Responsibility to Protect, or R2P as it is commonly known, reaffirmed the responsibility of the international community to prevent genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and highlighted the central role of the United Nations (UN) in meeting this responsibility. It asserted a broad role for the UN; not only responding to crises and imminent emergencies, but also providing an early warning mechanism, supporting the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide, and supporting the international community in taking preventive action to assist ‘those which are under stress before crises and conflicts break out.’¹ The endorsement of R2P is certainly a positive step for mass atrocity prevention. Yet the scope of the challenge is daunting. The twentieth century earned the moniker ‘the century of genocide’; the bloodiest in world history. The record of the UN itself was far from blameless, particularly with respect to the 1994 Rwandan genocide and 1995 genocide in Srebrenica. Moreover, as recently as 2009 the Secretary-General acknowledged the UN remained ‘underprepared’ to meet its ‘most fundamental prevention’ responsibilities with respect to R2P.² The present report explores the current capacity of the UN system to meet these responsibilities for

mass atrocity prevention. Through examining key organs of the UN system, it will consider areas of strength, and gaps within the present capacity. It will explore possible approaches to augmenting capacity, including within specific organs and through mainstreaming R2P considerations. Finally, it will also consider the capacity of the UN system to contribute to longer-term, structural prevention.

A History of Rhetoric and Inaction

‘There can be no more important issue, and no more binding obligation, than the prevention of genocide. Indeed, this may be considered one of the original purposes of the United Nations.’³

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, January 2004

The prevention of genocide has been a core goal of the United Nations since its inception in the aftermath of World War Two. In 1946, in its inaugural session, General Assembly resolution 96 (I) declared ‘genocide is a crime under international law which the civilised world condemns.’⁴ It invited Member States to enact domestic legislation for the prevention and punishment of genocide, and recommended ‘that international cooperation be organised between States’ for this purpose.⁵ It further requested that a convention on the crime be drafted for consideration at the next regular session of the General Assembly. The resulting *Convention on the Prevention and the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* was rapidly finalised and adopted by the General Assembly on 9 December 1948. It is regarded as the first ‘modern human rights

treaty', being adopted even before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.⁶

Yet in the six decades since the *Genocide Convention* came into force in 1951, it is widely recognised that the record of the UN in preventing genocide has been abysmal. The UN commitment to genocide prevention, while consistent at the rhetorical level, failed to translate into meaningful preventive action. During the period of the Cold War, the UN was paralysed by the hostility between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was unable to respond to the genocides in Bangladesh or Cambodia, or to act in a pre-emptory capacity 'to prevent' the commission of genocide. In the post-Cold War era, there was renewed hope that the United Nations, and particularly the Security Council, could serve as the 'global peacekeeper'.⁷ This was quickly dashed by the massive failures of the UN system associated with the 1994 Rwandan genocide and 1995 genocidal massacre in Srebrenica. In Rwanda, for example, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) largely withdrew as the genocide commenced. The mass killing progressed unimpeded as the UN Security Council bickered over an appropriate course of action. Later, the Independent Inquiry commissioned to investigate UN actions concluded:

The response of the United Nations before and during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda failed in a number of fundamental respects. The responsibility for the failings of the United Nations to prevent and stop the genocide in Rwanda lies with a number of different actors, in particular the Secretary-General, the Secretariat, the

Security Council, UNAMIR and the broader membership of the United Nations.⁸

In Srebrenica, the failure of the UN-declared 'safe area' led to the slaughter of over 7000 Bosnian men and boys. Again, a subsequent report recognised the failure of the UN 'to help save the people of Srebrenica from the Serb campaign of mass murder.'⁹

Yet despite these massive failures, calls for international efforts to prevent genocide and mass atrocities to move beyond the United Nations system have not garnered the support of governments internationally. Even the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) intervention in Kosovo, despite its largely successful mission, provoked controversy rather than increased support for actors working outside the UN system. While the NATO intervention undoubtedly saved Kosovo Albanian civilians from being targeted by Serb forces, the absence of a UN Security Council resolution authorising the military action led to adverse international reaction. As the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) subsequently remarked, 'The task is not to find alternatives to the Security Council as a source of authority, but to make the Security Council work much better than it has.'¹⁰ The UN retains a unique universal legitimacy, and remains 'unquestionably the principal institution for building, consolidating and using the authority of the international community.'¹¹ Ongoing efforts to prevent genocide and mass atrocities have thus continued to focus upon improving the capacity of the UN system, the political will of key

Member States, and learning lessons from the failures of the recent past.

The Responsibility to Protect

In the last decade, much of this effort has centred around the new norm of the 'Responsibility to Protect'. The concept of R2P emerged from the ICISS in 2001. Established partially in response to the international failure to respond to the Rwandan genocide, the Commission sought to reconceptualise the potential conflict between state sovereignty and humanitarian intervention. The resulting shift to 'responsibilities,' rather than 'rights,' reframed the discussion. At the World Summit in 2005, the Responsibility to Protect was unanimously endorsed by UN Member States. Member States acknowledged their primary responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. They recognised the value of international assistance in enabling States to meet this responsibility. In the event of a State 'manifestly failing' to protect its population, responsibility to act 'in a timely and decisive manner' fell to the international community, acting collectively through the United Nations Security Council.¹²

Within the Responsibility to Protect is an important preventive component. Member States affirmed 'This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means.'¹³ The Summit Declaration advocates the establishment of an early warning capability at the United Nations;

Member States also affirmed they ‘fully support the mission of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide.’¹⁴ Additionally, they committed ‘to helping States build capacity to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and to assisting those which are under stress before crises and conflicts break out.’¹⁵ The preventive component of R2P has attracted particularly strong international support. At the General Assembly discussion on R2P in July 2009, for example, many States focussed particularly on the necessity for prevention. There is thus widespread international agreement on the need for the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities, and on the central role of the UN in facilitating and contributing to this task.

