

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Special Meeting

“Social and economic measures to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity”

24 January 2023

INFORMAL SUMMARY

The Economic and Social Council convened a special meeting on [*“Social and economic measures to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity”*](#) on 24 January 2023. The meeting was convened by the Council following the proposal of Croatia—the co-Chair of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

The opening session included the President of the Economic and Social Council, the President of the General Assembly, the President of the Human Rights Council, and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission, as well as the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide who participated on behalf of the UN Secretary-General. A fireside chat with representatives of civil society, including the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, World Academy of Art and Science, and the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities (AIPG), moderated by the Permanent Representative of Croatia to the United Nations, focused on socioeconomic causes and solutions to prevent atrocity crimes. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support participated as respondents.

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in its entirety was considered an effective way to prevent atrocity crimes. To this end, sustainable development goals needed to be rooted in justice, peace and inclusion, for example, to promote inclusive education, climate justice and gender equality. For sustainable development efforts to be transformative, they needed to take into account the needs of communities and be accompanied by intentional efforts to foster justice, inclusion and equity. Sustainable development efforts also needed to be tied to peacebuilding and human rights efforts. The need for deep engagement of scientific and technology communities to address global problems was also underscored. The World Academy of Art and Science and the UN Trust Fund for Human Security recently launched the Human Security for All (HS4A) initiative to cultivate collaboration and innovation across all industries, all countries, to address global human security issues.

It was underscored that conflict prevention and atrocity prevention may have overlaps, but there were distinct differences. Many stressed that atrocity crimes develop over time, and are often grounded in exclusion, discrimination, socio-economic deprivations, violation of rule of law, poor governance, lack of accountability, human rights’ violation. At national level, rule of law and institutions that are inclusive and accountable were key to preventing atrocity crimes. Atrocity prevention lens was needed for conflict prevention.

The United Nations was called upon to develop atrocity prevention action plans and use atrocity risk reduction as a progress measure. The United Nations system, within their respective mandates, was encouraged to adapt and respond to local contexts while strengthening national ownership and leadership through active engagement of all actors across the society. The implementation of Security Council resolution 2594 (2021) could provide an opportunity to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to integrate risk of atrocity into all stages of planning throughout the transition processes. The Security Council was encouraged to explore establishing an expert level Committee to review its work on atrocity prevention.

Expressing concern about the civil society's limited access to the United Nations, the civil society representatives called for increased and meaningful engagement. In this regard, the Economic and Social Council was called on to make consultative status accessible to NGOs focused on atrocity prevention. Civil society on the ground played a key role in early warning of atrocity crimes, which needed to be enhanced. In this regard, the Secretary-General's Call to Action for Human Rights included guidance to the United Nations system on the protection and promotion of civic space centered around participation of civil society in UN processes, protection of civil society and promotion.

Member States welcomed the convening of this meeting by the Council. There was agreement that implementing the 2030 Agenda was key to preventing conflicts and atrocity crimes. Participants underscored the need to avoid silo approaches and the need for collaboration and coherence in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and promotion of human rights. Participants called for prevention and early warning, along with national policies and international cooperation. Developing countries underscored the need to mobilize adequate resources for development.

Many supported the principle of the Responsibility to Protect. For some countries, this remained a delicate issue, which required further discussion, including on its definition. Some underscored the need for the United Nations to do much more in this area. Several speakers looked forward to the elaboration of the New Agenda for Peace proposed in "Our Common Agenda".

Participants shared tools and policies for prevention and practical guidance on atrocity prevention. The Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes of the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide—a global working tool for the assessment of the risk of atrocity crimes—identifies risk factors for atrocity crimes relating to socioeconomic fragilities, such as a record of serious violations of international human rights, including economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as motives or incentives of an economic nature. The European Union (EU), for example, has Conflict Analysis tools and the EU Early Warning System to identify and address early warning, as well as the EU Toolkit on R2P and Atrocity Prevention that offers practical guidance on atrocity prevention to EU Delegations, missions, and operations. The international network Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes (GAAMAC), established on the initiative of Switzerland and currently chaired by Argentina, is providing a platform for dialogue and exchange of good practices between States and civil society. Argentina

highlighted its membership of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance to promote education, remembrance and research about the Holocaust, as well as its recent establishment of the National Institution against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism for prevention and addressing structural discrimination. Some Member States expressed concern about the conflict situations in some regions and countries and drew attention to potential atrocity crimes.

