

20 September 2011

Open Letter to United Nations Member States
Upholding The Responsibility to Protect, The Year Ahead

Six years after world leaders committed to secure a world free from the scourge of mass atrocity crimes, attention today is focused on how best to operationalize the responsibility to protect (R2P), not the merits of the norm. As heads of state gather in New York this week to discuss the most pressing issues of the day, setting goals for advancing R2P over the next year should be a priority.

This year has seen significant advances in upholding the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Lives have been saved in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Libya, and important steps have been taken to strengthen the institutional capacities of governments and the United Nations (UN) to prevent and protect.

This past year has shown that states working together through international, regional and sub-regional organizations *can*, by employing a range of peaceful and coercive measures, deter and halt the commission of mass atrocities. Swift and sustained international engagement in Guinea helped to stave off a recurrence of mass atrocities and illustrated how preventive measures can be used in a timely and decisive manner to save lives. In Libya and Côte d'Ivoire an array of non-coercive measures were exhausted before the difficult decision was made to resort to the use of force in response to governments intent on perpetrating mass atrocities against their own populations.

Institutionally, member states have taken steps to strengthen their capacity to swiftly and effectively respond to domestic and international threats of mass atrocities. An initiative to designate national focal points for R2P spearheaded by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and the governments of Denmark, Costa Rica, and Ghana is gaining support from a growing number of states. The birth of the UN's joint office for the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect fills a critical gap in the UN's prevention and protection architecture and the office should be an important ally to states in their efforts to uphold R2P.

The imperative to advance R2P remains urgent. Populations in Syria, Sudan, the DRC, and Myanmar have experienced mass atrocities and in far too many instances their plight has been met by silence from key member states. Much remains to be done at the conceptual, political and institutional level to fully operationalize R2P and ensure its consistent application. Legitimate concerns held by some states need to be addressed through dialogue, assessing lessons learned, engagement and most importantly, practice.

The R2P agenda is far too important to be pursued in an ad hoc manner. The UN Secretary-General has done a remarkable job in outlining his thoughts on how best to advance R2P. Now is the time for states to establish individual and collective benchmarks and goals for actualizing the aspirations of R2P at the domestic and international level. Each state has an important role to play in this process. In that vein we urge states to prioritize the following over the next year:

- Appoint a senior government official as a national focal point for R2P.
- Encourage all relevant UN agencies and departments to incorporate an R2P perspective into their activities.
- Use the tools available to the General Assembly to uphold R2P and take preventive and protective action.
- Work together to develop additional goals and benchmarks for advancing R2P.

With all good wishes for a successful opening session.

Sincerely,

Lloyd Axworthy, Former Foreign Minister of Canada, President and Vice Chancellor of the University of Winnipeg and patron of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

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Roméo Dallaire, Served as the force commander of the UN mission to Rwanda, Canadian Senator, patron of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

Prince El Hassan bin Talal, Board member of the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), Commissioner on Legal Empowerment for the Poor and patron of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

Gareth Evans, Co-Chair, International Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, President Emeritus, International Crisis Group, former Australian Foreign Minister, and co-chair of the International Advisory Board of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

Mohamed Sahnoun, Former UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser, and co-chair of the International Advisory Board of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

Jan Egeland, Europe Director, Human Rights Watch, former UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

Rosemary Foot, Professor of International Relations and Swire Senior Research Fellow, Oxford University, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Carolina G. Hernandez, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of the Philippines, Founding President and Chair of the Board of the Institute for Strategic and Development Studies, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

Frank Majoer, Former Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the UN, current Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to NATO, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

Juan Méndez, Former UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

Edward Mortimer, Senior Vice-President and Chief Program Officer, Salzburg Global Seminar, chief speechwriter and director of communications to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

Thomas G. Weiss, Presidential Professor of Political Science, CUNY Graduate Center, Director, Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

Ramesh Thakur, Professor of International Relations, Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy, Australian National University, and member of the International Advisory Board, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.

Simon Adams, Executive Director of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect.