

STATEMENT
on the 70th Anniversary of the Adoption of
the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide

The Budapest Centre for Mass Atrocities Prevention, co-founder of the European Centre for Responsibility to Protect, pays special tribute to Raphael Lemkin for his pioneering work and tireless struggle for the adoption of the Genocide Convention on 9 December 1948, as a direct response to the systematic and planned extermination of the Jewish people during the Holocaust as well as to the crimes committed by the Stalinist regime.

The seventy years, particularly the last three decades have witnessed important progress in seeking the implementation as the first international norm enabling Member States, acting also during peace time through the Security Council to cross the limits of national sovereignty when these heinous crimes are committed. Establishment of the International Criminal Court and the ad-hoc tribunals, the appointment of the Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, the adoption of the concept of the Responsibility to Protect, the setting up of the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, the continuously increasing network of regional and national focal points and civil society organizations as well as the development of early warning tools, preventive mechanisms and practices eradicating this “odious scourge”, all mark significant milestones in the road towards the noble idea, “Never Again”. These new institutions and mechanisms have exposed actors whose intention was to commit genocide and other mass atrocities and opened some space for holding them accountable.

Since 1948, however, the world has continually borne witness to serious obstacles to realize this ‘Never Again’ idea. Sadly, all too often, the international response has been inadequate. Genocide and other mass atrocity crimes have been perpetrated and remain a serious threat. The world has failed to protect many ethnic, national, religious and racial groups from becoming victims of these extreme crimes. Geopolitical rivalry, the protection of state sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention, are very often being used as a cover for dictators and extremists, excessive legalism, gaps, or even contradictions between universal and national values are often cited as main reasons for this inaction.

Preventing genocide is a collective and individual, political and moral responsibility and duty. States, in particular the Permanent Members of the Security Council of the United Nations, bear the primary responsibility for being the main custodians of the enforcement of the Convention, to prevent, halt and punish the crimes “without names”.

Since its establishment eight years ago, the Budapest Centre for Mass Atrocities Prevention has made efforts to raise awareness of, and to promote the prevention of genocide and other mass atrocities. It has focused upon developing regional capabilities, enhancing international cooperation and improving the role of the European Union and its Member States and addressing the emerging challenges such as radicalization and extremism. In doing so, the Budapest Centre attaches great significance to the education of future generations to empower them to behave in a non-discriminatory and tolerant manner, which is a fundamental precondition of preventing mass atrocities, including genocide.

Building on the institutional achievements within the UN system and joining the on-going initiatives aimed at devising procedures to prevent and counter mass atrocities, the Budapest Centre for Mass Atrocities Prevention invites all member states, in particular the Permanent Members of the Security Council of the United Nations, the Secretary General and the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect to seize the opportunity of the 70th anniversary of adoption of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and launch a process of dialogue focusing on overcoming the causes of inaction in particular to better protect the victims, strengthen the preventive approach and increase accountability.

The Budapest Centre, as co-founder of the European Center for Responsibility to Protect invites the European Union to be the primary mover, together with other international actors and stakeholders and appeals to its partners to support this initiative and help its implementation.