

**69<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and  
Punishment of the Crime of Genocide  
and  
International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of  
the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime**

**8 December 2017, 11:00am, Trusteeship Council, New York**

**Keynote speech by Adama Dieng, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on  
the Prevention of Genocide**

*“Launch of Appeal for the Universal Ratification of the Genocide Convention”*

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we mark the 69<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The adoption of the Convention was of immense importance. In the aftermath of World War II, it was the first human rights treaty to be adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, on 9 December 1948, one day before the Universal Declaration for Human Rights was also adopted. It was the still fresh memory of the terrible events that occurred during the war which prompted Member States to set up an international legal convention that would prohibit the crime of genocide and require signatory governments to take all necessary steps to prevent or halt that crime.

As the contracting parties of the Convention recognised at the time in its preamble, “at all periods of history genocide has inflicted great losses on humanity”. The crime of genocide did not start with the Genocide Convention and, unfortunately, it also did not end with it. Throughout history there have been many events that could have been qualified as genocide, as defined in the Convention and even now we are confronted with some situations that, if put to the test in a court of law, could also be labelled as such.

But genocide should not be part of our present or our future. It is not an accident, nor is it inevitable. It is our inaction, or our ineffectiveness in addressing the warning signs, that allows it to become a reality. A reality where people are dehumanized and persecuted for who they are, or who they represent. A reality of great suffering, cruelty and of inhumane acts that have at the basis unacceptable motivations - the thirst for power or resources, distorted views of identity supremacy, extremist ideologies, selfish interests.

Our collective failure to prevent the crises that set the context for this crime to happen has disastrous human and economic consequences. Enormous loss of life, massive displacement of people, collective trauma that lasts for generations, devastated economies, development set back by decades. The consequences go far beyond national borders. Ripple effects can be felt regionally and even at an international level. Genocide can indeed constitute a threat to international peace and security.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we also mark the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime, which was established three years ago. This is a day of great significance. It is a day that encourages us to reflect on tragic events of the past, but it also prompts us to consider our present and the future of generations to come. This day is both a tribute to the victims and an expression of resolve. It is a day with a powerful message: “Remember the Victims, Prevent Genocide”.

Remembering the victims, the tragic events of the past and witnessing the suffering of populations around the world today should prompt us to take action.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As of today, a total of 149 States have ratified or acceded to the Genocide Convention. The most recent one to accede, just last month, was Benin, who is joining us here today in this panel. However, 45 United Nations Member States have yet to join the Convention. Of those, 20 are from the African continent, 18 from Asia, and the remaining seven from the Americas. The lack of commitment of such a large number of States is puzzling.

Ratifying the Genocide Convention is a matter of moral obligation towards humanity. It represents a recognition of the responsibility of States towards their populations and shows respect for those who have perished as a result of this crime. The Convention has formed the basis of action aimed at the prevention of the crime of genocide and it has also played a vital role in the development of international criminal law. In addition, considering the negative impact that the commission of the crime of genocide has on international peace and security, ratifying the Genocide Convention, more than being simply a symbol of international unity, demonstrates commitment to the fundamental principles of the United Nations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On 9 December 2018, the Convention will mark its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It is a senior and wise Convention that needs to be protected. Many years have passed since the events that led the international community to say “never again” and draft this convention. But “never again” has become “time and again”. The problem does not lie in the Convention but instead in our lack of commitment towards it. To those States who are already parties to the Genocide Convention, I urge you to strengthen your commitment. To those who have yet to do so, I urge you to take action and ratify or accede to the Convention as a matter of priority in the next year.

Today I am launching a one-year appeal for the universal ratification of the Convention. I hope that by next year, on 9 December 2018, at the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention, I will have good news to report to all of you in this same room: a universal commitment to eradicate the scourge of the crime of genocide from our world. I call on all the Member States of the United Nations to join this cause. There can be no justification for not doing so.

Thank you.