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PREVENTING MASS ATROCITIES

An Essential Agenda for the Next UN Secretary-General

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Summary

The next Secretary-General of the United Nations will take office at a time when mass killings of civilians are on the increase. From South Sudan to Syria, mass atrocities—large-scale, systematic violence against civilian populations—are overwhelming the political, peacekeeping, and humanitarian work of the UN. It is essential that the Secretary-General sets out a clear agenda for preventing and responding to such atrocities that can gain the support of the UN system, the Security Council, and UN member states at a time of political and financial strain.

The Secretary-General can build this agenda on existing UN policy processes and reviews, rather than attempt to recreate systems for dealing with mass atrocities from scratch. The last two secretaries-general, Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon, have both taken atrocity prevention seriously, advocating the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and innovations such as the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) and the Human Rights up Front (HRuF) initiative.

But the UN is not making maximum use of its preventive mechanisms, and its mediation and peace operations systems are overstretched. Therefore, the next Secretary-General should prioritize five goals:

- **Strengthen Human Rights up Front:** HRuF has been instrumental in bringing the political, human rights, humanitarian, and development arms of the UN together to address crises, but its reforms remain a work in progress. Many UN staffers do not understand HRuF fully or take it entirely seriously, and there is often not enough political or operational follow-up to discussions of potential mass-atrocity situations. The next Secretary-General must throw his or her political weight behind making HRuF fully operational.
- **Empower a new special adviser on the prevention of mass atrocities:** The next Secretary-General should select a senior adviser on preventing mass atrocities as part of his or her core team—merging the posts of special adviser on the prevention of genocide and special adviser on R2P—and fully integrating this appointee and his or her staff into all levels of political decision making.

- **Improve early warning and analysis:** The Secretary-General should oversee the development of a systemwide and deliberately simple early warning tool that all staff can use, while demanding more detailed analysis and reporting on threats from senior UN officials—including development, political, and military personnel—in countries at risk of mass atrocities.
- **Strengthen the UN’s preventive and response tools:** The Secretary-General should work with member states to (i) ensure that the UN’s core political and mediation capacities are properly resourced; (ii) boost its regional offices as hubs for preventive diplomacy; (iii) invest in strengthening UN human rights presences as mechanisms for atrocity prevention; and (iv) work with peacekeeping contributors to fulfill the Kigali Principles on the protection of civilians.
- **Revitalize political discussions around mass atrocities:** The Secretary-General should look for new channels to raise early warnings and preventive strategies with the Security Council, moving beyond the paralysis over Syria. Among these channels should be convening a small group of UN ambassadors to act as informal advisers on mass atrocity policy issues. The Secretary-General should also support the African Union’s ambitions to play a greater role in prevention and mediation as an essential partner to the UN.

Preventing Mass Atrocities: An Essential Agenda for the Next UN Secretary-General

I. Introduction: The Secretary-General and the Prevention of Mass Atrocities

The next Secretary-General of the United Nations will need to address mass atrocities from his or her first day in office. Most urgently, he or she will face the seemingly intractable conflict in Syria, the worst case of mass atrocities since the Rwandan genocide; mass killings by warring parties in South Sudan, where a UN peacekeeping operation has been deployed since the country's birth in 2011; attacks by the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Iraq and Syria; and further mass atrocities from Nigeria to Somalia.

The frequency of deliberate, mass killing of civilians has increased in recent years after a steady decline since the mid-1990s.¹ The global risk of mass atrocities—large-scale, systematic violence against civilian populations—will likely remain elevated for the foreseeable future due to high levels of political instability and violent conflict.² International tensions will complicate efforts to foresee and respond to these threats. The incoming Secretary-General will have no shortage of compelling issues on his or her agenda, from climate change to the Sustainable Development Goals to the threat of pandemics. But it is essential that the Secretary-General make preventing mass atrocities an overarching priority for three main reasons:

- **First and foremost**, *mass atrocities have profound humanitarian consequences*. Each year, systematic violence worldwide kills more than 10,000 civilians and forces millions more from their homes. Most of the world's worst recent humanitarian emergencies—in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, the Central African Republic, and elsewhere—have had deliberate attacks on civilians at their root.³ The human toll alone should be sufficient reason for the UN, an institution born in the wake of the Holocaust, to make preventing mass atrocities a core function.
- **Second**, in a period of uncertainty about the relevance of the norms and institutions at the heart of the UN system, *the basic principle that large-scale, deliberate attacks against civilians can never be justified is a central tenet of international order*. If this core tenet is further eroded, it will become harder to defend the larger post-World War II human rights framework, and perhaps even the broader norms of global peace and security that guide the UN system.

