

15th Commemoration of the Genocide in Rwanda (2009)

Remarks of the President of the 63rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

Excellencies,

Madame Deputy Secretary-General,

Sisters and Brothers All,

It is with profound sadness that we gather today to commemorate an event that shook the world. For the grief that we feel for the genocide that traumatized Rwanda 15 years ago, traumatized all of us. The mass murder and unspeakable crimes committed shook our confidence in the conviction – the hope – that we are building societies where racism and ethnic hatred are no longer tolerated.

Unlike many acts of genocide that have gone unrecorded and unpunished in history, we can take heart in the attention that the world continues to give to the events in 1994. Powerful presidents have apologized for not doing enough to prevent the violence.; murderers and rapists, religious leaders and politicians have been arrested and tried for their crimes; the international community grapples with the complex and as yet operational concept of the responsibility to protect people facing massive violations of their human rights.

Yes, the world feels remorse for standing by while these crimes unfolded across this verdant land. But these crimes did not spring out of thin air. We acknowledge too that the seeds for this genocide were planted long before and nurtured with lethal results by colonial policies that institutionalized ethnic tensions and resentments.

Let us continue to learn from the Rwandan experience to explore the roots of ethnic conflict and racial discrimination as much as we try to combat impunity and promote truth and reconciliation. For if we are not aware of the injustices and grievances inherent in our economic and social systems, we will certainly continue to reap the harvest of death and destruction they have sown.

As the world enters into a downturn of uncertain depth and duration, ethnic resentments that have been kept below the surface in better times are bound to resurface. It is up to all of us to monitor the potential flashpoints that exist in developing and industrialized societies alike.

We must take every opportunity to join together in our efforts. I urge all Member States without exception to attend and support the upcoming Durban Review Conference. This conference will be a testament to the resolve or lack of resolve of each and all of us together, at this juncture in history, to combat and eliminate all manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Let the tragedy of Rwanda be a reminder and impetus to garner the collective resolve resist racism and affirm the human dignity of all our brothers and sisters. With our diligence and personal interventions, we can counter the indifference that leads to inaction and the injustices that lead to violence and the human tragedy of genocide.

Thank you.

H.E. Miguel D'escoto Brockmann