

Statement of Former New Zealand Ambassador to the UN Amb. Colin Keating at Security Council Meeting on: Threat to International Peace and Security: Prevention and Fight Against Genocide

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I want to thank all of the members of the Security Council for inviting me to participate in this briefing.

Twenty years ago, Madam President, your country, Nigeria, and mine, New Zealand, sat beside one another as members of the Council. I had the dreadful responsibility in April 1994 of presiding over a Council that refused to recognize that genocide was being perpetrated against the Tutsi in Rwanda and failed in its responsibilities to reinforce the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Rwanda in order to protect as many innocent civilians as possible.

My first responsibility today is therefore to remember the victims, the almost 1 million who died, and the survivors. It is good that the Council will today make its own commemoration of the genocide and discuss the need to prevent genocide in the future. This briefing also provides a fitting opportunity, for me in my capacity as former President of the Council in April 1994, to apologize for what we failed to do in 1994 and for that to be formally recorded in the official records of the Security Council.

Secondly, I want to acknowledge those Council members that joined with New Zealand in 1994 and supported our efforts to condemn the genocide and to reinforce the United Nations Assistance Mission in Rwanda (UNAMIR). In this regard, Nigeria deserves great credit, as do the Czech Republic and Spain. Two other members that gave support and encouragement were Argentina and Djibouti.

We must also remember those in the field who displayed great courage and did their best to protect civilians. Force Commander General Romeo Dallaire is first among these, as are the brave soldiers from Belgium and Senegal who gave their lives. I want to pay tribute especially to the major contingents from Ghana, Senegal and Canada, which remained in Rwanda throughout the genocide. While sitting in Amahoro Stadium during the genocide commemoration in Kigali last week, I could not but recall the bravery of the United Nations soldiers who protected many thousands of Tutsi in that stadium during the genocide. I was also reminded that despite what many people believe, the United Nations did not desert Rwanda completely.

I also want to pay tribute to two organizations: the International Committee of the Red Cross and Médecins sans frontières. Both had their people in several locations outside Kigali. As President of the Council, I met with their New York representatives, usually every morning, and was able to update the Council with objective information from the field.

We all know how important the flow of information to the Council can be — especially information during the early stages of an emerging conflict, when there are still options for prevention or deterrence. In March and April 1994, the Council was not getting useful reports

from the Secretariat. Even after the genocide had begun, events were being described for several weeks as simply a resurgence of the civil war. The wholesale slaughter of civilians was not being conveyed to the Council. Moreover, the Secretariat had concealed from the Council a critical piece of advice — a cable from the Force Commander in January 1994, which gave graphic early warning of probable genocide. And, in terms of early warning, a vital piece of evidence also existed in the United Nations system in Geneva — a report by a Special Rapporteur to the Commission on Human Rights warning of the likelihood of genocide. It was never drawn to the Council's attention.

All this confirms that there are many lessons about information, about early warning and about how to use information that I believe are still relevant today. I know there are hesitations among some here about the value of horizon-scanning, but if they want to take prevention seriously, then some creative alternative is desperately needed.

I need to explain what led the Council in April to downsize UNAMIR. Some months earlier, a permanent member was seeking to reduce the number of peacekeeping missions. It selected UNAMIR as a target for a special attention because of the slow progress in the peace negotiations in Arusha. It pushed for UNAMIR to be put on a very short leash. Accordingly, resolution 909 (1994) scheduled a review of the mandate for mid-May. Clear signals were given in consultations that there would be no agreement to renew the UNAMIR mandate if there were further obstacles in the Arusha peace process.

In hindsight, we can see that this was a naïve gift to the genocidaires in Kigali. Their ambassador was sitting as a member of the Council. They were privy to all the discussions in the informal consultations. They knew that the mandate was at risk. They had every reason to believe that all they had to do was to create conditions of chaos in Rwanda for the UNAMIR mandate to be terminated.

Against this background, all Council members will appreciate the political difficulties for those of us who were arguing for a reinforcement of UNAMIR. To reinforce UNAMIR required a new formal decision, but it was absolutely clear from the negotiations that a draft resolution to strengthen the force would meet with a veto. The task became even more difficult once some major troop contributors decided unilaterally to withdraw. Belgium had suffered serious losses; it believed all its troops were at risk and it began lobbying the Council and other troop contributors to evacuate. Some contingents, especially those that were lightly armed and lacked protective equipment, also feared for the safety of their personnel and wanted to leave. Thus, another challenge at that time was how to maintain the morale and confidence of the troop-contributing countries (TCCs).