- **Third**, as previous secretaries-general have learned, *the UN's credibility is inextricably tied to its response to mass atrocities and genocide*. “History’s judgement will be harsh,” said Ban Ki-moon about the UN’s abject collective failure to prevent or resolve the war in Syria.⁴ Before Ban, Kofi Annan spent years rebuilding the UN’s reputation after the disasters of Rwanda and Srebrenica, only to spend the last phase of his tenure grappling with the Sudanese government’s atrocities in Darfur. “If there is one legacy I would most wish to leave to my successors,” Annan said, “it is an Organization both better equipped to prevent genocide, and able to act decisively to stop it when prevention fails.”⁵

While one must be realistic about the UN’s limitations, the Secretary-General does play a unique role concerning mass atrocities. He or she can use the prestige of the office to address concerns about looming violence with an authority no other figure can muster. UN development, humanitarian, and human rights experts are based in countries at risk of conflict where few other actors have access or leverage. The UN deploys more than 100,000 peacekeepers worldwide, including in several sites of ongoing or recent mass atrocities.

History shows that the UN *can* prevent mass atrocities. In recent years, UN envoys have helped avert potentially bloody crises in Guinea and end spiraling inter-ethnic killing in Kyrgyzstan. They have also done behind-the-scenes preventive diplomacy in fragile states such as Kenya and Burkina Faso. In 2011, when Côte d’Ivoire was on the verge of new conflict, with a high risk of mass atrocities, UN attack helicopters and French troops restored order.⁶

But every case of relative success has been hard-won. Tasked with managing recurrent conflicts from Haiti to the Democratic Republic of Congo, the UN is seriously overstretched. Its annual peacekeeping budget has surpassed a record \$8 billion, and member states are wary of spending more money on prevention and human rights. As a series of recent internal reviews (described in more detail in Section 2.c. below) have emphasized, the UN has become too reactive, failing to grasp crises early and then struggling to assist fragile states once conflict begins.

The challenge for any Secretary-General is to invest much more seriously in prevention: to harness the UN’s limited resources to identify risks of mass atrocities, focus political attention on them, mobilize member states for action, and devise timely and effective responses. This report offers a brief overview of relevant UN early warning and response mechanisms. It then sets out an agenda for the next Secretary-General focused on: (i) the steps the new Secretary-General can take during his or her first 100 days in office to demonstrate a commitment to fighting mass atrocities; and (ii) longer-term steps to improve the UN’s early warning systems and its responses to looming threats of mass atrocities.

2. Early Warning and Prevention Mechanisms

Given the UN's global reach, the organization and its leader should have access to a remarkable amount of information about potential mass atrocities. The reality is patchier. As evidenced in situations such as Sri Lanka (2009), the Central African Republic (2012), and South Sudan (2013), information does not always flow smoothly from the field to headquarters—and even when warning signs are clear, headquarters often reacts indecisively. Many UN staff working on issues such as development do not receive training on early warning of mass atrocities. In some cases they resist this, afraid they could alienate their local contacts by asking hard questions about violence.

The UN's multiple funds and agencies often do not share information well with one another, and “stovepiping” is a problem inside individual UN entities. Key elements of the UN Secretariat—including the Secretary-General's office, the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)—are bogged down in crisis management and have little time to focus on new threats. Political and financial constraints have exacerbated a tendency among UN officials to avoid making warnings or bold policy proposals that could alienate member states.

The Security Council and other intergovernmental bodies are often slow to respond to warnings of mass violence or divided over how to act, as the Syrian tragedy has demonstrated. Even when the Security Council authorizes a rapid response, the UN's operational responses can be flawed. It took a year to deploy 5,000 peacekeepers to reinforce the embattled mission in South Sudan in 2013–14. An internal study found that UN peacekeeping missions, although regularly mandated to protect civilians in imminent danger, are “generally passive” in the face of violence.⁷

Yet the next Secretary-General will be able to build on efforts by previous UN leaders to make the organization better prepared to address mass atrocities. These include: (i) the Human Rights up Front initiative, launched by Ban Ki-moon in 2013; (ii) the work of the Secretary-General's special advisers on the prevention of genocide and R2P; (iii) a series of landmark reviews of the UN's peace and security mechanisms in 2015; and (iv) repeated, if often unsuccessful, attempts to improve the way the UN Secretariat conveys warnings to the Security Council.

2.a. Human Rights up Front (HRuF)

Ban Ki-moon launched HRuF in 2013 to address failings identified in the UN's response to the 2009 Sri Lanka conflict. These included poor coordination among UN actors; an apparent lack of focus on human rights abuses and conflict risks among officials both at headquarters and in the field; and a lack of engagement with national authorities and member states to

build political support necessary for prevention.⁸ Guided by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG) and championed by Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson, HRuF has introduced a number of changes to UN operations, including how the Secretariat engages with member states, and advocated “cultural” change across the system.

