



For immediate release

**47th Session of the Human Rights Council,
Interactive dialogue with the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide
(as per HRC/RES/43/29, June 2020)**

Geneva, 28 June 2021

**Remarks by Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu
Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide**

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to engage through this interactive dialogue with the Human Rights Council and exchange on issues and situations that are of major concern to my mandate. Previous such engagements have enabled action on highlighted situations, and it is my hope that today's discussion will do the same.

Part of my mandate as Special Adviser is to provide early warning and to collect existing information on massive and serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including against ethnic, religious and national minorities, which if not prevented or halted, might lead to genocide. Atrocity crimes – war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide - affect entire societies through generations. Prevention is so much less costly – in all areas, and particularly in saving human lives.

The inaction to promptly respond to those warning signs allows genocide and atrocities to happen. We need stronger commitment and early action at the community, national, regional and international level and sincere approaches to prevention and early action is more urgent than ever.

We can't repeat the same failures and their devastating impacts, such as the conflict in **Syria**, which has raged for over 10 years with ongoing gross violations against civilians. There must be

accountability for the gross violations and crimes committed against the people in Syria, and prompt collective actions by international community to protect the population.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Since the military takeover in **Myanmar**, I have issued multiple warnings of a heightened risk of atrocity crimes in this country. The widespread and increasingly systematic attacks against peaceful protesters, resulting in killings of hundreds of people, thousands arbitrarily arrested - many subjected to enforced disappearance – the targeted killings of civilians as a result of clashes between the Myanmar Armed Forces and ethnic armed organizations, may constitute crimes against humanity. The human rights, humanitarian and security situation are deteriorating quickly, with indiscriminate attacks against civilian population, threatening the lives of thousands of people in Myanmar.

I am deeply concerned about the impact that the current situation may have on the minority groups, including the Rohingya population. The office of the Special Adviser has warned, since the violence against the Rohingyas in 2017, that despite the numerous warnings of the risk of atrocity crimes, no early actions were taken to stop the killings, torture, rape, forcible displacement and horrible suffering of Rohingya people. Today, in 2021, the escalation of violence in Myanmar continues against civilians, putting the Rohingya and other minority groups at imminent risks. Root causes need to be addressed, including guaranteeing definite citizenship and other rights to the Rohingya community in Myanmar, ensuring accountability for past crimes in order to deter more atrocity crimes from being committed. Stronger support is also needed to the international mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court and the Human Rights Council- Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar in fighting impunity in the country.

In **Yemen**, I'm growing increasingly concerned about the protection situation of civilians as the conflict continues in the absence of a nationwide ceasefire. Indiscriminate and targeted attacks across a proliferation of frontlines have resulted in ongoing grave violations of international human rights and humanitarian law that may amount to war crimes. In particular, the situation in Ma'rib has become increasingly dire for the large number of displaced people residing there as the fight for control of the area draws on. I also highlight the grave impact that the denial and obstruction of humanitarian aid and other essential goods is having on civilians countrywide, particularly as the number of cases of COVID-19 continue to rise.

On **Afghanistan**, I echo the recent call by the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the concerns raised by SRSG Deborah Lyons to the Security Council, for the international community to do more to support Afghanistan and prevent a reversal on the important gains made on the

rights of women and minority communities over the past several years. I am particularly concerned over reports of attacks and targeting of minority communities such as the Hazara. The 8 May attack on students, most of whom were girls, in a majority-Hazara area of Kabul, is one horrific example of the violence faced by this community and which is also specifically targeted at women and girls. I urge this Council to look at ways it can support ongoing efforts to protect these populations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In **Ethiopia** there are continue reports of ethnic and religious tensions, hate speech, incitement to violence and allegations of human rights violations and abuses including killings, rape, displacement of populations and destruction of property. I have previously called on the Ethiopian authorities to establish national mechanisms for accountability of alleged human rights violations and other crimes committed, to address the root causes of ethnic violence, build national cohesion and reconciliation.

Central-African Republic has witnessed increasing human rights violations, targeted violence against communities and forced displacement of civilians committed by armed groups, government forces and bilaterally deployed security personnel, which could contribute to risks of atrocity crimes.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, armed groups and intercommunal violence continues to threaten populations in eastern provinces. Escalating violence, particularly in Ituri and North Kivu, results in large numbers killed and a displacement crisis. My office is working closely with the peacekeeping mission – MONUSCO – to find ways to improve protection outcomes for the long- suffering civilian population and support the Mission’s efforts aimed at addressing and countering hate speech that contributes to fuel tensions between communities.

In **South Sudan**, there is persistent localized violence across many areas of the country amid limited progress in implementing the terms of the peace agreement. Much of this violence, which is perpetrated along ethnic lines, is fueled by an increasing proliferation of weapons and ammunition, with armed militia. My office has been advocating for accountability for atrocity crimes committed and the implementation of transitional justice measures contained in the peace agreement, noting that the Hybrid Court for South Sudan needs to be established and swiftly operationalized in coordination with the African Union.