United Nations Capacity for Mass Atrocity Prevention

R2P delineates a broad yet specific role for the UN in mass atrocity prevention, in a manner not previously enunciated. In the five years since 2005, however, there has been relatively little analysis of the current and potential capacity of the UN system to undertake this preventive role. Much greater attention has been given to role of the Security Council when mass atrocity crimes have appeared imminent or already been underway. Integral to R2P, however, is also longer-term preventive work in ‘capacity building’, and ‘assisting those which are under stress before crises and conflicts break out’.¹⁶ Furthermore, where such analysis has occurred, the results have been concerning. In 2009, for example, nine years after the release of the official reports on UN actions during the Rwandan genocide and the genocidal massacre in

Srebrenica, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon acknowledged ‘many of their institutional recommendations, including on early warning, analysis and training, have not been fully implemented ... The United Nations and its Member States remain underprepared to meet their most fundamental prevention and protection responsibilities.’¹⁷ It is only through a methodical analysis that the current capacity of the UN system for prevention activities can be assessed, and key strengths and areas for improvement identified.

The following section will first explore the UN bodies specifically mentioned in the Summit Declaration – the OSAPG, the Security Council and the General Assembly – followed by a wider analysis of relevant organs.



3. Office of the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide

The Office of the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) is the focal point for genocide prevention within the United Nations system.¹⁸ Recently, the mandate of the office has also been expanded to include consideration of the four R2P crimes. With a staff of twelve, the Office is mandated to collect existing information on ‘massive and serious’ human rights and international humanitarian law violations that might lead to genocide; act as an early warning mechanism to the Secretary-General, ‘and through him to the Security Council’; make recommendations to the Security Council (through the Secretary-General) on preventive actions; and finally ‘liaise with the United Nations system on activities for the prevention of genocide.’¹⁹ The OSAPG has developed an ‘Analysis Framework’ through which it assesses the risk of genocide. Eight factors have been identified that ‘cumulatively increase risk of genocide’, including tense inter-group relations, weak institutional capacity to prevent genocide, the presence of illegal arms, underlying motivation to target a group, circumstances that facilitate perpetration of genocide, acts that could be elements of genocide, evidence of ‘intent to destroy in whole or in part’, and triggering factors such as elections.²⁰ Currently, the Office has identified three central priorities.²¹ First, it seeks to ‘raise awareness’ through high-level events on genocide prevention and R2P, and through training of UN staff and government officials. Secondly, it will ‘analyse situations

of concern'; provide timely advice to the Secretary-General and the Security Council; and engage the General Assembly in dialogue on early warning and assessment. Finally, through 'advocacy' the Office seeks to 'advise the Secretary-General on preventive action', mobilise the UN system 'and other key partners', and conduct advocacy missions in cases when they are of particular value.

In late 2010, the Fifth Committee of the UN, responsible for budgetary matters, voted to fund three additional positions in the OSAPG. The responsibility to protect is now explicitly incorporated into the work of the Office, and it will now integrate 'all four crimes and violations (genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing) into its method of work'.²² Nevertheless, whereas the position of the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide (SAPG) is a full-time, paid position with support staff, the corresponding position of the Special Advisor for the Responsibility to Protect still lacks this institutionalisation. At present, therefore, the capacity of the OSAPG for mass atrocity prevention is far greater than that of the Special Advisor for R2P. This disparity in resources means that, pragmatically, the Special Advisors are likely to continue to pursue a joint agenda, and that the OSAPG is likely to be the primary driver of this agenda. The recent expansion of the mandate and funding of the OSAPG are consistent with Secretary-General's plan to establish a joint office for the Advisors, but fall short of full integration.

Beyond its own currently developing capacity, there are opportunities for the OSAPG to build the capacity of the wider UN system to prevent

genocide and mass atrocities. In particular, the OSAPG is well-placed to lead an initiative to operationalise, or ‘mainstream’ the preventive component of the R2P throughout the UN system. With appropriate training and awareness, incorporating R2P considerations into the normal operating procedures of relevant UN organs and programs could have a significant impact on prevention. This could include utilising UN agencies and field staff to provide information relevant for an early warning system. It might incorporate the inclusion of specific preventive capacity building measures within preventive deployments or development assistance programs in at-risk nations. It may involve extending the conflict-sensitive development capabilities of the World Bank to include explicit consideration of R2P risk factors. The potential of the OSAPG to have a greater impact through utilising the wider UN system is substantial. The small size of the Office and the complexities of inter-agency cooperation, however, indicate that at present a targeted approach is most likely to be effective. In particular, a review by the OSAPG of the capacity of the UN system for genocide and mass atrocity prevention would enable rapid identification of areas where there are opportunities to have maximal impact, and areas in which urgent improvement is required. This review could utilise the 2006 review of the UN system’s capacity for conflict prevention, undertaking further analysis focussing specifically on genocide and mass atrocities.²³

There is also scope for a strategic decision regarding the balance between operational prevention – designed to have a short to medium term impact in States already at risk of mass atrocities – and structural, long-term prevention measures. According to Lawrence Woocher, ‘The

origins and terms of the Special Advisor's mandate strongly suggest the office was intended to concentrate on early warning for immediate and medium-term operational prevention rather than long-term structural prevention.²⁴ Yet, a narrow focus on operational prevention might overlook the potential benefits of structural prevention work. Furthermore, the Secretary-General's 2009 report *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect* highlighted structural prevention as an important component of preventive action.²⁵ Research on the antecedents of genocide indicates that many of the risk factors can exist decades in advance of a genocide.²⁶ Moreover, commonly identified risk factors such as economic distress and legal discrimination against a minority may require long-term strategies for amelioration.

The OSAPG is uniquely placed to encourage agencies such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to incorporate R2P considerations within their programs, and potentially utilise strategies within them that contribute to the structural prevention of genocide and mass atrocities in tandem with their own developmental goals. R2P researcher Eli Stamnes has suggested a 'quiet' approach to this kind of long-term structural prevention, to avoid 'weakening' the R2P concept.²⁷ Indeed, she has advocated avoiding 'direct appeals' to the concept of R2P for such structural prevention work.²⁸ This approach, however, may inadvertently undermine the perceived importance of structural prevention, and prevent the OSAPG from using the persuasive power of R2P to promote structural prevention. An alternative might be to simply utilise the label of 'R2P structural prevention'. This has the additional

appeal of enabling States to incorporate measures to reduce risk without being forced to acknowledge a pre-existing elevated risk – a politically sensitive issue. The small size of the OSAPG, and the large magnitude of mass atrocity prevention, indicate that leveraging off the wider UN system in this way could substantially increase its overall impact.



