

Rwandan Genocide Commemoration Ceremony, New York
7 April 2010

Your Excellencies, Deputy-Secretary General, Permanent Representatives, honorable guests, members of the Rwandan community, ladies and gentlemen,

I would first like to thank you for inviting me to participate in this ceremony to commemorate the Rwanda genocide.

Sixteen years ago today, violence was unleashed that led to the horrific deaths of approximately 800,000 innocent people. Today, we remember the victims of the Rwanda genocide and their surviving families as we continue to work to achieve justice, peace and reconciliation in Rwanda, and to prevent genocide from occurring again anywhere in the world.

The Rwandan genocide left an indelible imprint on me personally. I went to Rwanda three months after the genocide in my capacity as Representative of the UN Secretary General on Internally Displaced Persons and visited a church that was the scene of one of the worst atrocities. My helicopter landed some hundred yards away in the rain and mud. In the archway to the Churchyard and in front of the rooms adjacent to it, the bodies of people who had died were piled up. Bodies lay in the Churchyard and more bodies remained scattered inside the Church. It was impossible to believe that human beings were capable of such brutality against other human beings.

Remembering the violence means acknowledging the victims, but also calling attention to the survivors and the difficulties and struggles they continue to face. If I remain haunted by my experience in Rwanda after the genocide, how have the lives of the survivors been affected? We owe them our recognition and respect for having the courage to endure the trauma, to bear witness and to participate as citizens of Rwanda and of the world.

The international community cannot forget the genocide in Rwanda. Today is a timely occasion to remind ourselves of our collective failure to recognize the warning signs of impending violence and to prevent the deaths of so many. We also recognize the efforts of the Rwanda Government and so many others who have supported Rwanda on its road to recovery.

My Office was established on the premise that genocide can be prevented, and must be prevented. On an on-going basis, my Office monitors situations of concern around the world, alerts relevant actors where there is a risk of genocide and advocates and mobilizes for appropriate action. However, understanding the processes and root causes of genocide is central to these efforts; I therefore believe it is critical to raise awareness and create better understanding of this horrific phenomenon.

The Rwandan tragedy teaches us that genocide is an extreme form of identity-related conflicts. However, it is not the differences in identity, whether real or perceived, that generate conflict, but rather the implication of those differences in terms of equitable access to power and resources, social services, development opportunities and the enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms.

Seen in that light, early prevention becomes a challenge of good governance and equitable management of diversity. That means eliminating gross inequalities, discrimination and promoting a common sense of belonging, a responsibility which all Member States have towards their people.

The challenge of managing ethnic diversity in Rwanda and the wider Great Lakes Region remains daunting. It is incumbent upon all of us to continue supporting Rwanda and the region to deepen their unity in diversity, equality and respect for human rights.

Thank you.