Madam President,
I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Candidate Countries the Republic of North Macedonia*, Montenegro*, and Albania*, as well as Ukraine the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

At the World Summit fourteen years ago, all UN Member States endorsed the principle of a shared responsibility to protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and war crimes. This principle is anchored in three pillars: the essential responsibility of States to protect their own citizens, our shared responsibility to take appropriate steps to assist States in exercising that solemn duty, and our preparedness to take timely and decisive action where national authorities manifestly failed to do so.

Since 2005, the European Union has been a staunch supporter of the Responsibility to Protect, and we warmly welcome the inclusion of a dedicated debate on the Responsibility to Protect in the formal agenda of the General Assembly again this year. This reflects the topic’s importance and allows us to have a full exchange on the current state of affairs in atrocity prevention. We thank the Secretary-General for his Report on the Responsibility to Protect: Lessons Learned for Prevention.

We note that the General Assembly debate this year coincides with the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the 20th Anniversary of the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1265 (1999) on the Protection of Civilians.

Madam President,
There have been important developments since last year’s debate. We warmly welcome the appointment of Dr. Karen Smith as the new Special Adviser of the Secretary General on the Responsibility to Protect, and the active role that she has played
since taking up her position. The EU remains a strong supporter of the work of both the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. We thank Under-Secretary-General Dieng for his leadership in the development of the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech that was launched last week.

Madam President,

In his report on the Responsibility to Protect, the Secretary General rightly concludes that, while States have the primary responsibility to protect their populations, more needs to be done at the international level. We must make greater efforts to reduce the risk of atrocity crimes and respond promptly to evidence of their imminent commission. There is also a need to take further action in support of regional initiatives to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes, including by strengthening partnerships with regional and sub-regional organizations as well as civil society organizations. In this regard, drawing on the example of EU-AU-UN triangular cooperation and recognising the importance of the “principle of non-indifference”, we call upon regional and international organizations to share their best practices in support of the prevention agenda.

International and regional organisations have a unique role to play in preventing and responding to mass atrocities. As highlighted in the SG’s report, on 13 and 14 May 2019, the EU co-hosted, together with the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, the 9th Annual Meeting of the Global Network of Responsibility to Protect Focal Points. This year’s meeting had an explicit focus on the specific role that regional organisations can play in the promotion and implementation of the Responsibility to Protect. It brought together a cross-regional group of senior government officials from more than 45 countries, as well as representatives of the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the African Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Council of Europe. They exchanged experiences on how they had responded to early warnings in specific situations, and examined linkages between the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the implementation of the Responsibility to Protect. R2P Focal Points identified options and recommendations for concrete implementation over the coming year, which are enumerated in the final co-hosts’ conclusions on promoting and operationalizing the Responsibility to Protect.

As the first regional organisation to formally appoint an R2P Focal Point, the European Union warmly welcomes the recent appointment of an R2P Focal Point for the Organization of American States. We strongly encourage other regional organisations, as well as Member States, to do the same.

Madam President,

It is vital that the Security Council uses available tools in the exercise of its responsibility to protect populations from mass atrocities. We welcome the Arria-formula meeting on “raising effectiveness of atrocity crimes prevention”, convened by Poland last December. Participants at that meeting highlighted some practical actions on atrocity prevention that could be taken by the Security Council. In this respect, we acknowledge and welcome the initiatives aimed at ensuring that the Security Council is able to effectively prevent or put an end to situations involving the commission of mass atrocities, including the ACT Code of Conduct, and the initiative on the suspension of the veto in case of mass atrocities presented by France and Mexico.

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The Human Rights Council and human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms must be further mobilized in preventing atrocities. Their interaction with the Security Council could be strengthened to better inform the latter about situations that may lead to atrocity crimes. The "Human Rights Up Front" initiative also has an important role to play in enhancing system-wide capacity to prevent mass violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. A robust human rights culture within the UN system is crucial to fulfilling our responsibility to protect.

Madam President,

The European Union supports the operationalisation of the concept of the Responsibility to Protect through an integrated approach including diplomatic support at bilateral and multilateral level, transitional justice and accountability, human rights, conflict prevention and mediation as well as development assistance and humanitarian aid. Last year we launched a new EU toolkit on the Responsibility to Protect and Atrocity Prevention – an instrument that offers practical guidance on atrocity prevention to EU delegations, missions and operations on the ground. We are now taking steps to raise awareness of this tool and of how our staff can make good use of it.

We must continue promoting accountability for atrocity crimes. The European Union and its Member States remain
committed to the efforts to end impunity for the crime of genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity and war crimes at the national and international level. We reiterate our firm support to the international criminal justice system and its institutions. International courts and hybrid tribunals can play an important role where States are unwilling or genuinely unable to do so. We actively promote the universality of the Rome Statute and, through our support for the International Criminal Court, we foster capacities for accountability and reconciliation, which are key elements for non-recurrence. We encourage the Security Council to consider carefully the possibility offered by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court to refer situations to the Prosecutor.

Responsibility to Protect is not only about international responses to domestic crises, but very much also about domestic prevention against home-grown risks. Hate speech, for instance, if left unaddressed, can lead to acts of violence and conflict on a wider scale. The European Union’s Framework Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia criminalises the public incitement to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin. Hate speech as defined in this Framework Decision is a criminal offence also when it occurs online. The EU, its Member States, social media companies and other platforms, share a collective responsibility to ensure that the internet does not become a safe haven for incitement to violence and hatred, while at the same time promoting and facilitating freedom of expression online.

Madam President,

There are no easy solutions, but the Secretary-General’s report rightly calls for decisive early action towards prevention in order to close the gap between our stated commitment to the Responsibility to Protect and the daily experience of vulnerable populations around the world. To close this gap, we must ensure that the Responsibility to Protect is operationalized and implemented in practice. The European Union is committed to working with all stakeholders to help make this a reality. We once again welcome this debate, and encourage further dialogue in the General Assembly, as we continue to work with our international partners to fulfil the Responsibility to Protect that we embraced in 2005.

Thank you.

* The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

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