



**INTERVENTION BY**

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**AT THE**

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE PREVENTION OF  
GENOCIDES**

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**Excellency Didier Reynders, Deputy Prime Minister and minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Belgium,**

**Excellency Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General,**

**Excellency Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,**

**Distinguished participants,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

This discussion on the Prevention of Genocide is very important, because we have to keep reminding ourselves to always be vigilant and learn from the past, in order to prevent its recurrence. To paraphrase Kundera, it is a struggle of memory against forgetting.

Whenever we speak about genocide, the focus tends to be on the events as they unfold and the aftermath, with less attention to the root causes of genocide.

Whilst we should seek to understand what makes individuals and groups of individuals undertake acts of hatred and such extreme violence against their fellow humans, we must also understand the political and social processes that breed, condone and justify such hatred and violence.

We must understand what happens when a political and social system see whole groups of people - whether because of ethnicity, race or religion or some other characteristic - as the 'Other' and therefore not quite human, justifying exclusion, slavery, persecution, invasion, oppression, hatred, dispossession,

divide and rule, wars and in its extreme forms, genocide and mass atrocities

Genocides have occurred and continue to occur throughout history and in every corner of the globe, in societies ancient and modern, for reasons as diverse as the acquisition of land and resources, political tyranny and racial, ethnic and religious discrimination, to mention but a few.

As the concept emerged during twentieth-century history, instances quoted include the Holocaust, and the genocides and mass atrocities in Armenia, Cambodian, Bosnia and Rwanda.

In the context of the UN definition, it should also include genocides and mass atrocities under colonialism: mass atrocities against and the near-extirmination of the indigenous peoples in South America, the US, Canada, and Australia; and the mass atrocity of the transatlantic slave trade as well as the systematic discrimination against the Roma people in Europe over the centuries. It should include instances of mass atrocities and genocide in Africa during colonialism: against the Khoi and San people in Southern Africa, in the Belgium Congo, in German South West Africa, and so forth.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Unless we deal with these lessons from history, understanding the root causes that led to these events, and their aftermath, it will be difficult to prevent genocide occurring today.

The struggle against genocides and mass atrocities is therefore about addressing root causes of conflicts, about fighting all forms of oppression, abuse, marginalization and discrimination, and by managing the diversity of our peoples, cultures and religions.

It was the Rwanda Genocide of 1994, which prompted the adoption of the principle of non-indifference in the AU Constitutive Act of 2002. The African Union thus committed not to stand idle when African people are facing genocide, mass atrocities or internal strife.

On the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Rwanda genocide, we are reminded that the root causes of the Rwanda genocide included the divide and rule tactics under colonialism, the failure to manage diversity in the post-colonial period, and at the time of the events in the words of the OAU High Level Panel the fact that *“the Rwandan genocide could have been prevented by those in the international community who had the position and means to do so. But though they had the means, they lacked the will. The world failed Rwanda”*.

These events therefore also guide the African approach towards conflict prevention, mediation and post-conflict reconstruction, as well as our emphasis on reconciliation, transitional justice, and healing.

It means redoubling our efforts to protect the human rights of all strata and groups in our societies, through instruments such as the African Charter on Peoples and Human rights and the African Peer Review Mechanism.

It means paying special attention to managing diversity and ensure inclusion, equality, human security and justice for all.

The African Union has embarked on the difficult task of establishing the African Human Rights Memorial Project (AUHRM), which aims at preserving the memory of mass atrocities, in recognition of past suffering and in the interests of future peace and security. It will commemorate, reflect and remember the series of grave crimes committed against Africans as a result of genocide, slavery, apartheid and colonialism, and to ensure Never Again.

I will conclude by making reference to the solemn declaration of our heads of state and government to silence the guns by 2020, so that Africa could achieve its vision of an integrated, peaceful, people centred and prosperous continent.

I thank you for your attention.