



## INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

### *Call to Action for the United Nations General Assembly during its 81<sup>st</sup> session from the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect*

The UN was established to uphold international peace and security, protect human rights and advance international cooperation. These commitments were reinforced at the 2005 World Summit, when member states committed to a collective Responsibility to Protect (R2P), affirming their obligation to safeguard populations from atrocity crimes, namely: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. The Outcome Document also strengthened the UN's broader protection architecture, including through the creation of the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the Universal Periodic Review.

More than eight decades later, the state of multilateralism has shifted, and the UN stands at a crossroads. While the principles enshrined in the UN Charter remain as vital as ever, the world has changed dramatically. Today's international landscape is marked by growing polarization, revanchist nationalism, extreme xenophobia, a deepening crisis of trust – both among member states and between governments and their constituencies – erosion of international norms and the deliberate undermining of the international legal system.

The 81<sup>st</sup> session of the UN General Assembly offers a pivotal opportunity to renew and deepen the UN's foundational, collective commitments to human rights, peace and security, the rule of law and sustainable development. This is a moment to transform global governance and recommit to effective multilateralism to better address ongoing challenges, from conflict and climate change to the rapidly evolving risks of artificial intelligence (AI) and other digital technologies. As the world confronts the devastating scale of conflicts and atrocities today, upholding protection must remain a central measure of the UN's legitimacy.

In this context, the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICR2P) calls on all UN member states to fulfill the following commitments during the 81<sup>st</sup> session.

#### **1. Put Protection at the Center of UN Reform and Leadership**

The UN's credibility and legitimacy depend on its ability to protect civilians. Few failures have more profoundly undermined confidence in the UN than its inability to prevent or respond to genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. ICR2P urges UN member states to ensure that the Protection of Civilians (PoC) and R2P remain central, system-wide priorities. These principles are not rhetorical aspirations – they are essential to the UN's credibility, legitimacy and purpose.

Multilateral reform processes – such as the UN80 Initiative, the Humanitarian Reset and the recent review on the future of all forms of UN peace operations – reflect a growing recognition of the system's shortcomings and the urgent need for change. Yet these processes and the subsequent implementation of their respective recommendations will fall short if they prioritize efficiency over purpose or avoid confronting politically difficult questions about accountability, coordination and political will. Reform must be substantive, candid and ambitious, ensuring that the protection of vulnerable populations takes precedence over institutional self-preservation.

UN reform must also preserve and strengthen the institutional capacities needed to identify and prevent atrocity crimes. This requires continued investment in and strengthening of dedicated protection roles and mandates, including the Secretary-General's Special Advisers on Genocide Prevention and R2P. These experts provide critical foresight and strategic guidance, helping to foster a system-wide understanding of protection across all pillars of the UN's work. Diluting or sidelining these roles in the name of administrative streamlining would only weaken the UN's ability to anticipate risks to civilians and respond decisively.

Reaffirming protection as the UN's core purpose requires concrete commitments from member states, including adequate and predictable financing, strengthened institutional capacities and robust mandates that explicitly prioritize the full spectrum of civilian protection. These commitments must be matched by the political support necessary to ensure that protection mandates are fully and effectively carried out.

Principled leadership will be particularly consequential this year, as member states prepare to select the tenth UN Secretary-General. The next Secretary-General should bring the vision, authority and political leadership necessary to strengthen the UN's role in preventing and responding to conflict and atrocity crimes, including by revitalizing the UN's good offices for preventive diplomacy, and to build support for collective action to protect vulnerable populations.

ICR2P calls on UN member states to:

- Ensure that the selection of the next Secretary-General prioritizes demonstrated commitment to the UN Charter, human rights, peace and security and the prevention of atrocity crimes.
- Protect and strengthen dedicated atrocity prevention capacities, including the mandates and roles of the Special Advisers on Genocide Prevention and R2P.
- Provide adequate and predictable resources, robust mandates and sustained political support for civilian protection and atrocity prevention efforts.

## **2. Strengthen Prevention Across the Multilateral System**

For the UN to remain credible and effective, protection must be translated into coordinated action across its peace, security, human rights and development work. The UN must strengthen its capacity to prevent the outbreak and escalation of hostilities while ensuring integrated and complementary approaches to prevention, response and resolution.

