

Workshop on: Atrocity Crimes Prevention through Education in Southeast Asian Region – Secondary Education

Opening remarks by Ms. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Under-Secretary-General, Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

(Virtual)

Friday September 16, 2022

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very happy to be able to join you today virtually as we are starting the third phase of our project on ‘Atrocity Crimes Prevention through Education in Southeast Asian Region’ with a focus on secondary level education.

From the outset, I would like to express appreciation to our partner, the Documentation Center of Cambodia, for the dedication and commitment shown in the implementation of our joint initiative since commencement in early 2021.

Today’s workshop, and the previous workshops we have organized with DC Cam, is taking place in the framework of a project that my Office, UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, launched in 2020 to strengthen educational responses to atrocity prevention in the Southeast Asia region.

The project is of particular significance to my mandate as the United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. My mandate is to monitor and raise alarm over situations across the world where there is a risk of atrocity crimes, by which I mean genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. I am also mandated to raise awareness on the causes and dynamics of these crimes and to strengthen the capacity of Member States, regional organizations and civil society to prevent them.

Since my Office cannot implement its mandate without the collaboration and engagement of others, education becomes one of the key tools for creating awareness and developing expertise on genocide and its prevention. This initiative therefore goes to the core of my mandate.

Teaching about past atrocity crimes, the process and early warning signs that led to their commission, such as discrimination, hate speech and intolerance contributes to early prevention. It is also through education that children learn critical thinking skills and understand their rights. The teacher’s manual that

we have developed in partnership with DC Cam provides an opportunity to raise awareness among learners of the risk factors of these crimes, to be able to identify when they might be happening in the world, in their region or even to themselves. I strongly believe that atrocity prevention needs to happen at all levels -at the international, regional, national and community levels. However, it is often at the community level that the risk factors and early warning signs of atrocity crimes are first manifested. I therefore believe it is crucial to work with and support actors at the community level to become champions of prevention, this includes schools, teachers and students.

Unfortunately, we know throughout history that education has also sometimes been misused or manipulated to aid the commission of atrocity crimes. We saw this in the propaganda used in the Holocaust to teach racist ideologies against the Jews. Education was also misused to divide and segregate communities in the lead up to the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This is why I believe it is crucial to work with schools, educators and teachers to support them to be champions of prevention and instill in new learners' values of respect, non-discrimination and compassion.

I would like to thank you all for your roles in implementing this project and for the dedication you have shown to integrate this manual into your own teaching. I look forward to our continuing collaboration and your support in expanding this curriculum to other teachers in your countries and in the larger region. The input, feedback and discussion you have in the workshop today, will help us and DC Cam in finalizing the manual and being able to disseminate and translate it further.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The project we are implementing in Asia Pacific is not the only one. I have made education a key priority of my mandate. In 2021, my Office launched a similar initiative in Africa, bringing together scholars from across the region to develop a curriculum on genocide prevention. My Office also intends to launch similar initiatives in other regions, including the Middle East and Latin America. The objective is to have teaching materials and curricula on atrocity prevention that is developed by and contextualized to the region in which it is being taught. The work you are doing will therefore also be a good practice and resource that can help or inspire others doing similar work.

Let me conclude by thanking you once more and to reiterate the full support of my Office in taking forward this important work we have started with you and with DC CAM.

I wish you a very successful workshop.

Thank you.