I welcome the 30th special session of the Human Rights Council on the grave human rights situation in the **Occupied Palestinian Territory**, including East Jerusalem on 27 May 2021. While I am glad that the parties to the conflict managed to agree on a ceasefire at the end of May, the situation remains very volatile in Israel and the OPT and tensions can trigger renewed violence. I support the HRC resolution establishing an international commission of inquiry to investigate violations of international humanitarian law and all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law leading up to and since 13 April 2021, and all underlying root causes of recurrent tensions. Only by addressing the root causes of the violence, we will prevent further serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the context of this conflict.

I welcome the resolution recently adopted by the Human Rights Council on **Sri Lanka** which strengthens avenues for accountability and reconciliation. The report by the High Commissioner sets out several areas of concern including continued impunity for past violations, militarization of government functions, increase in divisive and hateful rhetoric against minority communities as well as intimidation of civil society, these trends are also concerning from an atrocity prevention perspective. I encourage the Sri Lankan Government to ensure accountability for past violations, to invest in comprehensive reconciliation and to respond to hateful and divisive narratives by strengthening efforts to promote non-discrimination and inclusion for all Sri Lankans. My Office stands ready to support in these efforts.

Justice, accountability and reparation are fundamental to break those cycles of atrocity crimes, reconstruct trust in institutions, reconcile populations divided by conflict, provide victims with a real opportunity to rebuild their lives and build real and lasting peace. I encourage this Council to ensure victims' right to truth, justice and reparation are reflected in your actions and decisions, which will in turn assist in preventing future crimes.

Justice and accountability remain central for trust-building and reconciliation in the region of the Western Balkans. Just last week, I concluded an official visit as Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, precisely to **Bosnia and Herzegovina**. I expressed concern, in all my meetings, at persistent instances of genocide and war crimes denial and glorification of war criminals. I also expressed concern at increasing patterns of hate speech. Some of my interlocutors likened the ongoing inflammatory rhetoric to that which existed prior to the 1992-1995 war in the country. I strongly believe that the situation in the country requires increased high-level commitment to trust-building and reconciliation, specially by the top leadership level.

During my ten days in the country, I visited various grassroots initiatives that are contributing to build trust from the bottom up. There is much to admire and learn from the work of these local

peace champions that are building mutual trust, respect and understanding at the grassroots level. They constitute a positive example to be replicated by political leaders in building a future of peace and prosperity.

In the region of the Americas, I am particularly concerned on the situation of indigenous peoples. In **Brazil, Ecuador** and other countries, I call on governments to protect communities at risk and ensure accountability for the crimes committed. The discrimination and hate speech against the displaced populations, such in the context of **Venezuela**, remains a great concern for my office. I would also like to highlight the fundamental role of transitional justice in **Colombia** to ensure peace can prevail, and the need for an immediate response to the violence against human rights activists and former combatants.

The Office maintains a general concern on the impact of racism and discrimination in the overall Global North, which can ignite social polarization increasing the risk of atrocity crimes when/where elements of resilience are weak with a focus on migrant/refugee populations.

Excellencies,

When atrocity crimes are committed, the repercussions are felt across borders and cause disastrous human, economic and security consequences. The sharp increase in the number of people displaced including refugees fleeing Myanmar, Central-African Republic, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, among others, requires an urgent response. People displaced need to be protected by neighboring countries, according to international norms and principles, while the root causes of the problem must be addressed. This includes guaranteeing full protection and respect of human rights of the population, with attention to the vulnerable minority groups, and ensuring accountability for past crimes.

The Human Rights Council through its mechanisms have provided important contributions in deterring atrocity crimes, through the early warning of special procedures mandate holders and through the establishment of facts and promotion of accountability by the commissions of inquiry and investigative bodies. I encourage this Council to continue and strengthen such efforts on early warning and early action, to deter further atrocities to happen, with a focus on the country situations I have just highlighted. I also encourage the Council and Member States to use the Universal Periodic Review as a tool to detect and address underlying risk factors of atrocity in countries under review, as well as report on their efforts towards preventing these crimes.

I want to reiterate the call from my predecessors and the Secretary-General for the universal ratification of the Genocide Convention. Forty-two United Nations Member States have yet to

accede or ratify the Convention. It is time to commit and act to eradicate the scourge of the crime of genocide from our societies.

As Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, I am committed to do my utmost to continue providing early warning and recommendations on potential situations of atrocity crimes. I will also continue to assist in building the capacity of national authorities, regional organizations and civil society, including community leaders, to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes. I ask this body and all Member States to do the same. Genocide and other atrocity crimes are preventable if we put aside narrow political interests and work together. Prevention is a collective responsibility and it is upon us to make this a reality, that “never again” will any person experience the terrible suffering of this egregious crime of Genocide.

Thank you.

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