

**Focal point meeting
Latin American Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity
Prevention / Address by Special Adviser Adama Dieng
16 June 2014**

Introduction

Dear Friends,

Muchas gracias y buenos dias,

- Let me start by expressing my profound gratitude to all of you, to the Government of the Republic of Argentina, and to our partners at the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation for inviting me to participate in this focal point meeting of the Latin American Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention.

Gratitude for institutional and personal commitment

- I am honoured to be speaking to you this morning. Your presence here, to take part in the focal point meeting and in the regional seminar, is testimony to your own and your countries' commitment to the prevention of genocide and mass atrocity crimes. The participation of all of you speaks to the relevance of this issue in today's world, and to the political significance that you all assign to it. It speaks, certainly, to the institutional commitment adopted by your States. You come from different parts of the structures of the State: Human Rights Departments, Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense, Ombudsman's offices, Prosecutors' offices. This is a sign that prevention of

genocide touches upon a myriad of issues and that all of them are important, without exception.

- But your participation also speaks to your personal commitment, as individuals, in carrying this agenda forward in the face of many kinds of challenges and, sometimes, personal difficulties. This is a commitment that I honour, and for which I express my and the Secretary-General's gratitude.

Focal points as operational agents for prevention

- As I said when I addressed you at the Raphael Lemkin seminar in Poland one year ago, I believe the call for prevention resonates most strongly in regions that have experienced atrocity crimes, as the Latin American region did in the twentieth century. The consequences of these crimes can be felt for generations and generate a moral call to action. Moral imperatives, however, need to be supported by practical roadmaps. Learning the lessons of the past means not only remembering what occurred – which is in itself very important – but also applying what we have learnt and putting in place structures and mechanisms that can limit any likelihood of recurrence. That is why it is so important that we are proactive; that we take preventive action before situations deteriorate. The responsibilities that you have taken make you all part of this prevention process. As focal points, you are all agents for change, agents of prevention inside your governments.
- At the Raphael Lemkin seminar, much was said about the process of genocide. You saw how genocide and other atrocity crimes are not single events and that the process that leads to them takes time. There is a progression of events that requires plans, policies, and the gathering of resources. As they take time, these processes provide a number of entry points for prevention

– before casualties mount up and the window of opportunity closes. At every stage of the process, action can be taken to stop genocide.

- Knowing that a crisis is imminent is not enough, we have to act. We do not have a good history, in this regard. We stood by while almost a million people were killed in Rwanda in 1994. We failed the people of Srebrenica in 1995. We have worked hard since then to find ways to respond earlier and better to protect populations, but we still face challenges. Today, we are working to provide relevant and timely responses to the situations in the Central African Republic and South Sudan – but we are watching the tragedy continue to unfold in Syria and we see dramatic developments occurring in Iraq.
- In short, it is important that the commitments we make are translated into actions that really have an impact on people's lives, and that policy positions result in actual projects, programmes and mechanisms with specific outcomes. It is also important that these initiatives are supported in a way that makes them effective and sustainable. This is imperative when we are working on scenarios where early prevention is relevant, which is the case in many of your countries.

Reflection on existing projects

- At the national level, I know that you have already taken a variety of initiatives that are gaining traction. Here in Argentina, during the next three days I will be conducting meetings with senior government officials to discuss initiatives that Argentina has taken. I am very much interested, of course, to learn more about the lessons that Argentina has taken from its own history and how these could be applied elsewhere. I am interested to see how the past is memorialised and used to encourage prevention.

I am also very interested in Argentina's efforts to establish a national mechanism on genocide and atrocity prevention, and in the legislation being put in place to support this initiative. I understand that Paraguay is launching a similar process - my Office is looking to see how it could support that country. In Mexico, I know that an Inter-Secretarial Commission is currently developing ambitious plans to take forward in the near future.

- Other States are also moving forward. I am encouraged by the progress I see in the area of capacity-building, on which my Office has worked closely with a number of you. Together with the Auschwitz Institute, we have supported initiatives here in Argentina, in Uruguay, in Paraguay and most recently in Costa Rica and Mexico. We plan to contribute to similar activities in the Dominican Republic, Panama, Guatemala and Colombia in the second half of this year. I am particularly encouraged when I see these activities as point of departure for institutional discussions on national strategies, action plans or policy priorities. This is important, as real change requires definition of objectives and sustainability over time. We are all accountable to the people we serve.

Working with partners

- Initiatives have to be taken at the national level. However, I believe it makes a huge difference to be able to take these initiatives under the umbrella of support provided by a regional cooperation network such as the Latin American Network. In meetings like today's, you can share your experiences and your perceptions of what has worked, what has not worked and on how to address the challenges you face as you move forward. You are partners in prevention.

- Moreover, today you will have the opportunity to discuss the creation of a common institutional agenda for the upcoming months. This will include discussion on how to move forward with the institutionalization of the Network at the national, regional and international levels. This is the level of specificity that I think is fundamental at this stage in the life of the Network.
- Needless to say, I am very pleased that my Office is a partner in these efforts, and for the support and encouragement of our partners in civil society, particularly the Auschwitz Institute, the Stanley Foundation and the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect. The Latin American Network does not only constitute an example of partnership among States. It is also an example of how different actors can work together to achieve common objectives. The Network constitutes a model that actors in other regions of the world are already looking to, as an example of good practice. This is as much an opportunity as it is a responsibility. Let us together work to make the Network a vibrant, operational and effective platform for atrocity prevention.

External dimension of the Network

- The Network, of course, has an important external dimension. In the last few months, we have seen the Network represented at two important events that I understand you will be saying more about during the course of the day today.
- Firstly, this March, the Network was presented through a panel discussion at a side event to the 25th Session of the Human Rights Council, under the able co-sponsorship of Ecuador, Argentina and Chile. That event, in which I also participated,

drew the interest of a significant number of Member States and provided the Network with some useful visibility.

- Secondly, also in March, some of your States participated in the first meeting of the Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes, which took place in Costa Rica. In that meeting, you presented the Network to officials from States from all regions of the world as an example of regional cooperation for the prevention of atrocity crimes. As this global network considers new initiatives, I invite you to contribute actively to those discussions in order to continue shaping global initiatives.
- Of course, there are more opportunities. The side event at the Human Rights Council provided ideas as to what the Network could do to advance the atrocity prevention agenda in the Council. Network members could also cooperate through the other inter-governmental bodies of the United Nations. The work of the General Assembly is of particular relevance. Each year, the Assembly conducts an informal debate on States' responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. In this year's debate, which will take place in September, the General Assembly will discuss matters related to the provision of assistance to States to enable them to fulfil this responsibility. I invite you to contribute to the September dialogue with the knowledge and expertise that you all have.

Closing

- To reiterate what I said one year ago in Poland, it is clear that your governments and your region clearly understand the importance of prevention. The motivation and achievements of the Latin American Network are resonating worldwide. Your success has inspired the establishment of a similar network in

Africa and other regions are paying attention. The Network is becoming well known and attention is being paid to the outputs it generates.

- There are, therefore, many good reasons to continue your good work, and to “populate” the Network with different examples of national initiatives that Network member States can design, test and carry forward. I encourage you to continue to share the successes and challenges of these initiatives both within and outside of the Network.
- Your discussions on the institutionalization of the Network at the national, regional and international level are important because they will provide a useful framework for future initiatives. I wish you every success and look forward to continued cooperation, both in the design and implementation of your national initiatives, and with the Network as a whole as it continues to develop.
- I will be happy now to take your comments and questions. Thank you very much.