



1 April 2014. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says that the organization has worked hard to “draw on the lessons of its failures” in Rwanda and Srebrenica.

The Secretary-General today addressed an international conference on the Prevention of Genocide in Brussels.

The conference was held on the initiative of the Government of Belgium and with the cooperation of the African Union, the European Union and the UN. It was attended by 124 representatives of states, regional and international organisations as well as academics.

“In the face of the violence in Rwanda, the Security Council withdrew the UN peacekeeping operation, thereby taking away the sorely needed international “eyes and ears” on the ground. The UN was also deeply tarnished by its actions and inactions at Srebrenica,” Mr. Ban told the conference.

Mr. Ban said that two special advisers on Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect scanned the world for signs of genocide and atrocity crimes to sound the alarm when necessary.

The Secretary-General added that the UN’s most recent initiative to prevent atrocity crimes is the Rights Up Front exercise, which aims to improve prevention through an intense and early focus on human rights violations. “We learned from the case of Sri Lanka. It obliges those within the Organization to be frank in telling Member States what they need to hear, rather than what they might want to hear, about serious violations and emerging crisis situations.”

The Rights up Front approach has been on display in recent months in South Sudan, where the United Nations opened the gates of its peacekeeping installations, offering shelter to people fleeing violence.

“Twenty years ago, such steps would have been unthinkable. Today, it was done as a deliberate matter of policy – a lesson of Rwanda made real.”

The Secretary-General noted that there are grounds for encouragement and that it can no longer be claimed that atrocity crimes are only a domestic matter, outside the realm of international concern and noted that no part of the world can consider itself immune to the risk of genocide.

“The international community often proves reluctant to act, at times even when atrocity crimes are happening. The reasons may vary, from competing definitions of national interest, to the complexities and risks of a given situation, to a perceived lack of capacity. There may be little appetite for new financial or military commitments.

But is that sufficient reason to look away? Is that not merely an echo of what we heard twenty years ago? ,” the Secretary-General said.

In the chair’s conclusion of the conference it is noted that the international community has made substantial progress in fighting perpetrators of crimes of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity in the last two decades. The participants call for the signing and ratification of major international legal instruments and implementation of the Responsibility to Protect principle.

*Photo: Ban Ki-moon, Didier Reynders, Belgian Foreign Minister and Thorbjörn Jagland, Secretary-General of the Council of Europe meet the press after the International conference on the prevention of genocide. UNRIC/Julien Schreiber.*