



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

The Secretary-General: Renewing our commitment to the peoples and purposes of the United Nations

The United Nations Charter expresses the determination of “We the peoples” to “reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights” and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for international law can be maintained.

The General Assembly, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council and other UN bodies have further defined the responsibilities of Member States and the UN system, with a special emphasis on their role to prevent armed conflict and to protect people from atrocities and egregious crimes.

When people face such risks they expect the UN to act, and the Organization’s performance is rightly measured by this benchmark. Every day, in zones of conflict, humanitarian emergency and insecurity, as UN staff, we try to meet our responsibilities to protect people. Staff often show tremendous courage and commitment, as in Timor Leste in 1999. They sometimes give their lives to UN service.

Despite our efforts, the Member States and the UN Secretariat, agencies, funds and programmes have not always succeeded in achieving these goals. The 1994 Rwandan genocide represents the most emblematic failure of UN and Member State action. This was followed by our collective failure to prevent atrocities in Srebrenica in 1995. In 2012, my Internal Review Panel assessed UN action in the final stages of armed conflict in Sri Lanka as a “systemic failure” - a characterization I accept on behalf of the UN system.

Over these past two decades, several million people have lost their lives in such crises, and tens of millions have been displaced. Only by meeting our Charter responsibilities can the UN and its Member States prevent horrendous human suffering. We can and must improve how we react to impending catastrophes. A coherent UN, exercising its moral and political responsibility and taking early civilian action can have a transformational impact in preventing and ending gross violations of human rights and humanitarian law. By doing this, the UN can support national and regional actors to meet their own responsibilities, ultimately supporting sovereignty and encouraging peaceful resolution of conflicts.

The recommendations of the Internal Review Panel and its follow-up will help us to better achieve these goals. Implementation begins with this statement, launching a series of steps that will strengthen United Nations action. The statement is being shared with all staff members, for whom it can serve as a guide and reminder in their daily work.

On behalf of the senior leadership and all staff, I solemnly renew the commitment of the UN Secretariat, funds and programmes to uphold the responsibilities assigned to us by the Charter, the Security Council and the General Assembly whenever there is a threat of serious and large-scale violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

We will be vigilant in identifying emerging risks and will ensure that our actions are guided by more effective use of the information that is available to us from UN human rights and humanitarian mechanisms and other entities.

We will inform national authorities of violations and support them in taking essential early action.

We will bring violations to the attention of the appropriate UN organs and regional organizations when national authorities are unable or unwilling to respond.

We will work to help Member States reach agreement on early actions and play our role in implementing their decisions.

We will speak out publicly where violations are ongoing.

We will exercise due diligence in implementing all our mandates.

We will engage in discussions with Member States on ways they can pursue improvements toward fulfilling their own responsibilities.

Above all, we renew our commitment to “We the peoples” of the UN Charter.

As we look at Syria and other difficult situations going forward, this commitment will be fulfilled promptly and systematically, with compassion, integrity, impartiality and with courage by us all.

BAN Ki-moon
Secretary-General
United Nations
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