

# **Statement by Ambassador Liu Zhenmin At the Plenary session of the General Assembly on the Question of "Responsibility to Protect"**

2009/07/24

Mr. President:

The Chinese Delegation welcomes the General Assembly debate on the question of "responsibility to protect" (R2P). It provides a very good opportunity for Member States to exchange views on the concept.

Mr. President,

"Responsibility to protect" is a new concept that emerged at the beginning of this century. The 2005 World Summit Outcome Document gave a very prudent description to "responsibility to protect". The Outcome Document strictly limited the scope of application of "R2P" to four serious international crimes, namely, "genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity". However, experience in the past few years shows that there is still controversy among Member States over the meaning and the application of the concept. The debate at the GA will help Member States come to a clear understanding and seek further consensus.

As to the interpretation and implementation of "R2P", China would like to state its preliminary views as follows:

- 1) The government of a given state bears the primary responsibility for protecting its citizens. The international community can provide assistance, but the protection of the citizens ultimately depends on the government of the state concerned. This is in keeping with the principle of state sovereignty. Therefore, the implementation of "R2P" should not contravene the principle of state sovereignty and the

principle of non-interference of internal affairs. Although the world has undergone complex and profound changes, the basic status of the purposes and principles of the UN Charter remains unchanged. There must not be any wavering over the principles of respecting state sovereignty and non-interference of internal affairs.

2) The concept of “R2P” applies only to the four international crimes of “genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity”. No state should expand on the concept or make arbitrary interpretations. More importantly, abuse of the concept should be avoided. And it is necessary to prevent “R2P” from becoming another version of “humanitarian intervention”.

3) When a crisis involving one of the four crimes emerges, to ease and curtail the crisis will be the common aspiration and legitimate demand on the part of the international community. But the relevant actions must strictly abide by the provisions of the UN Charter, and respect the views of the government and regional organizations concerned. The crisis must be addressed in the framework of the UN, and all peaceful means must be exhausted. It is necessary to prevent any state from unilaterally implementing “R2P”.

4) When the occurrence of such a crisis calls for the UN to respond, the Security Council has a role to play. But the Council must make its judgment and decisions in light of specific circumstances, and must act prudently. It must be pointed out that the responsibility of the Council entrusted by the UN Charter is the maintenance of international peace and security. The prerequisite for its taking action is the existence of “any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression”. The Council must consider “R2P” in the broader context of maintaining international peace and security, and must guard against abusing the concept.

5) As for early warning and assessment, the GA and the SC need to further study whether there is a need to set up such a mechanism. If there is indeed such a need, it is imperative to ensure the neutrality

and reliability of the information gathered, ensure the fairness and transparency of the assessment procedures, and prevent double standards or politicization of the question at hand.

Mr. President,

“R2P” so far remains a concept. It does not constitute a rule of international law. Therefore, states must refrain from using the “R2P” as a diplomatic tool to exert pressure on others. Whether “R2P” can be universally accepted by states, and whether it can be implemented effectively are issues that still need to be further explored in the UN or relevant regional organizations.

Mr. President,

We note that Member States still have divergent views on the concept of “R2P”. Interpretations differ on many specific issues concerning the concept. There is a need for the GA to continue to carry out discussions on the concept based on the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document. We are open-minded towards the discussions, and are prepared to communicate with others, in an effort to forge a common view on questions relating to the implementation of “responsibility to protect”.

Thank you, Mr. President.