As described by UN staff, HRuF tries to do two things: (i) ensure the UN has an effective early warning and prevention system, bringing its three pillars—peace and security, development, and human rights—together to strengthen them all, prioritizing human rights; and (ii) if situations deteriorate, ensure that the UN acts early and firmly to prevent mass atrocities. There is some confusion in the system, however, over whether HRuF’s focus should be on mass atrocities or defending human rights more broadly.⁹

The core institutional innovations of HRuF include a multi-tiered system of early warning, starting with regular “human rights scans” by officials in the field to look for signs of emerging abuses and tensions in specific countries. In New York, there are Regional Quarterly Reviews (RQRs), at which mid-level members of UN agencies scan all countries in their region for early warning signs and then discuss in more detail those situations that seem to raise the risk of serious violations, and Senior Action Group (SAG) meetings involving principals on the most serious, urgent, and/or complex cases.

UN officials are cautiously positive about the effects of these and other innovations ushered in by HRuF. Many describe the RQRs and other discussions as frank, and human rights experts who once struggled to gain a hearing in policy debates are now taken far more seriously. The initiative has helped field-based officials with divergent priorities discuss potential threats more constructively, and a number of resident coordinators (RCs) have cited HRuF in turning to headquarters for assistance in the face of looming violence. The UN has instituted a new system of “light teams”—small groups of experts on political and human rights crises—to deploy to support RCs in countries likely to face violence, such as Nigeria on the eve of its 2015 presidential elections.

HRuF has complemented efforts by DPA, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to make UN country teams more effective by deploying human rights advisers and peace and development advisers to at-risk countries. However, funding for these positions is limited and UN officials note that demand for these advisers from RCs outstrips the number that can be deployed.

HRuF remains a work in progress. Not all UN officials appear to take the RQRs and related discussions equally seriously, and preparations for these meetings are uneven. The most serious gap in the system appears to be a lack of consistent, systematic follow-up, at both the headquarters and field levels, to identified threats of potential mass atrocities. This lack of

results has led some field-based officials to conclude that HRuF is a little more than a set of headquarters meetings.

Questions have arisen about whether HRuF will outlast the tenures of Secretary-General Ban and Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson. Officials in Ban's office are working hard to ensure that it does so and have taken steps to improve follow-up on the RQRs, including requesting more regular briefings from officials in at-risk countries on evolving threats of mass atrocities. While the basic structures of HRuF will remain in place after transitioning to the next Secretary-General, it will be down to Ban's successor to signal whether HRuF remains a political priority.

2.b. Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

Kofi Annan created OSAPG in 2004 as part of his broader efforts to incorporate the lessons of Rwanda's genocide and the Balkan wars into the UN's response to future atrocities. On taking office in 2007, Ban Ki-moon maintained the position of special adviser on the prevention of genocide and created a parallel post of special adviser on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

Some member states, suspicious of R2P, aimed to undermine this second position and refused to fund a separate office. Successive R2P special advisers have served on \$1-a-year contracts, and both special advisers have been supported by OSAPG staff. The office is relatively small and, in an institution in which personal contacts are essential to getting anything done, it has the disadvantage of being housed outside the main headquarters building in New York. This contributes to a broader impression that OSAPG is not a central player in discussions of major crises on the UN's agenda; strikingly, until Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson required it, OSAPG had not been consistently invited to send representatives to the RQRs.

In 2014, OSAPG published a Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes that should assist in early warning.¹⁰ Many field-based officials, however, note that that this framework is too complicated to serve as a practical tool for non-experts and therefore is ill-suited to the kind of systemwide reporting being spurred by HRuF. The framework involves 14 "risk factors"—each of which has 6 to 18 associated "indicators." The risk factors range from quite concrete issues—such as the existence of an ongoing armed conflict—to general topics such as "absence of mitigating factors."

2.c. Peace Operations Reform

In 2015, the UN published three key reviews concerning (i) peace operations; (ii) peacebuilding; and (iii) women, peace, and security.¹¹ The UN activities reviewed by these panels have great potential to mitigate risks of mass atrocities even if they do not explicitly or exclusively

focus on this goal. All three reviews argued that the UN is too focused on responding to crises and should invest in prevention. UN officials and diplomats in New York have endorsed this, at least at a rhetorical level. Another common conclusion across all three initiatives was that fragmentation of analysis, strategy, and action among the UN's many mandates is a major weakness.

