



The
Stanley
Foundation

Policy Memo

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SUBJECT: Preparatory Workshop for the Second Meeting of the R2P Focal Points Network

The 2005 United Nations World Summit Outcome Document outlined the unequivocal responsibility of states and the international community to protect populations from genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes. In doing so, states committed to taking steps at the domestic, regional, and international level to protect populations from mass atrocities and making the promise of “never again” a reality.

In September 2010 the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, in association with the governments of Denmark and Ghana, launched an initiative to support governments in their efforts to operationalize the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) at the national level through the appointment of R2P Focal Points.

Focal Points are senior officials mandated to enable national efforts to improve mass atrocity prevention and response. The initiative seeks to expand the number of R2P Focal Points appointed by national governments and to link these Focal Points within a global network designed to facilitate international cooperation and coordination in pursuit of protection-focused objectives. Costa Rica and Australia have since joined Denmark, Ghana, and the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect as co-organizers of the initiative and the Focal Points Network.

In advance of the second formal meeting of this Focal Points Network, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and the Stanley Foundation convened R2P Focal Points and other national representatives, UN mission ambassadors and experts, UN officials, and mass atrocity specialists for a preparatory workshop to address the challenges faced by individual R2P Focal Points and their developing global network.

Held on February 24-26, 2012, as part of the Stanley Foundation’s 43rd United Nations Issues Conference, the workshop considered how countries with diverse forms of government, institutional capacities, and bureaucratic cultures might tailor their internal process—and the profile of an R2P Focal Point—to suit their national context. It also explored the role of a Global Focal Points Network and how best to support and share strategies and lessons learned in developing capacities and policies for atrocity prevention at the national, regional, and international levels.

Reflecting on the objectives and orientation of R2P Focal Points and their global network, participants outlined the following operating principles:

- Mass atrocity risk is dynamic and universal. Developing national capacities to prevent and halt atrocities involves a process of continuous self-reflection relevant to all states.
- The specific profile of the Focal Point should be determined by national context and capacities.
- Focal Points should be positioned with the authority to convene policymakers across relevant ministries. They should possess deep insight into the workings of their national system and a skill for operating within the nuances of their institutional context.
- The core objective of a Focal Points network is to create a “community of commitment” that increases state capacity to implement R2P’s three-pillar framework.
- The network will promote education and awareness of R2P principles through support provided to member governments and engagement with those outside the network.
- The community is conceived as a network, not a coalition. Members remain free to determine their position and approach to specific situations and policy applications.
- The network will serve as a support system for states committed to R2P objectives; first, in developing national action plans and capacities and ultimately, in policy development and coordination.

Additional observations from the discussion follow:

Domestic Implementation of R2P – National Priorities and Approaches

The experience of R2P Focal Points appointed since the launch of the initiative reflects a range of stages and approaches determined by unique national contexts. Participants underscored that national implementation of R2P is an incremental process determined by individual country priorities and existing capacities. Discussion, however, highlighted a consistent set of shared challenges with important implications for evaluating national capacity and designing the profile of an R2P Focal Point.

Policy Scope and Institutional Reach

While roles and emphasis depend heavily upon national context, R2P’s three-pillar framework creates implications for national policy that cut across a diverse spectrum of governance institutions and require the focus of a wide array of policy actors at the national level. Institutions critical to ensuring domestic protection, building capacity, and responding as appropriate to international atrocity threats include not only foreign ministries, but also interior ministries, security and justice sector structures, legislative bodies, economic management and planning authorities, foreign assistance bureaus, and so on.

Convincing key stakeholders of their role in “atrocities prevention,” however, can prove challenging. Many officials remain unfamiliar with the R2P framework, its commitments, or its implications for policy development at the national level. Even when informed, domestic actors sometimes view atrocities prevention as irrelevant to their mandate or of lesser priority than established interests and agendas. Others—particularly in the diplomatic sphere—may consider it a redundant objective already fully encompassed within ongoing activities.

Role of an R2P Focal Point

Those charged with leading efforts to operationalize R2P at the national level can face intense resistance to the idea that atrocities prevention should be treated as a distinct policy priority with implications for a broad spectrum of approaches to internal and external governance.

The role of an R2P Focal Point is to integrate atrocities prevention within national policy and apply a mass atrocities lens to ongoing internal and external policy development. Reflecting upon early efforts, participants described an R2P Focal Point as a proactive “hub” for analysis, policy input, and intergovernmental coordination. This “hub” has proven particularly successful when led by a respected convener with deep insight into the inner workings of national political and bureaucratic structures.

Buy-in from other domestic stakeholders has been more readily assured when Focal Point engagement has been approached as a “resource” for policy implementation. Clear indications from high-level executive authorities that atrocities prevention is a priority have also proven useful. In some cases, these expressions have been made explicit in strategic national policy documents that outline executive commitment and elaborate on the connections between atrocities prevention and the mandates of specific institutional actors.

Even within the best-resourced governments, the sheer scope of activities required of a comprehensive approach to atrocities prevention means that a Focal Point must serve as an enabler rather than implementer. Participants cautioned against overloading Focal Points and insisted capacities, expectations, and mandates must be carefully matched to national contexts. They encouraged flexibility, noting that institutional needs are frequently revealed through experimentation.

Building a Global Network

Reminded of the protection objectives at the heart of the Focal Points initiative, participants described their global network as a support system for a community of states committed to the full implementation of R2P principles. In its early stages, this network would focus on education and awareness-raising and mutual support and strategy-sharing for national capacity reviews in developing domestic policy. It would become an access point for lessons learned, assisting states as appropriate and desired, to self-identify forms and level of internal atrocities risk. In later phases, it could become a repository of best practices for both internal and external policy development and application.

In addition to providing a point of access to its full membership, the network might also help clarify nodes of what participants called “multiple bilateral” exchange. The network would thus

strengthen bilateral cooperation among members through direct collegial links. Such links would create flexible opportunities to match needs and build relationships for mutual support, as well as identify partnerships for project and crisis-specific policy development.

Looking forward, participants recommended that the network consider establishing a secretariat that would provide Web-based support and assist network members in information exchange, and help match needs for deeper cooperation as desired between members. The secretariat will also support the organization of the meetings of the global network. Participants also noted that (sub)regional engagement would be critical to the functions and ultimate expansion of the network.

Moving Forward

February's dialogue clarified common challenges faced by those who have sought to integrate R2P within national policy and a shared vision of the role a global network of R2P Focal Points might play in supporting states to address internal and external atrocity risk. The second formal meeting of the R2P Focal Points Network, to convene in September 2012, will continue to elaborate upon this shared vision—translating its objectives into the next steps to build a network that best enables its members to fulfill their responsibility to protect.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Memo do not necessarily reflect the view of the Stanley Foundation, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, or any of the conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

For further information, please contact Rachel Gerber at the Stanley Foundation, 563-264-1500, or Savita Pawnday at the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 212-817-2104.