4. Security Council

The Security Council bears primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security internationally.²⁹ It has a robust capacity for the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities.³⁰ Through the issuing of resolutions, it can authorise peacekeeping operations, international sanctions and military action. With a massive agenda and intense pressures upon its resources, it typically focuses upon situations of crisis or imminent crisis.³¹ Its history with respect to the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities is most notable for its failure to prevent or curb the Rwandan genocide. Even as the full horror of the genocide became apparent during the course of April 1994, the Council failed to respond effectively. The Council's (in)action with respect to events in Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s, and its dithering and largely ineffective response to the situation in Darfur in recent years have further contributed to a reputation of failure even in the most dire of circumstances. It is Security Council policy and practice, rather than capacity constraints, that best explain these failures. The primary issue is that of political will.³² As Wheeler and Egerton noted: 'The real test of the Summit Declaration is whether it increases the likelihood of the Council mustering the political will to act to prevent and halt future humanitarian crises.'³³

The Security Council has the capacity to make a major contribution to mass atrocity prevention through providing a credible threat of reaction, or a 'timely and decisive response' under the Summit Declaration. Thus far, this capacity has been largely unrealised, although recent action with respect to Libya may be indicative of the emergence of a more responsive approach (discussed further below). In past instances, the failure of the five permanent (P5) members of the Security Council to reach agreement on appropriate reactive measures, and their ability to use the veto, has meant the Council has not responded decisively to incidents of genocide and mass atrocities. Yet a stronger and more consistent commitment to a 'timely and decisive' response to mass atrocity crimes could become a deterrent force over time.³⁴ Genocide is often a quasi-rational tactic, chosen as a deliberate strategy with a realistic prospect of meeting the desired goals of a perpetrator regime – however irrational the goals themselves may be.³⁵ A genuine, ongoing likelihood of Security Council intervention to curb or prevent mass atrocities is likely to change the calculus of potential perpetrators. There are several ways through which the Security Council could pursue this goal. Most ambitiously, there have been multiple proposals for a 'rapidly deployable, robust military force, which can be threatened or used to deter or halt genocidal crimes.'³⁶ Currently, however, there are substantial obstacles associated with this option, including political dissension and practical constraints.³⁷ More realistically, the Council may consider interventions such as authorising multilateral peacekeeping missions, or military intervention, or more limited measures such as arms embargoes or the imposition of no-fly zones.

The manner in which the veto is utilised in Council resolutions pertinent to preventing or curbing mass atrocities is a key issue. Formal and informal opportunities to change P5 practice in this area have the potential to positively impact upon the Council's ability to respond decisively. In recent years, this has already undergone something of a process of change:

The costs of using a veto in the UN Security Council in cases of emerging genocide or mass atrocities are now extremely high and the international community generally appears much less likely to 'look the other way' in such situations than it was even a decade ago. However, ensuring an effective response is another matter.³⁸

In place of the formal veto, the use of the 'informal veto', whereby a resolution is not formally put to a vote or is substantially weakened due to a prior indication that a member of the P5 is likely to veto it, has come to play an increasingly significant role in relevant resolutions. This has repeatedly occurred in resolutions surrounding the mass atrocities in Darfur, both delaying them and weakening their content.³⁹ A stronger emphasis on the need for 'timely and decisive' response may contribute to rendering the 'informal veto' less acceptable, and facilitate strengthened responses from the Council.

In recent months, the Security Council has overcome its historical reticence to respond to situations of actual or potential mass atrocities, through its uncharacteristically rapid and decisive response to the civil war in Libya. Just weeks after hostilities erupted in Libya, and as a potential massacre of Libyan civilians in Benghazi loomed, UN Security

Council resolutions 1970 and 1973 imposed sanctions and a no-fly zone over the country in order to protect the civilian population. The Council authorised Member States ‘acting nationally or through regional organisations or arrangements, to take all necessary measures to protect civilians under threat of attack in the country, including Benghazi, while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory’.⁴⁰ Both Russia and China withheld their Security Council vetoes, choosing instead to abstain, a move which *The Economist* described as ‘all but unimaginable until recently.’⁴¹ This level of responsiveness to a situation of potential mass atrocities is unprecedented, and in stark contrast to the Council’s delayed and much weaker response to the atrocities in Darfur. It suggests a new level of willingness to react rapidly in response to potential or actual R2P crises. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that particular elements of the Libyan crisis were favourable to a rapid response, including the pariah status of the Gaddafi regime, and the relative ease – operationally – of imposing a no-fly zone on the coastal nation. It remains unclear whether the Security Council will act in a similarly rapid and decisive way in other cases.

Preventive diplomacy is a tool that can be utilised by the Security Council more often, and at earlier stages of conflict.⁴² Conflict prevention is a key component of the Council’s mandate to maintain international peace and security.⁴³ As Bertrand Ramcharan has noted, potential preventive roles for the Council have been identified that include ‘more regular discussion about early warning alerts, establishing ad hoc mechanisms to follow early warning cases, and more frequent discussion

between Council members and experts within and outside the UN system about early warning and prevention when appropriate'.⁴⁴ These measures would be particularly appropriate for mass atrocity prevention. The importance of an early warning mechanism is highlighted in the Summit Declaration. Augmenting the Council's capacity to receive and respond to early warning of mass atrocities would be of particular worth given its capacity to authorise robust preventive measures. A Security Council focus on mass atrocity prevention would ideally complement that of the Secretary-General, the OSAPG and other organs, highlighting the importance of a 'culture of prevention' throughout the UN system. Security Council missions can also be effective instruments for diplomacy. The Security Council Mission to East Timor in 1999, for example, played an important role in limiting the crisis there.⁴⁵ The authority of the Security Council can ensure engagement at the highest level in attempts to resolve crises.