Of the reviews, the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) has the most detailed recommendations relating to mass atrocities, although some R2P advocates complained that it did not focus enough on the issue. HIPPO endorsed HRuF and recommended that the Secretary-General and heads of UN funds and agencies ensure "country teams have the skills, experience and capacity to support conflict prevention efforts." It also praised the work of the UN's regional political offices in Central Asia, Central Africa, and West Africa, which have acted as hubs for conflict analysis, prevention, and mediation, and it urged the UN to launch a similar center for the Middle East and North Africa. It recommended reforms to the funding of the UN's mediation capacities and support systems for its civilian Special Political Missions (SPMs), which are deployed in trouble spots including Iraq and Afghanistan but are constrained by outdated funding and administrative rules.

HIPPO called for an increase in the UN's analytical and planning capacities, recommending the creation of a new planning cell in EOSG. Ban Ki-moon has set up a three-person team to play this role, with the potential to expand under the next Secretary-General. He has also endorsed another theme of the HIPPO report: stronger cooperation with non-UN partners such as the African Union (AU).

In contrast to its emphasis on prevention, HIPPO signaled some skepticism about peacekeepers' ability to protect civilians through military means. It recommended that the organization set up a system of "vanguard" military capabilities to reinforce its missions or to deploy to crisis zones at short notice. The United States has led an initiative to persuade other countries, including other NATO members and China, to offer the UN more high-quality troops. The Netherlands, Rwanda, and the United States have also initiated the Kigali Principles—guidelines on protection of civilians, with an emphasis on training troops and taking the necessary risks to save lives—that a growing number of governments have endorsed.¹²

Combined, these initiatives offer a strong platform for the Secretary-General to push for more effective prevention and peace operations to counter mass atrocities, but it remains to be seen whether member states will put reforms into practice. In budget negotiations in the first half of 2016, the General Assembly awarded DPA just 8 new posts out of more than 40 it had proposed in the wake of HIPPO, while proposals to reform SPM funding and backstopping are stalled.

2.d. Political Engagement

However well the next Secretary-General promotes systemic reforms, he or she needs the support of the Security Council and the wider UN membership. After the Syrian debacle, many analysts question whether any Secretary-General—no matter how committed—can make the Security Council respond to mass atrocities effectively. UN officials and analysts are split over how to best influence the Council. Advocates of an activist approach point to Article 99 of the UN Charter, which specifies that the Secretary-General “may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.”¹³ Previous secretaries-general have invoked this article on just a handful of occasions—Ban has never explicitly done so—because they have worried that it could lead to a clash with Council members.

Nonetheless, the Secretary-General needs mechanisms to flag early signs of mass atrocities with Council members. In 2001, the Security Council passed a resolution inviting the Secretary-General to provide it with “information and analyses from within the United Nations system” on serious crises and potential conflicts.¹⁴ Yet “horizon scanning” sessions where DPA officials can raise concerns have run into skepticism from some Council members. The special adviser on the prevention of genocide has briefed the Council more frequently in recent years, but still less than would seem merited; the R2P adviser has never briefed a formal Council session, despite the Council’s references to R2P in nearly 50 resolutions.

However, it is still possible for UN officials to push difficult issues up the Security Council’s agenda: the high commissioner for human rights now briefs the Council far more frequently than five to ten years ago, and an OHCHR office in New York has become adept at bringing urgent information from crisis-zones like Burundi at short notice.

The Secretary-General also needs to ensure that he or she has allies in other UN forums, including the Human Rights Council and the notoriously combative Fifth Committee of the General Assembly, which handles budgetary matters. While countries concerned with mass atrocities have formed the “Group of Friends of R2P”—a caucus that meets in New York and has recently started to meet in Geneva as well—the Secretary-General needs extra diplomatic backup. The Human Rights Council has become increasingly active in responding to mass atrocities in cases including Libya, Syria, and Burundi, but remarkably there is only a very ad-hoc mechanism for the high commissioner for human rights, let alone the Secretary-General, to give it informal briefings on looming crises.¹⁵

The next Secretary-General also needs to look beyond the UN system to build alliances against mass atrocities. While the UN has established relations with the European Union, NATO, and other regional actors, its most important political and operational partnership is now with the AU. The AU and UN have worked closely to address mass atrocity situations

in Darfur, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan, while effectively fighting a war together against Islamist forces in Somalia.

Cooperation has often been rocky, with political splits and operational friction on the ground. But in cases such as Burundi, the AU has seemed more willing to act early against mass atrocity threats than the Security Council. The Secretary-General may find that it is sometimes easier to create momentum for action in Addis Ababa than in New York and Geneva, and should not shy away from mobilizing African states in a crisis. In January 2017, the AU will appoint a new chairperson of its commission, its equivalent of a Secretary-General; he or she could be a key ally for the UN leader.

