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**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
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Responsibility to Protect ('R2P')

**Statement by H.E. Gillian Bird
Ambassador and Permanent Representative
of Australia to the United Nations**

(As delivered)

Australia was proud to partner with Ghana to propose last year's important debate on the Responsibility to Protect – the first in this Assembly for a decade.

Well over one hundred states – from all regions – participated.

Support for the R2P principle and its implementation were overwhelming.

As was the desire for ongoing dialogue, in this Assembly, on how we can better protect populations from mass atrocities.

Such a response was fitting. After all, when our leaders agreed the R2P principle in 2005 they envisaged a leading role for this Assembly.

We also appreciated the opportunity to hear those who have questions, or harbour misgivings.

Let me reaffirm that the R2P principle is not a stalking horse for other agendas.

Nor is not an attempt to reinterpret the UN Charter.

It is about reinforcing the need, to work collectively and in line with the Charter, to protect populations from mass atrocities.

Mr President,

Australia agrees with the Secretary-General that regional organisations are essential to operationalising R2P.

Pacific Islands Forum leaders – via the Declarations in Biketawa in 2000 and in Boe in 2018 – have long recognised our collective vulnerability and the need to address such challenges at the regional level, as the Permanent Representative of the Marshall Islands has just reminded us.

The Biketawa Declaration served as the foundation for regional assistance efforts, including a successful mission to Solomon Islands – ‘RAMSI’ – that ended in 2017. An example of Pillar 2 in action.

The 2018 Boe Declaration reaffirms the critical importance of a rules-based international order, with the UN Charter at its heart.

It commits to strengthen regional security and stability, including by:

- identifying and addressing emerging security challenges; and
- improving early warning mechanisms.

Regional organisations can learn much from each other in their respective atrocity prevention efforts.

This is why Australia supports innovative regional initiatives, such as the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Atrocity Prevention.

Australia will host the first Regional Meeting of Asia Pacific R2P Focal Points later this year.

Such collaboration is bolstered by global forums, like the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, in which Australia is active.

With 61 focal points, this Network shares ideas, policies and builds capacity for implementing R2P.

Mr President,

Australia thanks the Secretary-General's Chef de Cabinet for the insightful remarks today and for this year's report, of the Secretary-General, on R2P.

We pay tribute to the efforts of the Special Advisers for the Prevention of Genocide and R2P, Mr Adama Dieng and Ms Karen Smith.

We agree that the UN's principal organs, and its member states, have a critical role in implementing R2P.

But it is important also to evaluate the role of the Secretariat.

Recent independent reviews have highlighted, in situations of mass atrocities, the critical importance of UN officials speaking for the UN as a whole.

It is also essential that the Secretariat ensure that reporting from the field provides an accurate and complete picture of developments on the ground.

In this regard, we wholeheartedly support the Secretary-General's ongoing reform agenda.

Mr President,

The Charter endows the Security Council with unique powers. With such powers comes special responsibilities.

That is why we joined 118 others to support the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group's Code of Conduct. A commitment to refrain from vetoing Security Council action in cases of mass atrocities.

We also encourage all states – but especially current and prospective Security Council members – to join Australia and 100 other states supporting the France/Mexico initiative on veto restraint.

In instances where a permanent member blocks Council action in cases of mass atrocities, or atrocity risk, we believe we should explore possible ways to use this Assembly for further dialogue.