The Security Council also has a clear opportunity to communicate the importance of mass atrocity prevention to the international community through the setting of its agenda. Ensuring that potential R2P crises are rapidly considered, and allowing the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide (SAPG) to directly brief the Council when appropriate, would effectively communicate that the Council considered these matters of great importance. In the past, this has not always occurred. In 2005, for example, former SAPG Juan Mendez was blocked from briefing the Security Council on his visit to Darfur.⁴⁶ Additionally, the Security Council has an opportunity to contribute directly to mass atrocity prevention through authorising peacekeeping operations and

preventive deployments with appropriately robust mandates. The United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) in Macedonia in the 1990s, for example, is widely considered as a successful preventive deployment. Recent research by Erik Melander indicates that statistically, peacekeeping missions appear to ‘reduce the risk that mass killings of civilians will commence in intrastate armed conflicts’.⁴⁷ Finally, Security Council presidents have the opportunity to highlight the importance of the Council’s role in contributing to mass atrocity prevention.⁴⁸



5. General Assembly

Apart from the Security Council and the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide, the General Assembly is the only other organ of the UN specifically mentioned in the paragraphs on R2P in the World Summit *Outcome Document*. The statement asserts: ‘We stress the need for the General Assembly to continue consideration of the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and its implications, bearing in mind the principles of the Charter and international law.’⁴⁹ This highlights the important function of the General Assembly with respect to the normative development of R2P. As the UN’s most representative body, the General Assembly is the most appropriate location for intergovernmental dialogue on the concept, and for developing consensus around approaches to implementing it.⁵⁰ In particular, the General Assembly provides a forum for discussion of what types of action might contribute to prevention. While the General Assembly lacks the power to authorise direct preventive action in a specific situation, broad-based support for particular kinds of preventive strategies could promote and grant substantial legitimacy to their use in nations ‘under stress’. Periodic discussion of R2P in the General Assembly, such as the 9 August 2010 debate, can also contribute to ensuring its ongoing importance within the international community.

The General Assembly can contribute directly to the UN's capacity for mass atrocity prevention through providing appropriate funding for the OSAPG or the proposed joint office for the SAPG and the Special Advisor for R2P. Currently, the OSAPG is funded both through the regular budget of the UN and voluntary contributions; in the past, however, a proposal for funding for the implementation of R2P was not supported by the Fifth Committee.⁵¹ The approval of funding for the proposed joint office, at the appropriate time, would improve UN capacity for early warning and prevention of the four R2P crimes.

There are only limited opportunities for the General Assembly to directly contribute to prevention in specific crises. In circumstances of major crisis in which the Security Council is unable to act due to divisions, there is the potential to invoke the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution. According to this resolution, 'in situations where the Security Council fails to exercise its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the General Assembly may make recommendations to members for collective measures.'⁵² As the ICISS report acknowledged, however, 'The practical difficulty in all of this is to contemplate the unlikelihood, in any but very exceptional case, of a two-thirds majority, as required under the Uniting for Peace procedure, being able to be put together in a political environment in which there has been either no majority on the Security Council, or a veto imposed or threatened by one or more permanent members.'⁵³ Nevertheless, the ICISS suggested, the possibility of a Uniting for Peace procedure could encourage decisive action from the Security Council.⁵⁴ Additionally, the General Assembly can consider crises not on the agenda of the Security Council, both as an

alternative to the Council and a mechanism to encourage the Council to consider them in turn.⁵⁵ Overall, however, the General Assembly has a fairly limited capacity to contribute to the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities beyond a rhetorical level.



6. The Secretariat

The Secretariat, headed by the Secretary-General, is the administrative organ of the UN. With close to 40,000 staff across several departments and offices the Secretariat is responsible for the implementation of UN mandates internationally.⁵⁶ While a comprehensive examination of the departments of the Secretariat is beyond the remit of the present report, selected areas of direct relevance, including the Secretary-General, the Department of Political Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, will be considered.

The Secretary-General

Leading the Secretariat, the Secretary-General has a unique ability to influence the path of the UN system. The practical and moral leadership of the Secretary-General is an important driver of the implementation of R2P within the UN. Successive Secretaries-General have focussed upon the need to progress from a ‘culture of reaction’ to a ‘culture of prevention’ with respect to conflict prevention broadly, and more recently R2P crimes specifically.⁵⁷ The establishment of the OSAPG, for example, institutionalises a preventive approach within the Secretariat. An established ‘culture of risk aversion’, however, has often prevailed over the possibility of preventive action in the past.⁵⁸ The issue of political will, it seems, ‘remains the essential challenge to a culture of

prevention.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the current Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, has demonstrated a substantial commitment to mass atrocity prevention through the expansion of the role of SAPG from part-time to full-time, through expansion of the OSAPG, and through regular reports and statements on R2P and its implementation.

There are considerable opportunities for the Secretary-General to take further action. Understanding of R2P within parts of the Secretariat remains limited, and high-level outreach and training could be beneficial.⁶⁰ Moreover, the idea of mainstreaming R2P throughout the UN system, including in the standard operating procedures of the departments of the Secretariat, is gaining increasing support.⁶¹ Incorporating explicit consideration of R2P within the mandates of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), for example, could substantially increase UN capacity for preventive action. By training field officers to recognise the warning signs of mass atrocities and report back appropriately, for example, the OSAPG could gain an important source of field intelligence. The Secretary-General could directly promote this consideration through requests for reports to include specific discussion of R2P where relevant. In turn, the Secretary-General's reports to the Security Council could incorporate this information, highlighting the importance of R2P considerations in the decision-making process.⁶²

The 'good offices' function of the Office of the Secretary-General is an important component of the UN's capacity for mass atrocity prevention.