3. Recommendations: A Mass Atrocity Prevention Agenda for the Next Secretary-General

The next Secretary-General should lay out a clear agenda to address the UN's weaknesses and maximize its strengths in preventing and responding to mass atrocities. This should include (i) steps in the first 100 days to send a political message about the importance of the issue to all UN staff and UN member states and seize immediate opportunities to improve internal UN workings; and (ii) longer-term steps to improve the UN's early warning and response mechanisms.

3.a. The First 100 Days

The Secretary-General will enjoy unique goodwill and leverage in his or her first months. He or she should communicate a clear focus on preventing mass atrocities to UN staff, member states, and the public. The first element of this messaging should be to **reinforce the importance of HRuF**. The Secretary-General should:

- *Issue a communique to all UN staff and member states* accepting his or her personal responsibility to do everything he or she can to prevent mass atrocities and stating that the new leadership team is committed to building on Ban Ki-moon's foundation and expanding and deepening the impact of HRuF.
- *Instruct the new deputy Secretary-General to oversee HRuF issues* on a day-to-day basis, following the model set by Jan Eliasson, to demonstrate that the initiative remains a political priority, and ensure adequate staffing in EOSG to lead the initiative.
- *Hold a town hall staff meeting on the future of HRuF at UN headquarters in New York* in January 2017—followed by similar events in other UN centers like Geneva, and “virtual town halls” with regional clusters of UN field missions later in 2017—to reinforce this message and allow UN staff to comment on obstacles to implementing HRuF.

The second should be to **raise the institutional focus on R2P and the prevention of genocide:**

- *Appoint a high-profile figure with demonstrated expertise on mass atrocity prevention to serve as special adviser on the prevention of mass atrocities, combining the special advisers on the prevention of genocide and R2P and continuing their mandates, while taking charge of OSAPG to pursue a broad agenda covering all atrocity crimes.*
- *Ensure that the special adviser and his or her staff are fully integrated into all levels of political decision making, relocating OSAPG to the UN Secretariat building and housing it near the Secretary-General's office to facilitate this.*
- *Strengthen the capacity of OSAPG to monitor and assess all mass atrocity crimes by (i) requesting additional staff for the new office; and (ii) directing OSAPG to explore new joint assessment efforts with DPA, OHCHR, and other relevant bodies.*
- *Relaunch the Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Genocide as a new Advisory Committee on Preventing Mass Atrocities, with a new panel of senior members, and give them a mandate to act as an accountability mechanism for the Secretary-General by reviewing his or her work annually.*

The third should be to **put mass atrocities at the center of dealings with political partners:**

- *Publicly commit to member states that the Secretary-General will systematically approach the Security Council early on risks of mass atrocities, and in keeping with the Security Council Code of Conduct that has now been signed by most member states.¹⁶*
- *Invite Security Council ambassadors on an early visit to the Syrian border to highlight the suffering of civilians, and use this visit to give a major speech on preventing mass atrocities.*
- *Convene a small group of UN ambassadors to act as informal advisers on mass atrocity policy issues, for example, through offering guidance on how to deal with budgetary issues and similar dilemmas.*
- *Make an early trip to Addis Ababa as soon as the new AU chairperson is in place to discuss mass atrocity prevention and cooperation in this area, building on the AU's significant progress and forward-leaning commitments, and offer a package of UN assistance to the AU on issues such as early warning (see points below).*

3.b. Longer-term Initiatives

Beyond the first 100 days, the Secretary-General should take steps to improve the UN's capacities for early warning and early response to mass atrocities, through gradual but significant reforms:

The first reforms should be to **improve the flow of early warnings from the field:**

- *Develop a simpler tool for analyzing mass atrocity threats:* While OSAPG’s existing framework may be useful for detailed analyses of potential atrocities, the next Secretary-General should direct the deputy Secretary-General to oversee a process managed by OSAPG, OHCHR, and DPA to develop a much simpler matrix for identifying key indicators of likely mass atrocities (such as hate speech, rising violence, and extremist ideologies). This should be endorsed by the directors of all UN agencies both as a systemwide tool for informing RQRs and other HRuF discussions, and as the basis for sounding the alarm when urgent threats arise.
- *Require enhanced reporting from RCs and other senior leadership in countries at greatest risk:* A simple early warning tool may be useful for UN officials globally, but it is clear that some countries and regions are at particularly high risk of atrocities and need a more specific focus. Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson has recently requested RCs in high-risk countries to report regularly on developments, and OSAPG should work with RCs and other UN staff to develop case-specific early warning indicators (such as acts of violence between specific ethnic groups or shifts in civil war battlefield dynamics) that can be regularly reviewed through the RQRs.
- *Strengthen the analysis and planning capacity in the Secretary-General’s office:* To reinforce these efforts to improve information and analysis about indicators of mass atrocities, the Secretary-General should not only give OSAPG greater prominence but also expand the analysis and planning capacity formed by Ban Ki-moon and direct it to (i) liaise closely with officials dealing with HRuF on addressing mass atrocity threats in UN planning; and (ii) mentor other elements of the UN system in using new tools to analyze mass atrocity threats.

