



Statement

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## President & CEO Message

*I'm often asked what my career path would look like if I were to start it all over again. My answer remains the same: it would look very much like this. A vocation, not a career; not a job, but a public service. This is how I see my work with the International Crisis Group.*

**M**y parents, who worked in public health and education, and volunteered in church, instilled in me the idea of serving the greater good. After my birth in London, they sent me to spend my formative years in post-civil war Nigeria, where I was raised by my maternal grandparents and my mother's siblings. My relatives in Nigeria would have a huge influence upon who I would become. My eldest aunt, an anthropologist, was especially important. She stoked my interest in Africa's place in the world as well as international relations more broadly – particularly the question of how to find resolutions to conflicts and forge peace between states.

Issues of war and peace have been central to my education and my work. I remember listening to family and friends narrate stories of the disastrous effects of the Biafra conflict while studying the former Yugoslavia's break-up and Rwanda's genocide. What underpinned my journey from the United Nations Association-UK (where I interned), to King's College London's International Institute for Strategic Studies, the UN Mission in Liberia and the International Center for Transitional Justice was a desire to help roll back the devastating humanitarian, social and economic costs of war and to find just and sustainable ways to prevent the recurrence of conflict.

In this light, Crisis Group, with its mission of preventing wars and ending deadly conflict by offering sharp analysis, practical recommendations and targeted advocacy, is a natural home. I am hugely proud to lead an organisation whose methodology is rooted in research in conflict-affected countries and that requires analysts to put themselves in others' shoes. Under my leadership, everything Crisis Group does will remain focused on this singular mission: stopping people from dying and suffering due to war. As a child of parents whose generation knows the cost of war all too well and as someone who saw the fallout up close, this mission is deeply personal to me.

It is a privilege to take the helm of this extraordinary organisation and work with more than 135 brilliant staff, as well as more than 30 volunteers, from countries all over the world, at a time when demand for Crisis Group's ideas is enormous and growing. Policymakers in governments, international organisations and elsewhere increasingly turn to us for nuanced, pragmatic and empathetic but straight-shooting analysis. Our access to policymakers across the world – and our presence on the ground – makes us well positioned to respond to the changing geopolitical landscape and to rising major and regional power tensions. In a world where impunity for mass killing runs rampant,

where jihadist insurgencies too often expand unchecked, where meddling outside powers too often obstruct diplomacy, where a record number of people are starving and displaced, in large part due to war, and where an increasingly deadlocked UN Security Council fails to do its job, Crisis Group's work is more vital than ever. Notwithstanding all the challenges, we still see and lay out realistic ways to prevent, mitigate and resolve deadly conflicts.

**U**nder my leadership, I envisage a growing organisation, at the top of its game preventing, mitigating and ending deadly conflict by informing the knowledge and behaviour of conflict actors and policymakers. I will guard Crisis Group's position as the first port of call for conflict analysis, the top source of fresh ideas on the high-profile crises of the day, and a vital and often solitary voice calling attention to forgotten wars.

At the same time, the organisation's next chapter will see significant evolution. I'm especially pleased to assume the presidency at a time of exciting innovation, started by my predecessors Jean-Marie Guéhenno and Rob Malley. Our future of conflict and gender work remain high priorities and, together with our leadership team, I will work to advance this important new research while retaining our core strength of in-depth regional coverage. To help ensure better integration of thematic and regional work, I plan to roll out a new innovation hub of experts specialising in emerging risks. These might include issues we have already begun to cover – such as climate security – or new areas like cyber or remote warfare, food insecurity or public health as they relate to conflict dynamics. The hub will generate pioneering research across the organisation, as well as new funding ideas aimed at attracting big bets and increased philanthropic support for solving some of the intractable problems of our time. These experts will support the well-respected work of our six regional programs. I also intend to ensure that, where necessary, we

deepen and broaden our regional coverage, so that we remain a reliable and sought-after partner in peace and security throughout the world.