The good offices function can be understood as ‘the independent political role of the Secretary-General in preventing or mediating conflicts among, and more recently within, States.’⁶³ The Secretary-General can utilise the good offices function to privately mediate potential R2P conflicts at times of imminent crisis.⁶⁴ The Secretary-General enjoys a reputation as a reasonably impartial actor, in whom many states place a high level of trust.⁶⁵ Moreover, under Article 99 of the UN Charter, the Secretary-General has the opportunity to bring to the attention of the Security Council ‘any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.’⁶⁶ In practice, however, this capacity is not utilised. Judicious use of this provision, or a gentle reminder of its possible use in appropriate situations, may further strengthen the capacity of the Secretary-General’s good offices for mass atrocity prevention.

The Special Advisor for the Responsibility to Protect

The Special Advisor to the Secretary-General focusing on the Implementation of the Responsibility to Protect (SAR2P) is responsible for developing a UN-wide conceptual and policy framework for R2P.⁶⁷ This includes identifying practical recommendations for strengthening and coordinating the performance of the UN and its partners in this area, and engaging Member States in ongoing substantive dialogue on R2P implementation.⁶⁸ The current Advisor, Edward Luck, has argued that “the Responsibility to Protect has both operational and aspirational significance”, however the institutionalization of the Responsibility to Protect is still in a formative phase.⁶⁹ As such the Special Advisor’s

current capacity is limited, but his responsibilities present considerable opportunities for augmenting UN capacity for mass atrocity prevention.

The SAR2P has advocated better inter-agency collaboration within the UN system, and an integration of the Responsibility to Protect perspective into existing humanitarian and conflict prevention frameworks.⁷⁰ The Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide's early-warning framework will be most effective when coupled with comprehensive ongoing country-specific assessment.⁷¹ However, enhanced examination of early-warning indicators will not necessarily improve active decision-making because ultimately it requires the political motivation of Member States to take decisive and timely action.⁷²

Department of Political Affairs

The Secretariat, and within it the Department of Political Affairs, is the central focal point for preventive diplomacy within the UN system. Since the end of the Cold War, the UN has substantially increased its focus upon and capacity for preventive diplomacy.⁷³ These efforts have met with at least some success – according to the 2005 Human Security report, they have both prevented the escalation of multiple potential conflicts and resulted in a number of peace agreements for conflicts already underway.⁷⁴ In 2006, the Mediation Support Unit was established within the DPA 'as a central repository for peacemaking experience and a clearing house for lessons learned and best practices.'⁷⁵ Additionally, the 'Mediation Support Standby Team',

established in 2008, 'is a five-person expert team that can be deployed on short notice to assist UN and non-UN mediation efforts around the world.'⁷⁶ In its first year of operation it was deployed to ten countries to assist in mediation efforts, including Kenya and Madagascar.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, it is well recognised that the DPA's prevention capacity could be strengthened further, and utilised more assertively.⁷⁸ In the past five years there have been multiple proposals for strengthening the DPA's capacity in conflict prevention, preventive diplomacy and peacemaking, and for additional resources with which to do so.⁷⁹ Enhancing the financial resources of the DPA would facilitate strengthening its capacity in these key areas.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The mandate of the OHCHR is to 'promote and protect the enjoyment and full realisation, by all people, of all rights established in the Charter of the United Nations and in international human rights laws and treaties.'⁸⁰ It acts as secretariat to eight human rights treaty bodies, and has oversight for special procedures mandate-holders and special rapporteurs. The 2009 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, which focussed upon the efforts of the UN system to prevent genocide, noted that OHCHR has a presence in forty-eight countries, and was involved in implementing over fifty projects 'to help Governments, national institutions and non-governmental organisations to enhance their capacity in the area of human rights.'⁸¹ It also conducts widespread human rights monitoring. According to the Secretary-General, 'All of these activities are central to predicting and preventing

genocide.’⁸² At the field level, the capacity of the OHCHR for mass atrocity prevention is substantial. This capacity has not always been utilised effectively, however. In 1993, for example, the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Arbitrary or Summary Executions concluded after visiting Rwanda that acts of genocide may have occurred there. The UN system did not respond effectively to this report, nor a subsequent report in early 1994 that the situation had worsened.

The established capacity of the OHCHR for mass atrocity prevention provides a strong basis for further augmentation. First, integrating explicit R2P analysis into the regular activities of the OHCHR would further strengthen existing capacity. The human rights treaty bodies, for example, encourage and assist states in adopting measures to curb racial and ethnic discrimination and exclusion.⁸³ States ‘are asked to demonstrate and explain the preventive strategies that they have in place and the institutions that they have established to protect against risks.’⁸⁴ Ideally, it would become standard practice to incorporate consideration of potential risk of R2P crimes and appropriate risk mitigation strategies. This would require treaty bodies to develop a strong knowledge of the kinds of factors that can indicate risk of mass atrocities, and the ability to assess the preventive strategies that might be helpful in a particular context. Second, a stronger focus within OHCHR on minority rights could enhance capacity for mass atrocity prevention. Currently, minority rights is a relatively minor focus of the OHCHR. The limited resources allocated to this area include the Independent Expert on Minority Issues, and a Forum on Minority Issues that sits for two days each year. Yet minorities are most likely to be the

victims of genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. A stronger focus on minority issues and strengthening the rights and position of minorities globally could contribute to achieving the preventive goals of R2P.⁸⁵



7. Additional Areas of Preventive Capacity within the UN System

United Nations Development Program

There is potential for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to make a major contribution to the capacity of the UN for mass atrocity prevention through early stage structural prevention work. While short to medium-term prevention strategies are most often discussed as part of the preventive component of R2P, there is much scope for structural, long-term prevention to have a substantial impact over time. In his 2009 report *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon highlighted the possibilities of development assistance contributing to the structural prevention of R2P crises.⁸⁶ Mainstreaming specific consideration of R2P throughout the development assistance programs of UNDP could ensure that development assistance is delivered in a manner that also contributes to reducing risk factors for genocide and mass atrocities. Programs might specifically target risk factors identified by the OSAPG, such as ‘tense inter-group relations’ or ‘weak institutional capacity to prevent genocide’, through improving indigenous mediation capacity for example. Much of this work, however, would not require the addition of specific programs, but rather involve tailoring existing programs to mitigate risk wherever possible. For example, incorporating R2P considerations into an aid program might involve designing the program to ensure aid is distributed in ways

that provided equitable access for ethnic minorities, in a manner that does not inflame inter-ethnic tensions.