Atrocity prevention must be treated as a cross-cutting priority across the multilateral system, rather than a siloed function. Prevention should function along a continuum, with prevention and protection measures integrated well before crises emerge. Embedding atrocity prevention priorities into policies and governance structures during periods of relative stability strengthens the ability of states and institutions to identify risks early and respond before they escalate. Sustainable implementation of R2P requires national ownership and long-term political will, with prevention efforts reinforced across national, regional and multilateral levels.

This approach must also address situations of protracted, state-led repression, including where atrocity risks or crimes persist outside situations of armed conflict. The absence of active hostilities should not be interpreted as the absence of atrocity risk. Particular attention should be given to situations where severe restrictions on information, movement and civic space make such risks difficult to independently monitor.

Prevention also depends on the consistent respect for international law and accountability for grave violations. Complying with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is integral, as is the full implementation of R2P. While IHL provides a binding legal framework and R2P serves as a political commitment, both share the protection of individuals as their normative foundation. ICR2P calls on UN member states to stand firmly against the normalization of human suffering and to consistently uphold IHL and International Human Rights Law (IHRL). Grave violations of international law must be met with accountability rather than impunity, reinforcing the credibility of multilateral institutions, preventing recurrence and fostering trust with affected populations.

Strengthening prevention also requires serious and sustained investment in peace operations and local protection. Civilian protection should be explicitly reflected in mission benchmarks, resource allocation decisions and future mandates. Where the UN is unable to maintain a physical presence, local actors must have the resources and flexibility to help protect communities and prevent escalation.

Prevention is also inseparable from sustainable development. Developmental deficits and resulting fragility are risk factors for mass atrocity crimes, while atrocities, in turn, reverse development gains and deepen instability. The SDGs cannot be fully realized without addressing these interconnected risks. ICR2P therefore urges states to center atrocity prevention within their development efforts, adopting whole-of-government approaches and ensuring that development assistance prioritizes reforms that reduce vulnerability to atrocities and foster resilient, inclusive societies.

ICR2P calls on UN member states to:

- Systematically assess atrocity risks and strategies to address them in information and analysis presented to the HRC, UN Security Council (UNSC) and General Assembly, and use the risk factors and indicators in the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes in deliberations on country situations.
- Raise atrocity risks in country-specific discussions across relevant UN bodies, including the Third Committee, the Economic and Social Council and the PBC, and use meetings under Resolution 76/262 to ensure timely attention to atrocity situations following a UNSC veto.
- Prioritize PoC in the planning, renewal and drawdown of peace operations by ensuring that civilian protection is reflected in mission benchmarks, resource allocation decisions and future mandates.
- Integrate atrocity prevention into national strategies and policies, including during periods of relative stability, and ensure that prevention efforts are mutually reinforcing across national, regional and multilateral levels.
- Support independent monitoring, documentation and preservation of evidence of potential atrocity crimes, particularly in situations where UN mechanisms and independent monitors are denied access to the territory, while ensuring appropriate safeguards for security, confidentiality and informed consent.
- Join and actively engage in multilateral networks, including the New York- and Geneva-based Group of Friends of R2P and the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, to strengthen global coordination and political will to advance R2P and atrocity prevention.

### **3. Center Civil Society and Affected Populations in Prevention, Response and Recovery**

The prevention of and response to atrocity crimes cannot succeed without the meaningful and inclusive participation of civil society and affected populations, including survivor communities. These actors bring irreplaceable expertise and lived experience that must be centered, not sidelined, in all stages of atrocity prevention. Local peacebuilders and civil society actors are frequently the first to witness and document atrocity risks, mediate tensions at the community level and implement unarmed protection strategies when violence escalates. In the aftermath of atrocity crimes, survivors and affected communities lead efforts for justice, accountability, redress, reconciliation and peacebuilding.

Meaningful participation requires more than symbolic consultation. Affected populations are not monolithic, and atrocity prevention will fail if groups facing heightened risks – including children, women, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQIA+ persons, ethnic and religious minorities, people with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced persons and other marginalized groups – are excluded. Their perspectives must inform risk analysis and the design of responsive, inclusive strategies, particularly where national institutions are captured, collapsed or complicit in atrocity crimes. Children and youth require particular attention, including through child protection, psychosocial support, continuity of education and meaningful opportunities to participate in prevention and peacebuilding.

