

Statement by H.E. Martin Uhomoibhi, President of the Human Rights Council

Delivered by

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Seminar on the Prevention of Genocide

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Madame High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay,
Mr. Francis Deng, Special Advisor of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of
Genocide,
Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the President of the Human Rights Council, who unfortunately could not be here today.

I also wish to congratulate the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for organizing this seminar and extend a warm greeting to all participants, especially the expert panellists. It is a pleasure to join you today in this important event.

The 60th anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide provides an important opportunity for the international community to draw the attention of all States to the significance of the Convention and to invite them to redouble their efforts for the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide.

Governments have a responsibility to disseminate knowledge of the principles of the Convention, paying particular attention to the principles of prevention. And States that have not yet ratified or acceded to the Convention are encouraged to consider doing so as a matter of high priority and, where necessary, to enact national legislation in conformity with the provisions of the Convention.

On 27 March 2008, the Human Rights Council unanimously adopted Resolution 7/25 entitled "the Prevention of Genocide". Paragraph 17 of the Resolution invites "*the High Commissioner, as part of the commemorative events, and as an important contribution to developing preventive strategies, to organize, within existing resources, a seminar on the prevention of genocide, with the participation of States, relevant United Nations entities and other international and regional organizations, civil society, and academic and research bodies, and to publish a paper on the outcome of the seminar*". This seminar takes place in the context of this request.

The crime of genocide is recognized in the Convention as an odious scourge which has inflicted great losses on humanity. Massive, serious and systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law might result in genocide.

General Assembly resolution 96 (I) of 11 December 1946, in which the Assembly declared genocide a crime under international law, and subsequent resolutions within the United Nations system have contributed to the establishment and development of

the process of prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide, including Assembly resolution 60/1 of 16 September 2005, the World Summit Outcome Document which includes the responsibility to protect.

Each individual State is responsible to protect its population from genocide, which entails the prevention of such a crime, including incitement to it, through appropriate and necessary means.

Genocide is defined among the most serious crimes of concern to the international community in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The functioning of the Court with a high number of ratifications of the Statute will help increase accountability for the crime of genocide.

Impunity for the crime of genocide encourages its occurrence and is a fundamental obstacle to the furtherance of cooperation among peoples and the promotion of international peace and security. Fighting impunity is an important factor in the prevention of genocide.

It is necessary to enhance international cooperation, including through the United Nations system and through regional organizations, aimed at fostering the principles enshrined in the Convention.

Further international cooperation is also required to facilitate the timely prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide. States should cooperate, including through the United Nations system, in strengthening appropriate collaboration among existing mechanisms that contribute to early detection and prevention of massive, serious and systematic violations of human rights, which if not halted, could lead to genocide.

When addressing complex situations that might lead to genocide it is important to carry out a prompt and comprehensive examination of a set of multiple factors; including legal factors, the existence of groups at risk, attested violations of human rights, the resurgence of systematic discrimination, and the prevalence of expressions of hate speech targeting persons belonging to national, ethnic, racial or religious groups, especially if they are uttered in the context of an actual or potential outbreak of violence.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the relevant special procedures and treaty bodies are crucial in addressing the challenge of collating information on massive, serious and systematic violations of human rights, and thereby contribute to a better understanding and early warning of complex situations that might lead to genocide.

In conclusion, I am glad to note that there shall be rich and interesting discussions at this seminar in which expert panelists shall take stock of progress made in legal and judicial systems, and also look into the important role of the human rights treaty bodies and special procedures in the prevention of genocide.

I wish you a successful seminar.