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UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY OPEN DEBATE ON THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT AND THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE, WAR CRIMES, ETHNIC CLEANSING AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

17 May 2021

**Statement by H.E. Fiona Webster,
Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Australia
to the United Nations**

This year marks 20 years since the release of *The Responsibility to Protect* report by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, co-chaired by former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.

The world then came together in 2005 to unanimously adopt the responsibility to protect norm, or R2P.

Two watershed moments that rallied the international community in a shared vision to prevent a repeat of the worst atrocity crimes inflicted on humanity.

Since then we have seen consistent, overwhelming support for maintaining dialogue on R2P in this Assembly.

History has tragically revealed that no society is immune from the risk of atrocity crimes and there should be no tolerance for complacency.

We need to do better, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated vulnerabilities and increased risk factors.

It is timely to again reinforce our common vision and commitment to R2P.

We therefore strongly support the adoption of the resolution being put forward in the Assembly today to further strengthen R2P within the UN system.

The purposes, principles and obligations under the UN Charter are not divisible. Sovereignty comes with responsibility. This includes the responsibility to protect our populations from mass atrocities.

Australia thanks the Secretary-General for both the 2020 and 2021 reports on R2P. They make a vital contribution to our understanding and operationalisation of the norm.

We encourage the Secretary-General to include in his future reports updates on the implementation of his previous recommendations.

We also continue to support the important work of the Secretary-General's Special Advisers for the Prevention of Genocide and R2P in addressing upstream drivers of atrocity crimes, strengthening early warning and prevention, and providing analyses of unfolding crises.

We need to do more to further integrate an atrocity prevention lens across all relevant fields of UN work.

We commend increasing efforts to use consistent language and joined up approaches across the human rights, peace, security and justice spectrum.

We must continue to promote justice and accountability; key to preventing recurrence of atrocities. When states hold perpetrators to account, the prospects for resolution, transitional justice and sustainable peace are strengthened.

We encourage Security Council members to bring potential atrocity situations under consideration as early as possible.

We encourage all states – but especially Security Council members – to join Australia and more than 100 other states to support the code of conduct regarding Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, as well as the Political Declaration on Suspension of Veto Powers in Cases of Mass Atrocity.

It is our shared responsibility to take every opportunity to interrogate in more detail how the UN system, in all its moving parts, can improve our capacity for accountability, early warning, mitigation and prevention of mass atrocities.

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