



ARMENIA

THIRD INTERNATIONAL DAY OF COMMEMORATION AND DIGNITY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE AND OF THE PREVENTION OF THIS CRIME

REMARKS BY ZOHRAB MNATSAKANYAN
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8 DECEMBER 2017

Excellences,
Distinguished Panellists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Guests,

On 9 December 1948 the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Decades of deep analyses of the phenomenon of this crime, its root causes and consequences, carried out by a remarkable lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, have resulted in empowering the international community with an important legal instrument to prevent and punish genocide. That in the subsequent decades since its adoption the international community encountered repeated occurrence of genocide, underscores the imperative of a continued forceful collective action to prevent this scourge.

Since the adoption of Resolution 69/323 on 11 September 2015, the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime has become a solid platform to commemorate the victims of past genocides and to manifest our collective resolve against the recurrence of this crime. 9 December bears also an important function of raising awareness and promoting education about the dangers of genocide, about the Convention, its goals and purposes.

Mr President,

There is strong symbolism in determining 9 December as the International Day. Reaffirming the significance of the Convention as an effective international instrument for the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide, Resolution 69/323 linked the International Day to the date of the adoption of the Convention. The Convention to date remains as relevant as ever.

The profound achievement of Rafael Lemkin, of the drafters of the Convention, of the United Nations has been exactly in endorsing international responsibility upon sovereign states to protect their populations from genocide. As the subsequent decades since the adoption of the Convention sadly prove, we should not entertain any illusion whatsoever that occurrence of new genocides is firmly fenced off. XXI century rattles our conscience yet again, as tendencies of extreme radicalism, hatred and exclusion are overwhelming national and international agendas. The opponents of the Convention have been arguing back then, that the crime of genocide is too seldom to legislate. However, the profound "odious scourge" brought about by genocides, the deeply penetrating and intensely agonising long-term horrific effects of genocides make perpetration of one such act one too many. The prohibition of genocide is a peremptory norm. For these reasons, the significance of the Convention is as persistent as ever.

Mr President,

The primary responsibility for the protection of their populations, including, and, in particular, minority groups, and for the prevention of atrocity crimes within their borders lies squarely with sovereign states. It is also an international obligation upon every member of the United Nations. The centrality of the national level of protection determines the priority of consistently addressing the resilience of national laws and institutions to sustain political, social and economic harmony, to promote inclusive societies with solid foundations for the protection of all human rights, and governance firmly based on the rule of law. However, challenges to sustainability of rigid protection systems may expose any society to risks of deterioration. No state or society can claim full immunity from committing atrocity crimes. To erect solid foundations of early prevention, to raise awareness and educate about the risks of deep and lasting social and political disintegration and ignominy as a result of genocide is a guarantee against the actual perpetration of such crimes and its consequences. The national protection systems are further reinforced by the depth of cooperation of national governments with the international and regional human rights institutions. The Convention is an important instrument to guide and assist countries in addressing the risks of atrocity crimes and their early prevention. Notably, many countries have been incorporating the provisions and obligations under the Convention into their national legislative frameworks.

Prevention, and especially early prevention are also the primary responsibility of States. Such responsibility should be driven by the deep recognition of the risks of undermining the fabric of societies, exposing vulnerable groups to severe human rights violations and amplifying the risks of atrocities. The irresponsibility of flaring hate speech, intolerance, xenophobia,

racial and ethnic profiling, glorification of hate crimes, especially lead and encouraged by the political leaders within a state should be a concern to the entire international community and serve a clear early warning sign of potential conflict and atrocity crimes.

Mr President,

2018 marks the 70th anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This will be a fitting occasion to celebrate Rafael Lemkin, the chief architect of the Convention. We will also once again pay tribute to the sponsoring states of the landmark Resolution 96/1, which effectively endorsed the word "genocide" as "the denial of the right of existence of entire human groups" and affirmed it as a crime under international law. We will once again acknowledge and salute the first 41 signatory states of the Convention. However, before the date of the 70th anniversary approaches, we should also admit that with the present 148 states parties to the Convention, it still awaits 45 accessions and ratifications from member states in order to become a genuinely universal international instrument. Therefore, for the remaining one year before the 70th anniversary Armenia proposed a collective international campaign for raising the awareness of the Convention and for its universalization. We endorse, fully support and commit working together with the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide in launching a one year appeal for the universal ratification of the Convention by the end of 2018. Today, we appeal to the remaining 45 states to reflect on the significance of the Convention and to consider early accession and ratification.

Mr President,

Once again, as the main sponsor of Resolution 69/323 and a committed advocate to develop a rigid international machinery of prevention, Armenia reaffirms its deep appreciation to all its partners, including member states, the United Nations system, the civil society organisations, academia and the international media for their unwavering commitment, support and contribution to our collective responsibility of preventing atrocity crimes, including the crime of genocide.

Thank you.