In addition to these efforts to improve systemwide early warning, the Secretary-General should take steps to **improve the full range of UN capacities to help prevent mass atrocities, especially including UN regional offices, SPMs, and peacekeepers:**

- *Seek funds in the regular UN budget to expand the UN’s operational capacity to respond to risks of mass atrocities:* The suite of regularly resourced operational capacities should include deployments of technical advisers to the field in a variety of configurations—peace and development advisers, human rights advisers, “light teams,” OHCHR field offices, and mediation support staff. The relative risk of mass atrocities should guide decisions about where to deploy surge support.
- *Task UN regional offices and envoys with monitoring and recommending responses to regional mass atrocity threats:* Following the HIPPO report’s advocacy of UN regional offices as preventive tools, the Secretary-General should (i) work with the Security Council to ensure that

providing early warning of mass atrocities is added to all regional offices' mandates; and (ii) request the leaders of these offices, and other UN envoys and coordinators with regional mandates, to assess and report regularly on mass atrocity threats, and make recommendations for how the UN system should respond to them.

- *Require the heads of SPMs and peacekeeping operations to assess and recommend responses to mass atrocity risks:* The new Secretary-General should require mission leaders (including civilian special representatives and military force commanders) to submit a strategic assessment of mass atrocity risks in the countries where they work. The Secretary-General should also include brief assessments of these risks based on field analysis in his or her regular reports on missions to the Security Council, and encourage those leaders to include assessments of mass atrocity threats in their regular reporting on human rights.
- *Improve training on mass atrocity issues for peacekeeping forces:* In line with the Kigali Principles' commitment "to ensure that our sector and contingent-commanders, as well as our nominees for mission leadership positions, have a high level of training and preparedness," the Secretary-General should work with DPKO to reach out to the leaders of all signatories of the principles to (i) share the new UN guidelines on analyzing atrocity threats; and (ii) ensure that these are included in units' training and reporting.
- *Create new contingency planning mechanisms for UN missions:* Cases such as the Central African Republic and South Sudan show that UN missions must have contingency plans for fast-moving violence on their doorstep. In many cases, UN operations lack well-developed plans that contemplate political as well as humanitarian responses. The Secretary-General's analysis and planning advisers should work with all field missions to devise, review, and regularly update specific contingency plans for atrocity situations, including political and operational factors.
- *Develop plans for vanguard forces to reinforce UN missions:* Following HIPPO's recommendation that the UN establish a series of vanguard forces to reinforce operations (or deploy rapidly where new missions are needed), the Secretary-General should direct DPKO to work with UN member states and independent military experts to lay out a plan for such forces within his or her first year in office—liaising particularly closely with the United States on its initiative to boost UN operations.

Building on efforts to improve early warnings, the Secretary-General should take steps to **improve early response to prevent potential mass atrocities through HRuF mechanisms:**

- *Instruct the UN's in-house watchdog, the Office of Internal Oversight Services, to conduct an assessment of HRuF implementation to date, to offer independent proposals on how to improve its performance, and instruct the deputy Secretary-General to draw up an overall plan for addressing any shortcomings without disrupting ongoing HRuF processes.*

- *Establish standard HRuF follow-up mechanisms at headquarters and in the field:* The Secretary-General's office should take responsibility for (i) drafting follow-up documents outlining policy actions required on the basis of RQR discussions, working from a template of common preventive actions, to be tailored to the specific case; (ii) working with RCs on the implications for activities in the field; and (iii) laying out benchmarks for following up on discussions by different UN agencies.

