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**Opening Statement**  
**Director General of the MSG Secretariat**  
**Mr Leonard Louma, OBE**

## **Inaugural workshop on Atrocity Prevention and Responsibility to Protect (R2P)**

*25-26 July 2023,  
MSG Secretariat,  
Port Vila  
Republic of Vanuatu*

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**Head of Delegations & Distinguished delegates from MSG Countries,  
Representatives of Asia – Pacific Centre for Responsibility to Protect (R2P),  
The United Nations Special Advisor on the Responsibility to Protect, Mr George Okoth-Obbo  
Staff of the MSG Secretariat,  
Ladies & gentlemen,**

A very warm welcome to the MSG Secretariat!

At the outset, on all our behalf, let me acknowledge the Ifira landowners on whose land the Secretariat is situated and where we are conducting this workshop.

Let me express the Secretariat's sincere appreciation to the Asia – Pacific Centre for Responsibility to Protect (APR2P) for providing funding support towards the convening of this important Workshop and for agreeing to facilitate training sessions on specific subjects for consideration during the workshop.

The collaboration between the R2P Centre and MSG Secretariat was made possible through the Letter of Intent signed on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2022. The letter of intent codified our collective interests to cooperate in areas such as prevention of climate change atrocities, gender-based atrocities and hate-speech based atrocities. Excuse my ignorance, but these may have to be clearly defined.

The Secretariat is committed to working with the Pacific Centre for Responsibility to Protect on these issues and to assist our members in ensuring implementation of commitments made under relevant international instruments on R2P.

If this has not been done, it may be useful to collate all these international legal instruments into one document indicating the status of respective MSG Members in terms of signature, accession and ratification.

I also wish to thank the officials and members of your delegates for accepting our invitations to attend this workshop, despite your busy work schedules. Our sincere gratitude to all of you.

Distinguished delegates, you may have noted from the concept note circulated to you earlier, that this is the Inaugural workshop on Atrocity Prevention and Responsibility to Protect. The workshop therefore aims to provide an opportunity for senior government officials as well as MSG Secretariat to have an appreciation of and better understanding of the subject of atrocity prevention and early warning signals in Melanesia.

Let me digress slightly, if I may, and return to what I alluded to earlier on the need perhaps to clearly define terms. It would seem necessary to me that a clear definition as to what we mean by "Atrocity", consistent with the UN usage and understandings, is developed and accepted by the MSG members.

This would lend better clarity to what we are talking about, help inform and finetune policy decisions and options, as well as help get buy-in from Governments on what we are trying to do.

I would suspect that many in the region would find the use of "atrocity" alien, alarming, inappropriate and non-applicable in our part of the world. That is due, in large part, to our understandings being framed by events in Europe (Kosovo, Gestapo Camps), Latin America (ruthlessness of drug cartel bosses) Africa (Rwanda) and Asia (activities undertaken by the Pol Pot, practice of comfort women), to name a few. Governments in our part of the world can easily recede into a false sense of plausible deniability because of this.

And yet we do experience insidious acts of extreme cruelty in terms of our administration of justice (imprisonment, torture), implementation of immigration laws (deportation), our often benign and seeming indifference towards women - in domestic violence, sorcery and girl brides, our tendency to accept as normal payback killings and tribal fights – to name a few.

You will note, from the draft agenda circulated to you, there are specific sessions dedicated to the link between atrocity and MSG Security priorities under the Security Strategy particularly climate change.

Climate Change had been specified as an existential threat to Pacific Island Countries (PIC) both under the BOE Declaration and the MSG Security Strategy and therefore it is important to consider the likely impacts of climate change on human existence.

In this context, I wish to urge all of you to give your full consideration to this subject matter and the need to look at our national policies, regulations, and laws to accommodate state commitments on atrocity prevention and Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is a principle endorsed by States that aims to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. It is this framing of the narrative on atrocity that we must guard against and which I spoke of earlier. Since its adoption in 2005, it has been endorsed by countries around the world, including Pacific Island nations.

I understand that the R2P Centre and the Global Centre for R2P have developed a Framework for Action for R2P, which aims to provide practical tools to assist governments, regional organisations, and civil society to contribute to monitoring, risk assessment and early warning.

The framework was launched globally on 12 July 2023.

I am pleased to inform you the MSG Secretariat is privileged to host the launching of the R2P framework during this workshop, for the first time, for the Asia – Pacific Region. This is momentous occasion not only for the MSG region but also for the wider Pacific Community.

I note that following the launching you will have specific sessions on the framework and its commitments for governments and regional organisations to implement. Distinguished delegates, you have an exciting program for the next two days.

I am confident that with the assistance of our experts and learned facilitators, you can be able to develop appropriate recommendation for our members to implementation the R2P commitments so I encourage everyone to participate constructively.

With these few remarks, I wish to thank everyone again for your participation at the workshop and I and look forward to fruitful discussions and Outcomes of the workshop.

Thank you, Tenkyu tru, Tangio Tumas, Vinaka vaka levu, Merci Beaucoup, Oleti!

*MSG Secretariat  
Port Vila, Vanuatu  
25 July 2023.*

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