To that end, I organized daily informal meetings between the President and the TCCs, and at the same time with Nigeria and others, seeking to negotiate the best possible compromise on the future of UNAMIR. But that compromise inevitably had to be a downsizing rather than reinforcement. For me, the bottom line was to keep UNAMIR in existence and to retain as many of the most effective troops as possible, because we knew that the Force Commander would use whatever capacity he had to protect as many civilians as he could, and we hoped that this would be a foundation for the early reinforcement of UNAMIR.

Perhaps this history demonstrates some lessons about the important and necessary interaction between the Council and troop contributors that I think are probably still relevant today.

I will now turn to the efforts of New Zealand and the Czech Republic, with the support of Argentina and Spain, to name and condemn the genocide. Despite improved briefings by the Secretariat and the flow of information I was relaying to the Council from non-governmental organizations in the field, most of the permanent members were objecting. Their reasons varied, but the net result was that several members were blocking a draft presidential statement.

As the days wore on and the end of the month approached, New Zealand put in blue a draft resolution condemning the genocide. The words were drawn exactly from the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. As President, I announced that unless there were agreement on a presidential statement based on the exact language of the Genocide Convention, I would convene an open meeting of the Council at 11.55 p.m. on Saturday 30 April and put the draft resolution to the vote. Ultimately, presidential statement S/PRST/1994/21 was agreed, condemning the atrocities in Rwanda, using all of the language that we had proposed from the Genocide Convention, but at the insistence of some permanent members, the specific word “genocide” was removed.

In early May, New Zealand and Nigeria each introduced draft resolutions to reinforce the number of troops and to give the operation a formal mandate for the protection of civilians. But it took until 8 June before resolution 925 (1994) was adopted. Even then, the resolution was equivocal and did not allow full deployment. Ultimately, the genocide stopped only when the forces of the Rwandan Patriotic Front took control of the whole country.

That is the tragic history of April, May and June 1994. Time does not permit a detailed discussion of events in the following months, such as the mistaken decision of the Council to authorize Operation Turquoise or the events leading up to the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. But please permit me to make some brief final observations.

My first observation is a message of hope. I think it is very important to contrast the failure in 1994 regarding Rwanda with what the Council did in 2010 concerning Côte d’Ivoire. On Côte d’Ivoire, the Council members knew that there was a serious risk of ethnically based mass atrocities. They had good information from the Secretariat. They had put in place a proper protection mandate. The United Nations had properly resourced the Mission. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations, through its Capstone Project, had in place a useful set of doctrines. The TCCs showed courage and determination, and they were well supported by the United Nations. Most importantly, Council members were fully agreed on the need for limited robust action to ensure protection.

I would like to add that the development of the principle of responsibility to protect, which is referenced so clearly in the draft resolution before the Council today, gives further reason for hope. Recent Council practice in Mali and the Central African Republic and with the

Force Intervention Brigade in the Democratic Republic of the Congo further demonstrates that some important lessons have been learned.

My second observation relates to the belief in 1994 that the international community did not have the means to intervene in Rwanda; but it was false. In early April, just after the genocide began, a number of countries mounted a major unilateral military intervention in Rwanda. That was done to protect and extract foreign nationals, but those forces then departed. They left the Tutsi to their fate. Again in 1995, when the genocidaires and much of the civilian population had fled to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a further major intervention was launched, this time in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Ironically, that was to help those who had undertaken the genocide. The truth is that there was no lack of capacity. What was missing, both in Rwanda in 1994 and again in 1995 when the Council failed to act to establish security in the camps in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was political will.

My third observation relates to the cascade of tragedy that can occur when there is a failure of political will, such as in 1994. The Deputy Secretary-General has already touched on this. A toxic accumulation of events unfolded and eventually embroiled the whole region. Twenty years later, we are still dealing with the consequences in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The failure in Rwanda in 1994 not only caused genocide, but also led to an appalling humanitarian catastrophe in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1995. That led directly to the civil wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to human tragedy on an even more massive scale. Some estimates suggest that up to 5 million may have died. Major instability has afflicted the whole region.

If we truly want prevention to work, then we need better political, operational and financial mechanisms for the Council and the wider United Nations system to achieve better outcomes. I believe that this means new mechanisms for improved early warning, better systems for briefing and presenting options to the Council at the early stages of potential crises, enhanced preventive diplomacy, more effective use of Chapter VI tools of the Charter of the United Nations, quick preventive deployment, and, if all else fails, robust deterrence. I suggest that the costs of investing in such mechanisms would be insignificant when set alongside the dreadful human, political and financial costs of inaction that flowed from our collective failure in 1994 to respond to the genocide in Rwanda.