

Opening remarks by *Jutta Urpilainen*, Chair of the Finnish UN Association

Responsibility to Protect – seminar, Hanaholmen, Friday 28.8.2009

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen,

The international community will show its respect for humanity - and stand up for the victims of genocide, ethnic cleansing, war-crimes and crimes against humanity. It is this commitment that has brought all of us here this afternoon. On behalf of the Finnish and Swedish UN Associations, I would like to warmly welcome you all to our seminar on the responsibility to protect.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our distinguished speakers and panellists for agreeing to share their expertise with us today – thank you. In addition to our Foreign Minister, we are very glad to welcome the former UN Under-Secretary-Generals from Sweden and Norway. I personally believe that Nordic cooperation is something we need to cherish when discussing the future of the United Nations.

It is an honour to hear the voice of senator Romeo Dallaire in this seminar. Sir, your vivid description of "*the Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*" has played as a wake-up call to the international community. We are also grateful to the Canadian government for its determined work since 2001 to raise the concept of "responsibility to protect" into the international debate.

Madam president Tarja Halonen, we are glad to have you here, as one of the world leaders who four years ago, without reservation, made a commitment to the doctrine of responsibility to protect. This significant occasion was the High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly, at the World Summit in 2005.

Now we must stand together and meet the challenge of finding effective ways to implement this norm of responsibility to protect.

As we all know - too well - we live in a world which is far from ideal. The horrors of war, conflict and violence continue to cause large-scale human suffering across the globe. In a world of inequalities, security is still a luxury enjoyed by far too few. Having witnessed too many conscience-shocking events, the international community has finally begun to re-think its approach to global peace and security. The concept of the responsibility to protect - in UN jargon R2P - plays a central role in this new thinking.

Indeed, just a few months ago here in Helsinki, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, with the Finnish civil society, stated that the responsibility to protect was one of the most important tasks that the World Summit has set before us. But changing the established principles of global action is no simple task. As the Secretary General also recognised, we must first build the capacity to act - putting in place the resources and procedures which will make R2P a possibility. Only then can we take the most important step - building within the global community the courage to act.

However great these challenges may be though, we must not allow ourselves to lose sight of our ultimate goal. The prevention and halting of mass atrocities is one of the greatest moral challenges of our time. Whatever difficulties our intervention may require, we cannot in good conscience continue on the path of wilful indifference. Every victim is one victim too many.

As a pertinent reminder of this, we commemorate the 15th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide this year. I wish to recall the words of Victoria, a young

Rwandan woman who was the only one in her 11-member family to survive the massacre in 1994:

“The world betrayed us. If the world had acted, maybe I wouldn't have gone through what I went through. But despite that betrayal, let the whole world do whatever is in their means not to have genocide elsewhere. What I have gone through, I wouldn't wish any other person to go through it.”

One can only hope that a 'betrayal' such as Rwanda could never happen again, and that the global community should always be willing to act in the face of such horror. But it is not only a lack of will that is a betrayal of those in need. If we are willing to act, but unprepared, we fail the test of our collective responsibility. If we could prevent conflicts, but do not, we fail the test of our moral duty. And if we do not commit ourselves to giving sufficient aid and support to create the conditions for security across the globe, then we fail to meet the basic test of our humanity.

We must strive to make security, development and human rights a reality for all. In this era of multiple crises - food, financial, economic and climate crisis - we must not shy away from our promises to the poorest people of the world. The planned cuts to development aid show, at best, unfortunate short-sightedness on the part of decision-makers. And at worst, they are a sign of a reckless disregard for not only the wellbeing, but the very lives of many of the world's most vulnerable people. The only effective way to prevent state failure, armed conflicts and the accompanying humanitarian disasters is to invest in human development. Here, the developed world has promised too little, and delivered even less, far too often. We must not let this happen again. Without human security, no state can be secure - and neither can the world.

It is the aim of this seminar to aid us in meeting all of these challenges, and it is an honour to welcome you all as participants. Thank you.