

## *Africa Renewal*

Press Release

### **12 years after the killings in Rwanda, experts ask: Who is responsible for protecting peoples from genocide? Roundtable to be held in New York on 6 April**

5 April 2006 – New York. The United Nations will mark the 12th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda by launching a global information and education campaign aimed at preventing future acts of genocide. The first event will be a debate on the challenges faced by the international community as it seeks to protect civilians at risk of ethnic cleansing, war crimes, crimes against humanity or the threat of genocide within their own countries. The event will be held on 6 April at the United Nations in New York.

When UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan first proposed, in 2000, that the international community has a responsibility to protect vulnerable citizens, the idea was highly controversial. It ran against deeply-held beliefs in the sanctity of State sovereignty and the right of governments to protect themselves against attack by foreign forces. However, in the face of the terrible crimes perpetrated in Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan, it becomes necessary to ask, “What happens when the enemy of the people is inside the border?”

In 2005, the Secretary-General noted that, “experience has led us to grapple with the fact that no legal principle — not even sovereignty — should ever be allowed to shield genocide, crimes against humanity and mass human suffering. But without implementation, our declarations ring hollow. Without action, our promises are meaningless”. Today, *responsibility to protect* has more support in principle but is far from being put into practice. The question now has become, “Whose responsibility is it to protect, and by what means?”

Prior to the debate on 6 April, the highly-acclaimed BBC film, *Shooting Dogs*, will be screened. The film is based on the experiences of a UN peacekeeping contingent in Rwanda. Because of its limited mandate, the contingent was ordered to withdraw from a school it is protecting, leaving some 2,500 Rwandans to face their killers.

Taking part in the debate are:

- Juan Mendez, UN Special Adviser on Genocide;
- Alison des Forges, Human Rights Watch Adviser for the Great Lakes Region and an expert on the genocide in Rwanda;
- Gregory Stanton, President of Genocide Watch, assisted in drafting UN resolutions creating the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and is the author of “8 Stages of Genocide”.
- Pierre Prosper, former prosecutor with the International Tribunal for Rwanda and former US Ambassador-at-large for War Crimes.
- Speakers from Rwanda and the Sudan: to be announced.

The event will be moderated by Boston Globe journalist, Farah Stockman.

## **Background**

The Rwanda genocide began on 7 April 1994, a day after a plane carrying the presidents of Rwanda and Burundi was shot down as it prepared to land in Kigali, the Rwandan capital. Over the next 100 days, approximately 800,000 Rwandans were slaughtered. The genocide was highly organized, with top government and ruling party officials playing a direct role. Militia members, the armed forces and civilians carried out appalling atrocities, mainly against the Tutsi ethnic minority, but also against those from the Hutu majority who refused to join in the slaughter or belonged to opposition parties.

The genocide was perpetrated in full view of the international community. A peacekeeping operation -- the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR) -- was on the ground, with about 2,000 troops, originally sent to monitor implementation of an August 1993 peace agreement between the government and rebel forces of the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF).

After the genocide began, 10 Belgian peacekeepers were killed trying to defend Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, who also was slain. The then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali approached the Security Council with three options: reinforce UNAMIR, scale it down or withdraw it entirely. The Security Council voted to reduce the force from 2,000 to 270. Only in mid-May did the Council reverse the decision and vote to dispatch some 5,500 UN troops. Few arrived before the massacres ended in July, when the Tutsi-dominated RPF took power.

An independent commission set up by the UN later concluded: "The responsibility for the failings of the United Nations to prevent and stop the genocide in Rwanda lies with a number of actors, in particular the Secretary-General, the [UN] Secretariat, the Security Council, UNAMIR and the broader membership of the United Nations."

In 2004, on the 10th anniversary of the genocide, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, outlined a plan of action to prevent future genocides. It involved five broad areas of activity:

- Preventing armed conflict: Since genocide almost always occurs during war, governments and the international community must address the underlying causes of conflict. These include hatred, racism, the dehumanization of minorities, tyranny, poverty, inequality, youth unemployment and competition for scarce resources.
- Protecting civilians in armed conflict: When conflicts do erupt, one of the highest priorities should be protecting civilians. All combatants, state and non-state alike, must be reminded of their responsibility under international law to protect civilians. Peacekeeping missions must have the capacity to act when civilians are endangered.
- Ending impunity: National and international courts must be strengthened to make certain that perpetrators of genocide or other large-scale acts of violence do not escape prosecution.

- Ensuring early, clear warning: The signs of impending or potential genocide must be quickly recognized and disseminated.
- Taking swift and decisive action: National governments, the Security Council and other bodies must have the political will to move quickly and effectively to block the development of genocide or to halt it if it has begun.

To register for this event, contact:

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*Seating will be limited and registration will be required for non-UN pass holders.*

For information on the “Rwanda and the United Nations” programme, contact:

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**Watch** the 6 April debate webcast on [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).

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