



"The world must respond early to the risk of mass atrocities amid mounting religious and ethnic polarization and demonization", a United Nations special event warned, twenty years after the Rwanda genocide, where "the consequences of failing to heed the warning signs were monumentally horrifying.

"We must never forget the collective failure to prevent the Rwandan genocide," Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson [told](#) participants at UN Headquarters in New York.

The event, which formally was called "Understanding early warning of mass atrocities twenty years after the genocide in Rwanda," comes in the run-up to the 20th anniversary commemorations of Rwanda genocide, when in a mere 100 days beginning on 7 April, 1994, more than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred by Hutu militants.

Among the attendees was retired Canadian Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire, the head of the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda at the time, who had appealed in vain for the world to take

action before it was too late.

“If we are to [prevent future tragedies](#) , progress requires leadership and courage to speak out at every level – the kind of leadership and the kind of courage, that Roméo Dallaire showed 20 years ago,” Mr. Eliasson said. “It requires action by Governments to uphold their fundamental responsibilities – and by the international community when that does not happen.

According to Lt. Gen. Dallaire “the most easily identifiable warning tool out there” that a society is about to implode and possibly degenerate into genocide is the massive use of child soldiers “in the thousands upon thousands as the primary weapon of war, not as an adjunct”.



“As never before, the people of the world are measuring the performance of the United Nations by our efforts to protect human rights and civilian populations”, said Mr Eliasson, but noted, however, that the lessons learned over the years have not always been followed by action. “Since the tragedy in Rwanda, hundreds of thousands of people have died in mass atrocities and tens of millions have been displaced,” he said. “Over the last few weeks alone, men, women and children have been slaughtered not only in [South Sudan](#) but also in the [Central African Republic](#) (CAR) and in the nightmare of [Syria](#) .”

Some 65,000 civilians are currently being sheltered in 10 UN bases in South Sudan where well over 1,000 people, possibly thousands, have been killed and more than 400,000 have been driven from their homes since conflict erupted between President Salva Kiir’s forces and those of former deputy president Riek Machar a month ago today.

“The demonization - I use that word intentionally - of people of different faiths or ethnic belonging is one of the most toxic deeds of which human beings are capable. It undermines the

fundamental principle that must lie at the heart of human interaction – and in fact of the United Nations - the incontrovertible truth of every human being's equal value.

“When people are killed or violated in the name of religion, race or ethnicity, everybody’s humanity is diminished. We are all brutalized – victims and perpetrators as well as bystanders.”