

New York, 14 February 2008 - Secretary-General's message on the opening of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect [delivered by Mr. Vijay Nambiar, Chef de Cabinet to the Secretary-General]

I warmly welcome the establishment of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect at the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies of the CUNY Graduate Center. The birth of this new initiative holds great promise in supporting the endeavours of the international community to take the principle of the responsibility to protect from concept to actuality, from word to deed.

The responsibility to protect, as it emerged from the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit, is a solemn commitment by the international community. It also expresses a profound moral imperative in today's world. It summarizes the inherent obligation of every State to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It also asserts the responsibility of the international community to take collective action through the United Nations to protect populations from such serious crimes and violations when states manifestly fail to do so.

Two weeks ago, I visited the memorial in Kigali to the victims of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. It is impossible to pass through that building and not be affected – indeed, shaken to the core – by what the Rwandan people have endured. As Secretary-General of the United Nations, I am determined to do everything possible to prevent a repeat of such an unspeakable tragedy.

The Responsibility to Protect places particular emphasis on reaching out to Governments to prevent such atrocities in the first place. This is an obligation yet to be fulfilled. I have recently appointed two distinguished scholars and diplomats, Francis Deng and Edward Luck, to work with me as Special Representative for the Prevention of Genocide and as Special Adviser, respectively, to assist in the discharge of this mission. I now look forward with great anticipation to the contribution of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect in reinforcing and invigorating our efforts.

Your opening in 2008 is particularly fitting and timely. This year we mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Throughout this anniversary year, the United Nations will conduct a campaign to remind people everywhere about the obligation to respect the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings. And we will seek to educate people on the responsibility to protect.

The Global Centre can advance this campaign in crucial ways. Your work can rally support for wider global acceptance of this concept. You will help ensure that the responsibility to protect is known, understood and enjoyed by everyone, everywhere. You will also work to rally support for action under this principle in the world of today and tomorrow. For it is often those who most need their rights protected, who also need to be informed that this obligation exists -- and that it exists for them.

Working together, we can deliver on the promise of the responsibility to protect. And we can transform this idea from an abstract obligation into what it truly is: one of humanity's highest calling.

I look forward to working with you on this vital journey.