Yet meaningful participation is increasingly under threat. Key decisions regarding the future of the multilateral system are being made without sufficient input from civil society actors and affected populations who will be expected to implement or adapt to them. Travel constraints, visa restrictions and limited access to UN Headquarters in New York continue to hinder direct global civil society engagement. These barriers disproportionately affect organizations and communities with fewer financial and institutional resources.

ICR2P calls on UN member states to:

- Embed civil society and survivor participation systematically in decision-making on prevention, response and recovery, including development planning, capacity-building initiatives and technical assistance, and commit to regular, substantive consultation with local peacebuilders, civil society and affected populations. These processes should avoid tokenization and re-traumatization and instead reflect genuine partnership and respect.
- Commit flexible, sustainable resources and technical support to local protection actors working on prevention, protection and peacebuilding, and invest in community-based early warning and response mechanisms that actively involve local civil society and affected populations in identifying and reporting atrocity risks.
- Safeguard civil society access to UN spaces by removing administrative obstacles, supporting organizations with limited resources and ensuring interpretation and translation services to overcome language barriers.
- Strengthen the UN's capacity to recognize and address structural discrimination and systemic barriers that increase vulnerability to atrocities, including through training, guidance and accountability mechanisms focused on inclusivity, equity and community engagement. Protection frameworks should explicitly recognize the needs of marginalized groups whose risks and vulnerabilities are too often neglected.
- Where independent civil society cannot safely operate inside a country, create meaningful avenues for survivors, refugees, escapees, diaspora communities and civil society organizations operating in exile to contribute to atrocity risk assessments, early warning, documentation and prevention efforts.

#### **4. Protect Human Rights in the Digital and AI Era**

Digital technologies – including social media platforms, AI, geospatial technology, facial recognition, drones and surveillance tools – are rapidly reshaping our interactions and transforming the ways in which states and other actors exercise power. The rapid development and use of AI have brought new challenges for human rights, the protection of civilians and atrocity prevention, underscoring the need for effective and urgent multilateral governance that establishes safeguards against the risks posed by unaccountable technologies.

AI systems are already being utilized by state and non-state actors to exacerbate societal divisions, facilitate hate speech, misinformation and incitement and commit violations of human rights and IHL in ways that may amount to or increase the risk of atrocity crimes. AI is increasingly being used in warfare, particularly for target identification and decision-making, with potentially grave consequences for civilians. These uses raise significant questions regarding compliance with the IHL principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. The opacity surrounding these technologies can also complicate efforts to establish responsibility when errors or harms occur. Technical safeguards alone cannot substitute for meaningful human control, accountability, oversight and transparency, particularly where AI is integrated into military or security decision-making.

Machine learning, algorithmic surveillance and other digital technologies can be weaponized for ethnic profiling, mass surveillance or targeted violence. They can also facilitate disinformation, deepen information silos or incite violence, particularly against marginalized ethnic or religious communities. These technologies have been used to surveil populations, silence civil society and target human rights defenders and political opponents.

At the same time, these technologies hold potential for atrocity prevention by documenting early warning signs, strengthening human rights monitoring through evidence authentication and amplifying underrepresented or marginalized voices to share testimonies.

ICR2P calls on UN member states to:

- Ensure that AI governance frameworks are grounded in IHRL and IHL, address risks across the full AI lifecycle, prevent online incitement to atrocity crimes and are effective and enforceable.

- Require meaningful transparency, human oversight, accountability, human rights due diligence, impact assessments and access to remedy for harms associated with AI systems.
- Ensure that civil society, workers, technical experts and affected communities have meaningful opportunities to participate in ongoing AI governance discussions.
- Strengthen safeguards around the use of AI and other digital technologies in military and security contexts, particularly where their use may increase risks to civilians or facilitate violations of international law.
- Support responsible uses of AI and other digital technologies for atrocity prevention, including early warning, human rights monitoring and documentation, while safeguarding against misuse.
- Integrate patterns of digital repression, including pervasive surveillance, severe restrictions on access to independent information and transnational digital repression targeting survivors, exiles and civil society actors, into atrocity risk assessments and early warning frameworks.

In closing, ICR2P hopes that this call to action will translate into genuine, concerted efforts to improve the protection of vulnerable populations, strengthen prevention and support non-recurrence. ICR2P and its member organizations stand ready to provide support, early warning and expertise for member states in fulfilling this responsibility.