

A World Free from Genocide

*Address of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia Janez Janša
at the 67th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations*

- Mr Chairman, excellences, distinguished delegates
At the outset let me congratulate H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić, President of the current Session of the General Assembly, on his election and wish him success in discharging his duties.
- It is my honour to pay tribute to the Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, for his able leadership and tireless efforts in guiding the United Nations in these demanding times.
- This year's topic of the UN Convention is the peaceful prevention of disputes. We had the opportunity to listen to the distinguished speakers at the official opening, emphasising the importance of preventing violence and the responsibility of all member states, their leaders and international organizations to take any action they can in order to prevent and to raise the awareness of such horrible events.
- Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates,
- From among the other issues of global concern I would like to draw your attention to the horrific scenes in Syria. A civil war has been dragging on for many months. The mediation activities have unfortunately failed. It

shocks our conscious that we have been unable to stop bloodshed. Sadly we have not succeeded to protect civilians.

- In my view, the situation is critical. It speaks for the urgent need to consider strengthening the preventive capacities of the UN, its member states and regional organisations. Concerted efforts to avert mass atrocities are needed.
- Last year we celebrated the 60th anniversary of entering into force of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The Convention was the result of tireless efforts of Mr Raphael Lemkin, a Polish lawyer. He stalked the halls of the UN every day until December 1948, when the General Assembly finally adopted the Convention. He continued afterwards and his endeavours paid off in 1951, when the Convention came into force.
- We then waited half a century to see a first conviction of an individual for the crime of genocide. Establishment of the criminal tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda in the 90s was followed by the historic creation of the permanent International Criminal Court. This was another milestone in the humanisation of the international relations.
- It has also been encouraging that the UN system has improved its internal coordination of activities related to the prevention of genocide. The offices of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and of the Special

Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect were established. The Human Rights Council helped to promote the culture of prevention.

- Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,
Over the past months the Syrian tragedy has increased the awareness of our responsibility to prevent and stop mass atrocities. The US President, Mr Obama, established a promising Atrocities Prevention Board. In his remarks at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum last April he made a point that *“national sovereignty never is a license to slaughter your people”*. I hope we all share his belief that *“preventing genocide is an achievable goal”*. The UN Secretary General Mr Ban Ki-moon urged in his speech at the opening of this session that we should *“give the Responsibility to Protect concept a tangible meaning”*.
- To my regret, however, we have not yet achieved a common understanding on the modalities of such actions. We should therefore strengthen and focus our dialogue to this end. There is room for improving the modes of collaboration between the national, the regional and the international levels.
- Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,
I would like to remind you that only after the 2nd World War more than 80 countries witnessed mass atrocities. At least 53 million innocent lives were lost. Behind these numbers there were actual men and women and also

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children. They had their futures but were not allowed to live. Behind these numbers there are still traumatised families and the distorted creative potential of the affected societies. Bearing this in mind, we should be able to set at least basic limits to the human behaviour and stop mass atrocities.

- I therefore urge the Member States of the United Nations, regional and sub-regional organisations and the UN system to develop a new strategy to prevent genocide and other mass atrocities.
- Moreover, an intergovernmental forum of like-minded countries should be formed to propose a UN Resolution that would set a clear mandate for preparation and adoption of an appropriate legal mechanism; a legal mechanism that would provide the Responsibility to Protect concept with new tools; a legal mechanism that will enforce the prevention of the crime; a mechanism to enable a more rapid and effective response to acts of genocide and other mass atrocities.
- Slovenia stands ready to start a dialogue to this end. We are going to convene the first meeting in the following months. I am glad that we have already obtained substantial support for this initiative during this General Assembly's session.
- Let me inform you that this initiative originates from the international civil society. The Institute for Cultural Diplomacy has collected many thousands

of supporters among international NGOs, lawyers, students, journalists and other individuals. Support is on the increase. And there is not just one isolated initiative. There are many others across the globe.

- Mr Chairman, excellences,

We should, of course, also enhance our collaboration concerning the prosecution of alleged perpetrators of genocide and mass atrocities by individual States. Effective prosecution undoubtedly has deterrent effect and contributes substantially towards the culture of prevention.

- Moreover, a genuine culture of prevention needs to be developed globally.

We should improve our understanding of the warning signs and triggering early action. These days, we witness numerous acts of violence against diplomatic and consular missions in some parts of our world. I strongly condemn such violent acts. They can never be justified. Freedom of speech is fundamental in democracy, and violence has never been able to set its limits. Only strengthening intercultural dialogue would diminish the potential for conflict. Only mutual respect can contribute to maintaining peace and security.

- Mr Chairman,

It was in 1946 when Mr Raphael Lemkin asserted: "Our whole heritage is a product of the contributions of all nations." Each and every nation as well as the United Nations as a whole have an enormous responsibility and

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also the opportunity to prevent future atrocities. We cannot escape our history but let us learn from it.

- I fully believe we do not want the mistakes of yesterday to be repeated tomorrow. We took over the responsibility for the world from our forefathers and have the enormous responsibility to make it a better place for our children. I therefore invite you to do so by joining all our efforts for a world free from genocide and other mass atrocities.
- Thank you.