In parallel with efforts to improve the UN system's mechanisms, the Secretary-General must take steps to **improve communication with the Security Council and other partners over imminent threats:**

- *Improve informal information sharing with the Council:* The Secretary-General has opportunities for informal discussions with Council ambassadors, including regular lunches. Ban Ki-moon has used such occasions to discuss mass atrocities. More systematic openings could be used to communicate warnings to Council members. One option would be for officials from the Secretary-General's office (probably from the analysis and planning capacity) to brief Council political coordinators—who manage most substantive business below the ambassador level—on mass atrocity risks monthly or bimonthly.
- *Give OSAPG a higher profile in Council deliberations:* In line with the steps to increase the profile of OSAPG within the UN Secretariat and system, the Secretary-General should give his or her special adviser greater profile in Council meetings, by (i) working with Council members to arrange more frequent briefings with the special adviser on risks and trends in mass atrocities; and (ii) when dealing with cases on the Council's agenda that pose a threat of mass atrocities, working with Council members to invite the special adviser to brief alongside other UN officials (such as those in charge of peace operations, the under Secretary-General for political affairs, and other senior officials).
- *Increase the Secretary-General's own profile on mass atrocities with the Security Council:* The Secretary-General should work with members of the Council to hold public discussions of preventive strategies—possibly organized as “Arria formula” meetings (where civil society speaks) as an awareness-raising strategy.
- *Work with the high commissioner for human rights and Human Rights Council to create new mechanisms for OHCHR to offer the Council early warnings of mass atrocities through simple innovations such as more systematic briefings by the high commissioner.*
- *Offer strong support to the AU on mass atrocity prevention:* The Secretary-General should push the entire UN system to support the AU's efforts to improve its early warning and response mechanisms. As part of his or her outreach to the new AU chairperson, the next Secretary-General should ask DPA, OSAPG, and other relevant UN entities to outline a package of support to the AU, with a specific focus on the prevention of mass atrocities.¹⁷

List of Acronyms

AU	African Union
DPA	UN Department of Political Affairs
DPKO	UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations
EOSG	Executive Office of the Secretary-General
HIPPO	High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations
HRuF	Human Rights up Front
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OHCHR	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSAPG	Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide
R2P	“Responsibility to Protect”
RC	Resident Coordinator
RQR	Regional Quarterly Reviews
SAG	Senior Action Group
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SPM	Special Political Mission
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme

Key Recommendations at a Glance

FIRST 100 DAYS	
Reinforce Human Rights up Front (HRuF)	
1	Issue a communique to all UN staff and member states
2	Instruct the new deputy secretary-general to oversee HRuF issues
3	Hold a town hall meeting on HRuF's future with staffers at UN headquarters in New York
Increase the institutional focus on the Responsibility to Protect and the prevention of genocide	
4	Appoint a high-profile figure to serve as special adviser on the prevention of mass atrocities
5	Ensure that the special adviser and his or her staff are fully integrated into all levels of political decision making, relocating the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG) to the UN Secretariat building
6	Strengthen the capacity of OSAPG to monitor and assess all mass atrocity crimes
7	Relaunch the Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Genocide as a new Advisory Committee on Preventing Mass Atrocities
Put mass atrocities at the center of dealing with political partners	
8	Make a public commitment to member states that the Secretary-General will systematically approach the Security Council early on risks of mass atrocities
9	Invite Security Council ambassadors on an early visit to the Syrian border and use this visit to give a major speech on preventing mass atrocities
10	Convene a small group of UN ambassadors to act as informal advisers on mass atrocity policy issues
11	Make an early trip to Addis Ababa as soon as the new African Union (AU) chairperson is in place

LONGER-TERM

Improve the flow of early warnings from field offices

12	Develop a simpler tool for analyzing mass atrocity threats
13	Require enhanced reporting from resident coordinators and other senior leadership in countries at greatest risk
14	Strengthen the analysis and planning capacity in the Secretary-General's office

Improve UN capacities to prevent atrocities

15	Seek funds in the regular UN budget to expand the UN's operational capacity to respond to risks of mass atrocities
16	Task UN regional offices and envoys with monitoring and recommending responses to regional mass atrocity threats
17	Require the heads of special political missions and peacekeeping operations to assess and recommend responses to mass atrocity risks
18	Improve training on mass atrocity issues for peacekeeping forces
19	Create new contingency planning mechanisms for UN missions
20	Develop plans for vanguard forces to reinforce UN missions

Improve early response

21	Instruct the UN's in-house watchdog, the Office of Internal Oversight Services, to conduct an assessment of HRuF implementation to date
22	Establish standard follow-up mechanisms at headquarters and in the field
23	Improve informal information-sharing with the Security Council
24	Give OSAPG a higher profile in Security Council deliberations
25	Increase the secretary-general's own profile on mass atrocities with the Security Council
26	Work with the high commissioner for human rights and Human Rights Council to create new mechanisms for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to offer the Council early warnings of mass atrocities
27	Offer strong support to the AU on mass atrocity prevention