In particular, there is a great deal of scope for integrating R2P considerations into programs targeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a major focus of the UNDP. There is substantial commonality between many of the MDGs and the types of actions required for mass atrocity prevention. Consider, for example, the first MDG, that of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. As former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan enunciated, 'Every step taken towards reducing poverty and achieving broad-based economic growth ... is a step toward conflict prevention.'⁸⁷ Of course it is important not to oversimplify the relationship between poverty and the commission of mass atrocities, and to recognise both that mass atrocities can occur in the absence of poverty, and that poverty is not always a risk factor.⁸⁸ Yet in many cases it can be a substantial contributing factor, and addressing poverty is widely regarded as a structural prevention measure for reducing the likelihood of R2P crimes. Similarly, goal eight, that of developing a global partnership for development, is also an excellent example of common ground. From an R2P perspective, the level of 'trade openness' – that is economic interdependence – is one of six key predictors of the likelihood of genocide and mass atrocities developed through quantitative studies by the political scientist Barbara Harff.⁸⁹ Nations with high levels of economic interdependence are far less likely to engage in mass atrocity crimes, while economic isolation is a risk factor. Collaboration can also augment the effectiveness of the MDG programs. At the simplest level, aid is more effective in reducing

poverty in politically stable nations, while nations exhibiting risk factors for genocide or mass atrocities are typically poor and deteriorating environments for meeting the MDGs.⁹⁰ Integrating R2P considerations into UNDP programs targeting the MDGs, therefore, can be mutually beneficial for both programs – and most importantly for the recipient nations themselves.

International Financial Institutions

Successful prevention of genocide and mass atrocities will require the coordinated efforts of development actors. Since the end of the Cold War, it has become widely accepted that security and development are interconnected.⁹¹ Economic underdevelopment and economic stressors can contribute to the risk of mass violence.⁹² Within the UN system, special attention must therefore be given to the role of international financial institutions (IFIs), namely the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Headquartered in Washington D.C., the IFIs are the custodians of global economic cooperation and development. The IMF's main focus is macroeconomic financial and technical assistance to its member states with the aim of promoting international monetary cooperation.⁹³ The "World Bank" refers to the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Development Association (IDA) – those institutions responsible for poverty reduction through loans to middle-income and the world's poorest countries, respectively.⁹⁴ The World Bank employs approximately 10 000 development experts, spread amongst its headquarters and over 100 country offices.⁹⁵

The World Bank's ability to prevent violent conflict through institutional capacity-building and conflict-sensitive development analysis has been recognised within the UN system.⁹⁶ Significantly, in 2001, the World Bank adopted an Operational Policy on Development Cooperation and Conflict. This policy is executed under the "Fragile and Conflict-Affected States" strategic theme, and supported monetarily by a State and Peacebuilding Fund.⁹⁷ Through its Social Development Department, the Bank has recently created a new team working on conflict, crime and violence, to support and strengthen the Bank's efforts 'to make societies more resilient to violence'.⁹⁸ Furthermore, the World Bank has deepened its cooperation with the UN system through participation in coordination mechanisms such as the United Nations Development Group⁹⁹ and the Executive Committee on Peace and Security¹⁰⁰ within the Secretariat, as well as the establishment of a Partnership Framework for Crisis and Post-Crisis Situations in 2008.¹⁰¹

While the IMF has not produced conflict policy or research to the extent of the World Bank, it has taken modest steps to adjust its policies to fragile states, particularly through governance reforms.¹⁰² Joint World Bank-IMF initiatives also reflect a capacity to prevent mass atrocities. Their commitment to the MDGs embodies an implicit commitment to conflict prevention. In addition, in 1999 the World Bank and the IMF jointly adopted Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Though not without merited criticism,¹⁰³ the notable feature of this initiative is the creation of development policy through a participatory process, led by the host country and including input from civil society organisations, NGOs, bilateral donors and the IFIs.¹⁰⁴ In theory at least, the PRSP

affirms the state's primary responsibility to protect its population, thereby encouraging responsible sovereignty.

The IFIs have the potential to implement additional policies, building on these measures, to improve their capacity to prevent genocide and mass atrocities. At present, it is worth noting that most commentators have rightly emphasised the limits of the IFIs as preventive actors, and the undesirability of completely integrating the security and development agendas.¹⁰⁵ With this in mind, the following modest recommendations can be made. Organisationally, the World Bank is yet to integrate its entities that focus on conflict-related research with those responsible for policy generation. Furthermore, the World Bank's conflict programs are not connected to other salient programs, such as indigenous rights and governance more generally.¹⁰⁶ Should this internal coherence be improved, the Bank would be better equipped to prevent R2P situations. The potential for the IFIs to collaborate with the UN system in early warning and information gathering should also be explored in more detail.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, Rubin and Jones suggest the World Bank and DPA pool resources to generate a list of at-risk countries.¹⁰⁸ Finally, the recent World Development Report 2011, *Conflict, Security and Development* highlighted a range of recommendations to mitigate against mass violence.¹⁰⁹ In summary, given that equitable economic development will likely strengthen a country's resilience to R2P-related crimes, the World Bank and the IMF are key actors in the implementation of R2P. Though the preventive capacity of the IFIs is circumscribed by their strict economic mandates, they can nevertheless make an important contribution.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) protects “[a]ny person who is outside the country of his nationality ... because he has or had a well-founded fear of persecution by reason of his race, religion, nationality or political opinion and is unable, or because of such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the government of the country of his nationality”.¹¹⁰ The UNHCR currently provides protection and assistance to approximately 34 million refugees in more than 110 countries.¹¹¹ Genocide in particular can be curbed or averted by an operational application of R2P that provides protection through asylum, and the role of UNHCR is crucial in this respect.¹¹² Moreover, the UNHCR’s extensive field presence enables the UN to gather primary information on “emerging political and humanitarian crises, advocate for protecting populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, and alert the international community to developments which may lead to these crimes taking place”.¹¹³ The UNHCR is also integral to mass atrocity prevention because of its ability to work with governments to aid them in taking responsibility to protect their populations and those of others, thereby contributing to lasting global peace and security.¹¹⁴

