

**Human Rights Council Intersessional Meeting on Prevention of Genocide
(As per Human Rights Council Resolution 43/29)**

Wednesday, 10 February 2021
6.30 to 11.00 am NYT

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

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you all for the opportunity to engage at this inter-sessional meeting of the Human Rights Council on collective efforts to strengthen our capacities and commitment to prevent genocide, enable people to live in dignity and peace, and enjoy their human rights. I often describe myself as a child of two worlds, human rights and peacebuilding which makes for a good combination when it comes to prevention of genocide.

For years, I taught human rights, among communities involved in armed conflict, on my continent of birth, at a time when it wasn't the norm to do so. The basis of my teaching was international legal instruments, UN Declarations and Conventions, including the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Many of our Constitutions then did not provide for human rights protections. It was challenging, as people who desperately needed peace could only remotely apply the international instruments I taught in their daily lives.

Everything became clearer to them when in my teaching, I began to make the connection between human rights abuses as causes and results of the armed conflicts.

Many advancements have been made since then in the prevention of atrocities. Yet, the rise of xenophobia, racism and religious bigotry, often propagated by

political leaders and parties promoting ethno-nationalist populism is menacing human rights, democratic values, and social stability and dividing people. We have much learning to do, to accept difference and the diversity of humanity – how we appear, how we pray, what we believe – for peaceful co-existence.

Part of the mandate of the office of the Special Advisor is to collect existing information on massive and serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including related to ethnic and racial origin that, if not prevented or halted, might lead to genocide. The lessons are clear. Atrocity crimes create deep long-lasting damages across entire societies which takes generations to repair. Experience has shown us that prevention is so much less costly – in all areas, and particularly in saving human lives.

Yet, inaction to promptly respond to warning signs allows genocide and atrocities to happen. We need stronger commitment and early action at the community, national and regional level and international cooperation.

My office will continue working with Member States to ratify the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. It includes adopting national legislation align with this Convention and other relevant international treaties and building and strengthen institutional and human capacity for the prevention of atrocity crimes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Some of the situations relevant to the mandate of my office include the arbitrary detentions of political leaders, human rights defenders, journalists, activists and many more in Myanmar, and the transfer of legislative, executive and judicial powers to the military. I welcome the decision by the Human Rights Council to hold a special session on Myanmar this Friday, and the public statement issued by the Security Council calling for the immediate release in Myanmar of the detained, uphold democratic institutions and address the root causes of the crisis in Rakhine State. We have witnessed the human tragedy faced by the Rohingya population, with loss of lives and hundreds of thousands of people forced to flee their homes. Accountability and reparation for the enormous suffering of the victims and

conditions for safe, voluntary, and dignified return of the refugees remains nonexistent.

In Central-African Republic, violence, the forced displacement of civilians and attacks against Government forces and United Nations peacekeepers may constitute war crimes. My office has urged national authorities, with the support of the international community, to take urgent measures to address the insecurity and ensure the protection of its civilian population.

In Ethiopia there have been reports of religious and ethnic profiling and allegations of human rights violations and abuses including killings, rape, displacement of populations and destruction of property. I have called on the Ethiopian authorities to establish national mechanisms to address the root causes of ethnic violence, build national cohesion, promote human rights and reconciliation.

In Yemen, despite progress made at the political level with the establishment of the government in Aden, the security situation is concerning. The parties to the conflict conducted attacks and killings on civilians which may amount to war crimes. Other widespread human rights violations include enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, and gender-based and sexual violence.

There have been positive developments however in advancing transitional justice. In South Sudan, the Government's approval to establish the African Union Hybrid Court is a promising step towards accountability for serious human rights violations, including acts of sexual and gender-based violence.

The ICC's conviction of former Lord's Resistance Army commander, Dominic Ongwen, the surrender to the ICC in January of Mahamat Said Abdel Kani related to crimes in the Central African Republic, and the transfer to the ICC in June 2020 of Abd-Al-Rahman in relation to crimes committed in Darfur, Sudan, are all positive signs of dealing with impunity.

Going forward, I hope we can work towards ensuring the Universal Periodic Review reports by Member States contains information on how they are

implementing the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The prevention of genocide can be ingrained in the structure of our societies when there is a convergence of support from everyone, especially women and youth, two groups often excluded in spaces where decisions on war and peace are made.

As Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, I am committed to do my utmost to continue providing early warning and recommendations on potential situations of atrocity crimes. I will also continue to assist in building the capacity of national authorities, regional organizations and civil society, including community leaders to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes. I ask this body and all Member States to do the same to protect those at risk from such atrocities.

I also ask you to remember that the principles espoused in human rights-based approaches— universality, indivisibility, interdependency, equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, accountability and rule of law – hold true in the prevention of genocide.

Thank you.