

Statement by Edward C. Luck, Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General
16th Commemoration of the Rwanda Genocide, 7 April 2010

Thank you Under-Secretary-General Akasaka.

Mrs. Deputy Secretary-General, His Excellency Ambassador Gasana, Her Excellency Ambassador Rice, distinguished delegates, friends, and colleagues,

It is a singular honor to be with you this evening to mark the sixteenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, sadly one of the defining events of the 20th century. The macabre and deliberate acts of that April left an enduring stain on human history and on the noble aspirations of this world body. The funeral processions are still winding their way to the Genocide Memorial in Kigali. Moved by his two visits to Rwanda, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has tirelessly championed the responsibility to protect, insisting that we can and must do better in the 21st century.

This evening, we are moved by the accounts of survivors and uplifted by the voices of so many young people. Life triumphs over death. Those who would incite or commit genocide can no longer count on impunity.

For many religions, April is a time for remembrance, hope, and renewal. It is a time for faith and fellowship. In that spirit, tonight we will have the opportunity to view and discuss the documentary, "As We Forgive," on the ongoing reconciliation efforts in Rwanda.

Yet, for all of the goodwill and sense of common purpose in this room, it is sobering to acknowledge that we are still struggling to find surer ways of preventing genocide and promoting the responsibility to protect. The United Nations and its Member States must learn from their failure either to prevent or to protect in Cambodia, Srebrenica, and Rwanda. We must find the will and the means to break the cycles of recurring violence, hatred, and retribution that still afflict too many parts of the world. Even as we gather here to mark the horrific events of sixteen years ago, their grim legacy is playing out elsewhere in the Great Lakes region, leaving an unconscionable toll of wanton killing, destruction, and sexual violence.

In honoring past victims and survivors, we cannot be indifferent to those suffering or being threatened by mass atrocity crimes today. We need to understand that the responsibility to protect is a continuing one, borne by governments, armed groups, international organizations, and individuals alike. It is about the future, not the past.

Nevertheless, it has been the representatives of countries that have suffered such traumas that have been the most determined and eloquent advocates for the responsibility to protect. By remembering the past, they are helping us to chart a better future. We are especially grateful, Ambassador Gasana, for the able and ceaseless efforts of your delegation to advance this principle.

In closing, let me compliment all of the organizers for making this commemoration an annual event on the UN's crowded calendar. For it reminds us never to say "it can't happen here" or "it can't happen again." In preventing genocide and other mass atrocities, complacency is our enemy and vigilance our friend. It is reassuring, therefore, to see so many vigilant friends here this evening.

Many thanks and all the best.