

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE ON THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONVENTION
ON THE PREVENTION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE
9 December 2008**

Sixty years ago today, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The Convention was a direct outcome of the attempted extermination of the Jewish people during the Holocaust, and ever since has embodied the aspiration of the United Nations to prevent such a horror from occurring again.

The Convention compels signatory States “to prevent and to punish” the crime of genocide – to act against those who kill or commit other grave acts “with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such”. Under the Convention, attempts to commit genocide and public incitement to genocide are punishable acts.

The work of the United Nations to prevent genocide encompasses a wide range of activities. In the broadest sense, we promote human rights, the rule of law and the fundamental equality of all people. Through its global presence, the Organization provides practical assistance to States in building democratic institutions and resolving disputes through peaceful means. We have established an office dedicated to genocide prevention. And in 2005, Member States agreed unanimously on a new, groundbreaking global norm, the responsibility to protect, which aims to keep national leaders from hiding abuses behind the false cloak of sovereignty.

The United Nations also seeks to ensure that perpetrators of genocide are brought to justice promptly. The crime of genocide is included in the Statutes of the International Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, in the Law on the Establishment of the Extra-ordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, and in the Statute of the International Criminal Court. Justice is not only one of our main goals; it is itself an important means of prevention.

Despite these efforts, the world has continued to witness appalling acts that violate human dignity. Too often, the international response has been inadequate. Far from being consigned to history, genocide and its ilk remain a serious threat. Not just vigilance but a willingness to act are as important today as ever.

On this anniversary, I call on those States that have not already done so to accede to the Convention. I urge all States to implement the Convention, and to support our

efforts to prevent genocide and other serious human rights violations that may degenerate into genocide. Preventing genocide is a collective and individual responsibility. We must do everything in our power to ensure that our children may live free from the fear of being killed because they belong to an ethnic, national, religious or racial group.