



**Canadian Intervention at Human Rights Council Forum on Minority Issues  
Agenda Item 4: Improving Prevention of Violence and Atrocity Crimes  
25 November, 2014**

Thank you, Mr. President.

States have a solemn duty to defend the vulnerable, challenge aggressors, protect human rights, and promote human dignity. Unfortunately, the situation in many parts of the world today is characterised by violence and atrocity. Too often, our efforts at prevention have been inadequate and the impact on minorities devastating. As such, Canada welcomes the Minority Forum's timely focus this year on preventing and addressing violence and atrocity crimes targeted against minorities – a priority issue for our country and one that necessitates ongoing attention by the international community.

Proactively addressing risk factors associated with atrocities saves lives. As our Foreign Minister, John Baird, has said, "Societies that respect diversity, protect religious communities, protect human rights and hold perpetrators legally accountable are much less likely to suffer atrocities." Resolving political differences democratically, and seeking reconciliation are also critical practices in preventing atrocities. We must ensure our own societies are resilient against the risk of atrocities and work cooperatively as an international community.

The challenge now is to move to a more focused, effective and international approach to atrocity prevention and the UN has a key role to play. Canada looks to the UN to include atrocity prevention as part of its core commitment and the Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide has an important responsibility in this respect. Plans such as the UN Human Rights Up Front Action Plan can support more effective atrocity work, and provides valuable guidance on implementing specific prevention measures. It could also position the UN system to more effectively support human rights and act as an early warning system for atrocity crimes. The UPR also provides a powerful venue to identify issues of concern related to violence and atrocity targeting minorities.

For our part, Canada is unequivocally committed to preventing and halting genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. Priority areas in violence and atrocity prevention include: preventing sexual violence against minority women and protecting and promoting the rights of religious minorities.

Women and children belonging to minorities are at greater risk of violence, including sexual violence, in particular deliberate targeting for use of rape as a weapon of war.

Since 2006, Canada has committed close to \$70 million to prevent and respond to violence against women, including sexual violence in situations of conflict, including violence targeting minority women. For example, in October 2014 Canada announced a \$10 million contribution to address sexual violence in ISIL-affected areas, train individuals to enable effective investigations for future accountability processes and provide services to the victims of these crimes, many of whom belong to Yazidi and Christian minorities.

Defending freedom of religion and belief is another critical component of preventing atrocities. Canada remains deeply concerned about parts of the world where individuals experience difficulty in their ability to worship and practise their faith in peace. Too often religion is misused as a tool to promote intolerance and justify atrocities. In response, Canada created the Office of Religious Freedom in 2013 to promote human rights, protect all religious communities and promote values of pluralism and religious tolerance around the world.

Canada will continue to work with countries, the United Nations, and civil society to prevent atrocities, enhance early warning, and respond effectively to impending crises.

Thank you, Mr. President.