Endnotes

- ¹ Erik Melander, *Organized Violence in the World 2015: An Assessment by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 2015), available from http://www.pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/61/61335_lucdp-paper-9.pdf. See also “Early Warning Project: Statistical Risk Assessment,” Early Warning Project, US Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed August 22, 2016. http://www.earlywarningproject.com/risk_assessments.
- ² This definition of “mass atrocities” is from Scott Straus, *Fundamentals of Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention* (Washington, DC: US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2016), available from <https://www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide/take-action-against-genocide/resources/fundamentals-of-genocide-and-mass-atrocity-prevention>. We consider it virtually synonymous with “atrocity crimes,” which generally refers to genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.
- ³ UN OCHA designates the most severe humanitarian emergencies as “L3” crises. See “UNOCHA: Emergencies,” UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Accessed August 22, 2016. <http://www.unocha.org/where-we-work/emergencies>. For the number of civilians killed by systematic violence each year, see Melander, *Organized Violence in the World 2015*. For the number of civilians displaced, see “UNHCR Population Statistics,” UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Accessed August 5, 2016. <http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview>.
- ⁴ Ban Ki-moon, “Remarks to General Assembly Informal Interactive Dialogue on ‘A Vital and Enduring Commitment: Implementing the Responsibility to Protect’” (speech, New York, September 8, 2015), UN News Centre, http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/speeches/statments_full.asp?statID=2726#.V6KL6SMrLR0.
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- ⁶ For more on UN preventive action in the cases of Guinea, Kyrgyzstan, Kenya, and Burkina Faso, see Alex Bellamy, *The Responsibility to Protect: Towards a “Living Reality”* (London, UK: United Nations Association UK, 2013), available from <http://www.una.org.uk/sites/default/files/UNA-UK%20Alex%20J%20Bellamy%20R2P%20Briefing%20Report%20No.%20I.pdf>.
- ⁷ *Evaluation of the Implementation and Results of Protection of Civilians Mandates in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services*, A/68/78 (March 7, 2014), available from https://oios.un.org/resources/ga_report/a-68-787-dpko.pdf.
- ⁸ Charles Petric et al., *Report of the Secretary-General’s Internal Review Panel on United Nations Action in Sri Lanka* (New York: United Nations, 2012), available from http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri_Lanka/The_Internal_Review_Panel_report_on_Sri_Lanka.pdf. For a detailed study of HRuF, see Gerrit Kurtz, *With Courage and Coherence: The Human Rights up Front Initiative at the United Nations* (Berlin, Germany: Global Public Policy Institute, 2015), available from http://www.gppi.net/fileadmin/user_upload/media/pub/2015/Kurtz_2015_Courage_and_Coherence_UN_Human_Rights.pdf.

- ⁹ “*Rights Up Front*” *Detailed Action Plan*. United Nations. Accessed August 22, 2016. <https://undg.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Detailed-Plan-of-Action.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, *Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A Tool for Prevention* (New York: United Nations, 2014), available from http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/pdf/framework%20of%20analysis%20for%20atrocity%20crimes_en.pdf.
- ¹¹ For the UN’s review of peace operations, see High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, *Uniting our Strengths for Peace: Politics, Partnership and People* (New York: United Nations, 2015), available from http://peaceoperationsreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/HIPPO_Report_L_June_2015.pdf. For the UN’s review of its peacebuilding architecture, see Advisory Group of Experts for the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture, *The Challenge of Sustaining Peace* (New York: United Nations, 2015), available from <http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/pdf/150630%20Report%20of%20the%20AGE%20on%20the%202015%20Peacebuilding%20Review%20FINAL.pdf>. For UN’s review of its policy efforts related to women, peace, and security, see Radhika Coomaraswamy et al., *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (New York: UN Women, 2015), available from <http://wps.unwomen.org/-/media/files/un%20women/wps/highlights/unw-global-study-1325-2015.pdf>.
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- ¹⁵ One recent study notes that “at the moment it is easier for the High Commissioner to brief the Security Council than it is for him to brief the Human Rights Council—that is clearly wrong.” *Glion Human Rights Dialogue 2015* (Universal Rights Group), p5, available from <http://www.universal-rights.org/urg-policy-reports/glion-human-rights-dialogue-human-rights-council-10-improving-relevance-strengthening-impact/>.
- ¹⁶ Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein, *Letter dated December 14, 2015, from the Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General*, A/70/621-S/2015/978 (December 14, 2015), available from <http://www.globalr2p.org/media/files/n1543357.pdf>.
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A Note on Methods

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COVER: UN peacekeepers on assignment in East Africa,
April 2009. *Michael Grabam for US Holocaust Memorial Museum*



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