



OPENING OF THE HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL SESSION
by
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May I first of all invite you to rise for a moment of silence in respect and in memory of the millions and millions of innocent victims of hatred, killed for the only reason of who they were.

Thank you.

Mr. Secretary General of the United Nations,
Madam Chairperson of the African Union Commission,
Mr. Secretary General of the Council of Europe,
Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you all for coming so numerous to Brussels for the best purpose one can think of: to help to rid mankind of the scourge of killing the "other". What has brought man, since time immemorial, to destroy groups of "others" for the sole reason that something appeared "different" about him or her? Don't we all agree that in this twenty-first century there is no place for mass atrocities, for genocides?

Yesterday and today, civil servants, academics, legal experts, as well as representatives of civil society and parliaments have shared their experience and knowledge with all of us and have made very interesting and most useful proposals, which will be reflected in the Conference conclusions. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of them warmly.

In 2005, our Heads of State and Government recommitted themselves to "actively protecting and promoting all human rights, the rule of law and democracy and recognized that they are interlinked and mutually reinforcing". They also noted that "the promotion and protection of the

rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities contribute to political and social stability and peace and enrich the cultural diversity and heritage of society".

Putting these commitments into action will definitely signify a major step in preventing mass atrocities and genocides. In this respect, a special role is entrusted on the educational authorities to raise awareness of young people on the fundamental importance of protecting human rights and the values of diversity, with a special focus on the rights of minority groups.

One of the major elements coming out of the discussions is that it is in the first place the duty of National States to protect and promote the fundamental rights of all populations, including minorities, irrespective of their nationality, ethnicity, race or religion. States should be supported by Regional International Organizations they are member of, so ably presented here today by the Chairperson of the African Union Commission and by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, as well as by representatives of the European Union.

Particular focus has been put on the necessity to take effective measures to prevent incitement to violence based on ethnic or religious hatred, including enacting specific laws that prohibit incitement to violence.

The structural societal programs have however to be supplemented with mechanisms to monitor information about present or future dangers of mass atrocities. In this respect, it has been proposed that national Focal Points on Genocide Prevention, in conjunction with the Focal Points for Responsibility to Protect, would be established and duly inform national competent authorities on such developments. These informations should be exchanged with the regional organization of which the participating States are a member and thus establish a permanent network designed to inform, consult and take the appropriate decisions for political preventive action, in priority at regional level while remaining in agreement with the United Nations Secretary General and the Security Council.

Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,

The number of delegations – 124 in total, including 37 at ministerial level – demonstrates the importance of this issue and of your commitments to avert mass atrocities for good.

I am looking forward to learning about the suggestions, proposals and solutions you will present to us. We, who are presently entrusted with political responsibilities, owe it to the memory of the victims of past mass atrocities and genocides and to the young people, the future generations, to come up with concrete, practical and effective measures to prevent new mass atrocities and senseless bloodshed.

Our promise “Never again”, can and, indeed, should become a reality. Action is now !

Thank you.