

Launch of Global Centre for R2P

14 February 2008

Remarks by Mary Robinson

60 years ago, in the aftermath of a world war, the Holocaust, and the use of nuclear weapons, leaders came together to say, “never again”. They crafted the Convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide and adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in an effort to ensure that the horrors of that time would not be repeated.

Yet in the past six decades, we have witnessed mass atrocities committed against others across the globe. We have seen the increased targeting of civilians in conflict and the brutal use of rape against women and girls as a weapon of war.

Consider just one example – the situation today in Eastern Congo.

The Congo war has claimed more lives than any conflict since the end of World War II, yet receives almost no attention outside central Africa. An estimated five million people have died in the conflict since 1996 — the vast majority not by firepower but by starvation or preventable diseases, often as people hide in the jungle to escape the fighting. To the horror of all, the UN through 2006 had reported 27,000 cases of rape in Eastern Congo, yet last year that number rose dramatically, and some estimates argue that reported cases may have indeed doubled.

Tragically, there are many more examples worldwide where gross human rights violations are occurring in conflict zones and wherein the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are trampled upon.

Fortunately, there are also reasons to be hopeful. We are all watching the ongoing efforts to find a just and lasting solution to the crisis in Kenya. The proposed power-sharing arrangement that would bring both sides of the conflict into government, combined with a healing process that would help ensure political and economic justice and lay the

foundation for future stability, is encouraging for all who have followed the conflict with great concern.

The international community has moved far faster in addressing this conflict than it has in similar situations elsewhere. The United Nations has engaged at the highest political levels, the Security Council has issued a statement deploring the violence, and the Secretary General and the leadership of the human rights and humanitarian offices have been mobilized. Equally important, respected African leaders have stepped forward to provide invaluable mediation. Currently Kofi Annan, Graça Machel and Benjamin M’Kapa are working to achieve a political solution at the request of the African Union.

The view that it is unacceptable to ignore violence of the kind that has occurred in Kenya or to consider the crisis as purely an internal matter of the state is due in significant part to the growing acceptance of a new global norm – the responsibility to protect.

With the signing of the 2005 UN World Summit document, enshrining the principle of R2P and unanimous support of the General Assembly and Security Council in Resolution 1674, the world is uniting behind a commitment to support our fellow human beings in protecting the most basic of human rights, the right to life.

But we know that more efforts are needed to promote confidence building, clarity and acceptability around this new norm. That is why I am so pleased to be part of the launch today of the Global Centre on the Responsibility to Protect. Its aims - to build greater acceptance of the R2P norm and to work with others to call attention to how it must be applied in real-world crises – are vital.

The Responsibility to Protect is still too frequently misunderstood. We should be clear that it is not a justification of military intervention. It simply requires states to protect their own people and help other states to build the capacity to do the same. It means that international organizations like the UN have a responsibility to warn, to generate effective preventive strategies, and when necessary, to mobilize effective responses. The crisis in Kenya illustrates this: the primary role for outside actors is to protect civilians – not least by helping governments to improve security and protect human rights. The new R2P Centre

has an important role to play in drawing lessons from such examples and catalyzing international action to help countries to prevent or halt mass atrocities.

I believe a key part of the new Centre's work will be to engage with the wide range of initiatives being undertaken by others to foster understanding and support for R2P. Let me briefly mention two that I am involved with as examples of how the Centre and others can collaborate to raise awareness and deepen commitment.

In November 2007, I had the privilege of co-Chairing the International Women Leaders Global Security Summit, an event convened by the Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylands, the Council of Women World Leaders, the White House Project, and the Women Leaders Intercultural Forum, a project of the initiative I lead – Realizing Rights. In the final Call to Action document from the Summit, women leaders from around the world agreed four key issues to focus on for global security, one of which was fulfilling international obligations on the responsibility to protect.

We undertook to:

- Actively **reinforce the global consensus** that all nations bear collective responsibility to protect civilian populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.
- Clearly and consistently **articulate the international community's responsibility** to first take action through diplomatic and other non-violent means when states fail to prevent or respond effectively to the above mentioned crimes, even when committed by non-state actors.
- Press government representatives at the United Nations to articulate a clear **threshold for taking military action to prevent these crimes**, and to press the **UN Security Council to authorize decisive and timely action** when this threshold is crossed.
- Insist **that women's views are sought and women leaders are included in all peace and security initiatives**, including Track I and II negotiations.

- **End impunity for violence against women** and promote gender awareness in all stages of peace processes by mandating training for civilian and military personnel on the various ways insecurity manifests for women, including rape, murder, sexual harassment, unfair treatment and unequal power relations between men and women.
- Call on world leaders to **protect the impartial and independent space of humanitarian actors** working alongside military forces in areas of crisis.

A full report on the Summit will be available tomorrow on the Summit website, www.womenandglobalsecurity.org.

I know all of us associated with the Summit are eager to work with the new Centre to ensure that women's voices are heard in conflict situations and that women's leadership on peace and security issues is strengthened in the coming years.

I am also pleased to be here today as a representative of The Elders. We came together last year under Nelson Mandela and Graca Machel's inspiration and Archbishop Desmond Tutu's chairmanship to speak freely on global issues and respond to conflict situations. I would like to express our support and encouragement for the work of the Global Centre on the Responsibility to Protect. Archbishop Tutu, Kofi Annan and I – all members of The Elders – are also proud to serve as Patrons of the Centre. We pledge to do what we can to help ensure that the emerging doctrine of R2P is implemented by states and the international community.

At our launch last July, the Elders pledged to support as one of our core values R2P. In early September I traveled to Eastern Chad with seven other women, five of them leading African women, with support on the ground from Oxfam. A month later Archbishop Tutu led an Elders mission to Darfur. Since then the situation in both Darfur and Chad has deteriorated seriously. It is vital that the joint UN AU force in Darfur come up to full strength, with proper logistical support, and that the EUFOR force is deployed on the clear

understanding that it is a neutral force seeking to protect civilians and will exercise its mandate impartially.

We welcome the commitment of UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon in his high level appointments of Francis Deng and Edward Luck to further the acceptance of these principles as well as his efforts to unify the understanding of R2P within the UN system and with its Member States. These are important steps forward.

To signal our support, The Elders have declared February as Responsibility to Protect month as part of our campaign – Every Human Has Rights - to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This campaign aims to reaffirm and renew commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by encouraging millions of people over time to make a personal pledge to live by the principles of the Declaration. You can learn more about the wonderful partners working with us, and how you can get involved, by visiting www.everyhumanhasrights.org.

The images being shown now on the screen are of the website, and some of our communications materials. In addition to print and video information on human rights themes, we are creating profiles of inspiring human rights champions aligned with human rights themes like the Responsibility to Protect. These will appear on an [Elders] Human Rights layer on Google Earth. Through these and other methods, we hope the campaign can contribute to the work of this Centre by spreading public awareness of the Responsibility to Protect, so that people stand ready to demand an adequate response from governments when such urging is required.

I want to conclude by recalling that the Universal Declaration isn't just a proclamation of rights. It makes clear we all have duties to our community – that with rights come responsibilities. That is why it is so important that we link the principles of the Universal Declaration to the Responsibility to Protect.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as a Patron for the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. I look forward to working together with you to move from ideas

to action and to support all of you who have made a personal commitment to make the world a safer and more humane place.

Thank you.