The role of the Security Council was deemed critical. Reference was made to the initiative of France and Mexico in 2015 that launched the ‘Political Declaration on Suspension of Veto Powers in Cases of Mass Atrocity’, and Member States were encouraged to join this initiative. The Human Rights Council has also played a critical role in alerting the international community to the risk of immediate crises and facilitating technical assistance. Furthermore, the Human Rights Council has regularly developed international human rights norms and standards and considers social and economic measures to address root causes of crises. For example, the Human Rights Council works on a number of social and economic issues such as the widespread targeting of minorities through hate speech in social media; the effects of foreign debt on economic, social and cultural rights; and to the eviction of indigenous peoples from their land.

The Peacebuilding Commission’s country and region-specific engagements have addressed a wide range of nationally owned and -led priorities, including support for economic empowerment, good governance, rule of law, and the promotion of inclusive participation in peace processes, which in return are intended to support efforts aimed to improve social cohesion, trust in societies. The Economic and Social Council was encouraged to make use of the advice of the Peacebuilding Commission on a more regular basis.

Many also stressed the Economic and Social Council’s role in prevention efforts. In this regard, the Council’s oversight role over humanitarian coordination and operational activities for development, its wide range of technical subsidiary bodies, including the Committee for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, was underscored. The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide proposed that ECOSOC should advance research and policy on the linkages between atrocity crimes, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and prevention measures. Another proposal for ECOSOC was to regularize this discussion to explore interlinkages between the SDGs and atrocity prevention.

In addition to the recommendations highlighted in the summary, the following recommendations were also shared:

- Institutions such as national human rights institutions; effective, legitimate and accountable security sector and a diverse and robust civil society, including pluralistic media, should be strengthened to maximize their contribution to atrocity prevention efforts.
- Transformative and sustainable solutions needed to be inclusive, equitable, foster trust, include mechanisms that address grievances, promote resilience, respect human rights, and leave no one behind.

- Member States should ensure respect, protection and fulfillment of human rights, including the rights of women and girls, persons belonging to minorities, migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, and that the judiciary acts independently, impartially, and effectively.
- Member States should ensure that development assistance programs benefit all communities equally, reduce tensions, and empower local populations, including women, indigenous peoples, and persons belonging to minority groups, and strengthen resilience.
- Human rights education should be promoted and implemented effectively in a systematic manner for all generations as a life-long process, especially for the children and youth.
- Member States are encouraged to utilize the UN's Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes and the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review process to conduct periodic national assessments of risks and resilience, in order to strengthen human rights protection.
- It is essential to address the gender dimensions of mass atrocities and adopt gender-sensitive protection and reparation measures, as women and girls are particularly affected and targeted in situations of atrocities. More efforts are needed to enhance the participation and contribution of women and young people, in the legal, economic, social, political, security and cultural fields.
- Countries must invest in the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence through structural measures, including investing in appropriate legislation, investigation and accountability mechanisms, as well as healthcare and social services, or education.
- Multilateral engagement for atrocity prevention requires collaboration across the pillars of the UN system, including development, peace and security and human rights. Breaking down the silos also requires leveraging the work of the UN system to inform prevention efforts.
- The United Nations and its organs need to engage with community and faith leaders, indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector, academia, the media and others and to define transformative solutions.
- Ending impunity must be a priority to bring justice to the victims, and to deter the perpetrators of future atrocities. To this end, the accountability mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court, needed to be strengthened and good practices be shared.
- The operational activities of the UN development system must take risk indicators into account in their strategic planning. The work of the United Nations Office for Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect could support these efforts.
- The special advisers on the prevention of genocide and the responsibility to protect were called upon to share their recommendations for crisis situations so that the United Nations and its various entities can act in a timely manner.

The SDG Summit in September 2023 and the discussions around the New Agenda for Peace, in the lead-up to the Summit of the Future in 2024, offer opportunities to link up all the initiatives and to strengthen interlinkages across the pillars of the United Nations to enhance prevention efforts and boost support to States in protecting their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.