I have other priorities, too. I plan to inject new urgency into our early warning work. We will revamp and expand our monthly CrisisWatch global conflict tracker, now in its nineteenth year, using technologically advanced outputs that highlight threats and propel policymakers to early action. I want to amplify our voice and make more visible our methodology and impact. Crisis Group will focus more tightly on identifying the specific policy changes we want to see toward a particular conflict and on using our advocacy and communications tools more strategically to effect those changes. Building partnerships with sister organisations, where advisable, will also be vital if we want to change policy. I hope to dedicate increased advocacy and communications resources to our regional programs, thus decentralising some of these important functions. Here we would build on successes in the Africa and Latin America Programs, where we have strong relations with regional bodies like the African Union and have seen strong media engagement, especially with Spanish-language outlets.

Thanks to our Board of Trustees, who encouraged us to leverage our tremendous access and to create space for more imaginative diplomacy, our work behind the scenes – bringing parties together to find common ground – will likewise gather pace. In the past few years, we have helped sponsor fruitful dialogue initiatives in the Gulf, Latin America and South Asia, among other places. After taking stock of our dialogue efforts to date, we will craft a path forward to deepen this important work, based always on demand and a clear sense of our added value.

The honour of leading Crisis Group is especially great as I will be following in the footsteps of Gareth Evans, Louise Arbour, Jean-Marie Guéhenno and Rob Malley. All these previous

presidents have contributed immensely to bringing us to the position we occupy and the reputation we enjoy today as the world's pre-eminent conflict prevention organisation. These past leaders of Crisis Group, by inspiring, mentoring and empowering me, have helped me along my path to becoming Crisis Group's new president. I am particularly grateful to Rob who left the organisation in such excellent shape. Thanks to his leadership and the support of our Board of Trustees, we have evolved fast and for the better over the past few years.

I am also the beneficiary of a successful transition over the past year led by our new executive vice president, Richard Atwood. Under our Board of Trustees who empowered Richard and me to lead the organisation in the interim, our robust senior management team and the entire Crisis Group family came together in an exhilarating way to maintain the pace, quality, intensity and visibility of work that policymakers and our supporters have come to expect and that will continue under my leadership.

I look forward to working with and continuing to excite our existing supporters with bold solutions they can invest in, and attracting and involving new ones in our critical work to save lives. I see the governments, foundations and philanthropists who work with us as partners in that endeavour as well as important constituencies for Crisis Group. The challenges we grapple with also keep them awake at night, given that crises frequently affect them directly.

As I assume leadership of Crisis Group, I am mindful of the important conversations happening in many institutions about diversity, equity and inclusion, especially at a time when a global pandemic has aggravated inequality and required us to rethink how we work, communicate and treat one another. Our gender balance has improved in recent years, especially at senior levels of the organisation, but we can still do better. We need to do more to ensure that our staff better represent the countries that we work on. As Africa Program director, I placed a great

premium – as have other regional directors – on achieving that goal and, as Crisis Group's president, I will continue striving to ensure that our staff reflects the diversity of the places we cover.

A happy team is a productive team. We must invest in our most cherished asset: our people – not just our highly respected and visible experts, but also those performing core functions behind the scenes that allow our programs to shine. This is vital to me and is something we're looking at very closely at Crisis Group. Part of it is ensuring that our compensation packages are competitive and that staff are appropriately remunerated and inspired to stay longer with the organisation through clear career paths. I will also be investing in efficient workflows and creating more opportunities to connect our global staff to one another to protect our treasured sense of community.

I thank President Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria for his [statement](#) on my appointment and his recognition of Crisis Group's role in shaping policies that will build a more peaceful world. I am immensely proud to be Crisis Group's first African leader and only the second woman, after Louise. I am grateful for the expressions of support I have received from people around the globe and honoured to receive their kind words about what my appointment means to them. I'm particularly indebted to a number of women who encouraged and prepared me for leadership. My success is yours, too.

I end with a message to my colleagues – the Crisis Group family: my leadership is a testimony to your success; together we can rise to new heights, blaze new trails and continue to fulfil the mission of Crisis Group's founders established over a quarter-century ago to save lives in a world torn apart by war and violence. I look forward to leading with you all in this most humbling mission.