The UNHCR must manage many complex issues surrounding refugees, however. Despite its goal of assisting refugees to either return home voluntarily, integrate locally or resettle, in many cases refugees are unable to pursue any of these options, and require long-term assistance. Both industrialised and developing nations are often reluctant to host or

integrate refugees, and as a consequence UNHCR may assume primary responsibility for meeting protection responsibilities for the refugees.¹¹⁵ With the majority of refugees hosted in developing countries, strong anti-refugee sentiment can develop as a result of competition for scarce resources. Anti-refugee motivations might be triggered by economic pressures, security considerations, and/or racial prejudices.¹¹⁶ Davis, Majekodunmi and Smith-Hohn have argued that refugees are “not only a symptom but often a potential cause of R2P situations”, highlighting the complexity of refugee issues.¹¹⁷ The role of the UNHCR in contributing to mass atrocity prevention, therefore, is particularly complex.

United Nations Institute for Training and Research

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), is an autonomous research institute created to service the UN system. In accordance with its mandate, UNITAR provides training and professional development to United Nations personnel, as well as UN member states and other external partners in three thematic areas: environment, governance and peace, and security and diplomacy. In 2008-2009, UNITAR trained eighty thousand beneficiaries.¹¹⁸ Through its training activities, UNITAR has a unique potential to contribute to the UN’s capacity for mass atrocity prevention.

UNITAR’s contribution to conflict prevention generally, through capacity and institution building, has been recognised in the UN system.¹¹⁹ Several UNITAR programs and activities are particularly relevant to mass atrocity prevention. Within its Peace, Security and Diplomacy Unit, the

Institute offers four training programs in the area of peacemaking and conflict prevention.¹²⁰ While all four programs implicitly strengthen UN capacity to respond to R2P situations, the UNITAR-IPI Fellowship Program in Peacemaking and Preventive Diplomacy is of particular note. Since 1993, it has provided comprehensive training in conflict analysis, mediation and negotiation, through case studies and seminars, to UN staff, diplomats and representatives of regional organisations.¹²¹ Explicit R2P analysis within these case studies will strengthen R2P awareness and the capacity of the UN system to respond to potential R2P situations.

UNITAR could also contribute to mainstreaming R2P through the organisation of seminars and high-level discussions. Regular seminars, such as the 2007 seminar on genocide prevention at UNITAR's New York office, could perhaps be held in conjunction with General Assembly discussions on R2P.¹²² Given UNITAR's privileged access to the Security Council and Secretariat, regular seminars and discussions could have significant influence. Furthermore, with its emphasis on strengthening strategic partnerships, within the UN system and with regional organisations, UNITAR could be a focal point for networking and capacity building across the UN system and with regional partners.¹²³ UNITAR is highly reputable entity, and increased focus on training on issues surrounding mass atrocity prevention can make a meaningful contribution to UN capacity for mass atrocity prevention.¹²⁴

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) is dedicated to the advancement of women's rights and the attainment of global gender equality. It provides financial and technical assistance to women, and promotes women's economic security through development and democratic governance and violence prevention projects. UN Women programs provide opportunities for women to engage in promoting peace and preventing conflict within their own local communities and in a broader international spectrum.¹²⁵

Initiatives to reduce gender-based violence and violence against women are fundamental to the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities. Rape is employed as a strategy of war that is often enacted with impunity.¹²⁶ In June 2008 the Security Council passed Resolution 1820 stating "that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide".¹²⁷ Empowering women has the capacity to prevent not only their victimization but also contribute to the prevention of violent conflict more generally. Statistically, countries with low percentiles of women in parliament and the economic sector, or cultures that restrict women and condone violence against women are more likely to resort to armed conflict.¹²⁸ There is also significant evidence to suggest that gender-based violence can progress to genocidal atrocities.¹²⁹ UN Women's recognition of the link between women's empowerment,

conflict prevention and mass atrocity prevention propels its positive agenda in this area.

UN Women (and formerly its predecessor UNIFEM) also advocates a strong role for women in conflict prevention and conflict resolution strategies and programs.¹³⁰ Research indicates that women's experiences and insight are of particular value in early-warning monitoring.¹³¹ A gender-sensitive approach to early warning and conflict monitoring has the potential to further aid watch lists and monitoring programs to prevent mass atrocities.¹³² There is scope for liaison between UN Women and the Office of the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide to incorporate a gender perspective into the OSAPG's Analysis Framework that assesses risk of genocide, and other forms of early warning and root cause analysis. A deeper understanding of the gendered dimensions of mass atrocity crimes across the UN system may facilitate more inclusive and effective approaches to mass atrocity prevention.

International Criminal Court

Although the International Criminal Court (ICC) is independent from the United Nations it is significant because it maintains a cooperative relationship with it, and judicial proceedings can be initiated by the Security Council. The ICC plays a considerable role in the implementation of R2P by punishing *génocidaires* and perpetrators of war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹³³ It is governed by The Rome Statute which came into force in July 2002. Approximately 114 States have ratified the

Rome Statute, however, prominent non-parties and permanent members of the Security Council include the United States, Russia and China.¹³⁴ The Rome Statute strengthens existing states' obligations to effectively punish perpetrators of mass atrocities.¹³⁵ Punishing leaders responsible for mass atrocities has become a moral imperative of the international community.¹³⁶

The judicial organs associated with the UN system, including the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the hybrid Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia and International Criminal Court have received considerable attention regarding their preventive capacity through a deterrent effect. As the SAPG has commented with respect to these judicial organs within the UN system, 'Justice is not only one of our main goals; it is in itself an important means of prevention.'¹³⁷ At times the threat of justice does appear to have proved an effective deterrent, such as in 2004 when the SAPG reminded leaders in Côte D'Ivoire that they could be held criminally liable for exacerbating inter-ethnic tensions through xenophobic hate speech.¹³⁸ However the power of deterrence for prevention remains controversial and contested.¹³⁹ The dilemma is whether the prospect of prosecution is enough of a disincentive for leaders considering committing mass atrocities.¹⁴⁰ Theoretically the mere threat of prosecution should have a significant deterrent effect, but it unclear how robust this effect is in practice.¹⁴¹

The judicial structures for addressing mass atrocities are fragile because the ICC is a complementary authority that requires the consent of either

the state of the accused or the state in which the crime took place unless it is referred to the Court by the Security Council.¹⁴² States' refusal to comply with arrest warrants for accused perpetrators of violent conflict impedes the ICC's efficacy.¹⁴³ Thus, leaders responsible for atrocities are still able to operate with impunity.¹⁴⁴ Effectively, "the International Criminal Court is only as strong as its enforcement capacity, and is dependent on states for crucial assistance during all stages of its proceedings".¹⁴⁵ The ICC lacks the capacity to enforce jurisdiction and a police service to track and investigate suspects as this depends on the cooperation of member states.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless the ICC is an important operative in the prosecution of perpetrators and protection of victims of mass atrocities.¹⁴⁷ Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has appealed to Member States to "cooperate fully with the International Criminal Court, and other international mechanisms addressing genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and for the Council to take appropriate steps to encourage and facilitate such cooperation when it is not forthcoming".¹⁴⁸ With the ICC indictment of Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, and the recent request for an arrest warrant for Libya's Head of State Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, there appears to be significant momentum to punish national leaders responsible for mass atrocities.



8. Recommendations and Conclusions

The findings of the above review of the capacity for mass atrocity prevention in the UN system suggest there is a place for cautious optimism in considering the way forward. In the Secretariat, the OSAPG and through the Secretary-General, there is already a well-established capacity for prevention. Furthermore, recent reports from both the Secretary-General and the OSAPG suggest clear, practical and achievable routes to strengthening that capacity further. Nevertheless, as this report highlights, there are a number of opportunities to further strengthen capacity for mass atrocity prevention across the UN system.

First, mainstreaming R2P considerations across the UN system is being increasingly recognised as a valuable way in which to augment system-wide capacity. Human rights and conflict prevention are core to the functions of the UN, and in many respects mass atrocity prevention activities can be regarded as a subset of these broader goals. Ensuring the human rights and conflict prevention mechanisms of the UN are well informed of the risk factors for mass atrocities, of the potential strategies that can be utilised for risk mitigation, and of the importance of inter-agency communication on early warning could substantially strengthen system-wide capacity. While the OSAPG currently has just twelve staff dedicated to preventing genocide, with appropriate integration of the R2P agenda throughout the UN system, many hundreds of staff can also directly contribute to mass atrocity

prevention. The UN has a history of qualified success with mainstreaming issues as diverse as gender and disaster risk reduction, and efforts to mainstream mass atrocity prevention could benefit from adopting a similar approach.

The limited resources of the OSAPG also highlight the need for these resources to be utilised to maximal effect. To this end, it is recommended that the OSAPG conduct a formal review of the capacity of the UN system for genocide and mass atrocity prevention, including an analysis of areas of opportunity for enhancing current capacity. The 2006 review of UN capacity for conflict prevention could form a useful starting point for further analysis, focussed specifically on genocide and mass atrocities. The capacity of the OHCHR should be a particular focal point. With substantial existing capacity for mass atrocity prevention, there are real opportunities for the OHCHR to augment this further through incorporating explicit R2P considerations within its standard operating procedures. Additionally, a stronger focus on minorities – most often the victims of genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity – could yield new insights and programmes to promote their protection.

The role of the Security Council in mass atrocity prevention remains problematic. In the past the Council has been unable to provide ‘timely and decisive’ responses to prevent or curb mass atrocities such as the Rwandan genocide. This has the potential to impact upon the effectiveness of other preventive actions undertaken throughout the UN system, many of which are at least partially dependent upon a credible

(if implicit) threat of reaction. Unless and until this major issue is addressed, the role of the UN in mass atrocity prevention will remain limited and incomplete. Yet this is not an issue of capacity, but rather primarily one of policy and practice. Furthermore, since the end of the Cold War there have been some very positive changes in Security Council practices surrounding human security. A concerted and continual focus by R2P supporters amongst the permanent five Security Council members on the necessity for effective action to prevent and respond to mass atrocities could contribute to shifting Security Council norms over time. In order for this to be effective, however, there must be increasing recognition that, at times, humanitarian concerns must outweigh strategic manoeuvring.

Finally, the critical role of structural prevention in the arsenal of preventive measures deserves greater consideration. To date, there has been very little consideration of the capacity of the UN for structural prevention. The Secretary-General's 2009 report *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*, however, suggests the merit of a broad range of early-stage prevention measures. There is a strong potential for the UN system to make a substantial contribution to structural prevention through tailoring existing development programs to incorporate R2P considerations and goals. While this would be a challenging undertaking, it is achievable within the current UN structure, and has the potential to have a significant impact over the longer term. The resource implications would be relatively modest, and it is realistic to suggest the OSAPG might be able to campaign for dedicated resources for longer-term prevention work. Long-term structural prevention

activities have the potential to mitigate risk of mass atrocities at the earliest stages, and establish structures and mechanisms to prevent risk-escalation processes. In the longer term they may offer the strongest opportunities for mass atrocity prevention.

Since the 2005 Summit Declaration, more resources have been dedicated to the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities than ever before. The capacity of the UN system for mass atrocity prevention has been augmented through the expansion of the OSAPG, the creation of the role of Special Advisor to the Secretary-General for the Responsibility to Protect and initiatives such as the Mediation Support Unit and Mediation Support Standby Team. Regular General Assembly debates and UN publications on R2P, genocide prevention and broader issues of human security have contributed to an ongoing agenda for enhancing the capacity of the UN system in this crucial area. Yet much remains to be done. As the process of operationalising R2P gathers pace, this report has highlighted a number of areas in which the UN system needs to more comprehensively build its capacity for mass atrocity prevention. For those whom the system failed in Rwanda, Srebrenica and elsewhere, ensuring the UN system has the strongest possible capacity for mass atrocity prevention offers hope of a better future.



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