

# National R2P Focal Points Recommendations

## INTRODUCTION

In 2005 at the United Nations World Summit, states unanimously committed to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity by adopting the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). R2P affirms an individual state's primary responsibility to protect its population from these four crimes along with the collective international responsibility to take appropriate measures to help protect populations at risk.

To make the promise of R2P a reality, institutional capacities need to be developed at national, regional and international levels to prevent and halt mass atrocities. An important step that governments can take to improve intra-governmental and inter-governmental efforts to prevent and halt mass atrocities is the appointment of a R2P Focal Point. This senior level official is responsible for the promotion of R2P at the national level and to support international cooperation on the issue through participating in the Global Network of R2P Focal Points. Appointment of an R2P Focal Point is a step that can be implemented by governments with differing levels of capacity in mass atrocity prevention to demonstrate their commitment to R2P.

This policy brief provides a set of recommendations that governments can choose to take into consideration while appointing a national R2P Focal Point. These recommendations are in no way prescriptive and should not be read as a check-list. Rather, they are intended to inspire states to consider some of the possibilities that could be achieved by appointing a national R2P Focal Point.

## ABOUT THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

### *The commitment of R2P is classified in terms of three pillars*

**Pillar I:** The state carries the primary responsibility for the protection of populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

**Pillar II:** The international community has a responsibility to assist states in fulfilling this responsibility.

**Pillar III:** The international community should use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means to protect populations from these crimes. If a state is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action, in a timely and decisive manner and in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

### *R2P in Practice*

At the core of R2P lies a commitment to take effective *preventive* action and recognition that the international community must maintain its preparedness and willingness to react when and where prevention fails. This involves measures that cross the spectrum from supportive to intrusive, and from non-coercive (economic incentives, mediation, arbitration) to more coercive (sanctions, diplomatic isolation, referral to the International Criminal Court) and only as a last resort, use of force.

A wide range of activities have contributed to shifting the political debate on R2P in the last few years including annual debate in the United Nations General Assembly and more than forty-five United Nations

Security Council Resolutions invoking the language of R2P. These resolutions have addressed country situations, including Syria, Central African Republic and Sudan/South Sudan, as well as several thematic issues, including Protection of Civilians, Prevention of Genocide and Small Arms and Light Weapons.

Leading up to the 2013 Kenyan elections, considerable domestic and international efforts, in keeping with R2P Pillars I and II, contributed to preventing a recurrence of mass atrocity crimes seen around the 2007/08 elections. The successful example of Kenya reveals how investment in non-coercive measures like strengthening the rule of law, reforming the security sector and tackling hate speech, can help prevent atrocities when preventive actions and reforms are undertaken early, with sufficient resources and international support. The efforts of the Kenyan government provide a powerful counter-argument to those who assert that R2P is about the powerful meddling in the affairs of the weak. Many reforms undertaken in Kenya between 2008 and 2013 were government-driven, supported by civil society and the broader Kenyan population.

However, ongoing atrocities in Syria, South Sudan, Central African Republic and other cases, continue to demonstrate that steps need to be taken so that the international community can uphold R2P consistently and effectively.

## **LAUNCH OF THE R2P FOCAL POINTS INITIATIVE**

The R2P Focal Points initiative was launched in September 2010 by the governments of Denmark and Ghana in association with the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect at the annual Ministerial Meeting on R2P held during the opening of the UN General Assembly. Since then the governments of Costa Rica and Australia have joined the core organizing group.

Fifty-one countries from around the world and the European Union have appointed an R2P Focal Point.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF R2P FOCAL POINTS**

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. National implementation of R2P is an incremental process determined by an individual country's priorities and existing capacities.

The role of the R2P Focal Point should be tailored to the unique context of each individual country, recognizing the varying forms of government, diverging bureaucratic cultures and diverse policy priorities and capacities. The recommendations outlined here offer options for establishing institutional capacities necessary to protect populations nationally and, through the network, globally. These are suggestions only and are not intended to be prescriptive.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE R2P FOCAL POINT**

### *Core Responsibilities*

#### Enabler

The role of the R2P Focal Point is to integrate atrocity prevention within national policy where appropriate. The R2P Focal Point can be described as a 'hub' for analysis, policy input, and intra-governmental and inter-governmental coordination that enables other departments and ministries in implementing policies to avert and halt atrocities. Understanding the role as a 'hub' has been particularly successful when led by a respected senior official with deep insight into and a skill for operating within their national system.

#### Convener

Atrocity prevention cuts across a diverse spectrum of governance institutions and requires the focus of a wide array of policy actors at both the national and international level. For an R2P Focal Point to be effective they should be positioned to convene officials across relevant departments and ministries.

## *Possible Responsibilities of the R2P Focal Point*

### Intra-governmental and inter-governmental coordination

The central role of the R2P Focal Point is to coordinate intra-governmental and inter-governmental responses to mass atrocity threats. The intra-governmental role can involve educating and assisting in coordinating government agencies to responding to mass atrocity situations. Inter-governmental coordination can involve multilateral diplomacy, information sharing and international coalition-building to prevent and halt atrocities.

### Reviewing existing policies to implement R2P at the national level

An R2P Focal Point can play such a role by initiating a government-wide discussion to evaluate existing policy programs for mass atrocity prevention. This exercise would identify gaps in capacities needed across government institutions to prevent mass atrocities and encourage systematic planning needed for early prevention. For example, for countries with a history – or serious risk – of mass atrocities, this review can involve security sector reform, effective judicial review and mechanisms that mitigate ethnic and communal tensions. The role can also involve conducting awareness trainings and workshops on R2P for senior government officials.

One option to consider in this regard is the development of National Action Plans or other national level strategies tailored to suit national circumstances. A National Action Plan for R2P can provide an opportunity to initiate strategic actions, identify priorities and resources, and determine responsibilities and timeframes at the national level. The process of developing a plan also creates awareness of the problem, socializes officials and builds capacity.

### Monitoring and early warning

The primary role of the R2P Focal Point is to make sure that the risk assessments and policies to mitigate identified risks are communicated in a timely fashion to the relevant governmental leadership. However, depending upon the national circumstances and the level of resources allocated to the R2P Focal Point, the role can also involve monitoring and producing risk assessments. The R2P Focal Point can establish an early warning system within their office for receiving and disseminating information about emerging risk situations.

### Advising political leadership

An R2P Focal Point can be an official that operates outside the day-to-day decision-making structure of a government's executive leadership, but this official would ideally have the power and ability to reach senior decision makers when necessary. This person should be poised to raise the alarm on atrocity threats and, where appropriate, call upon the system to take action.

## *Additional parameters influencing the role and effectiveness of the R2P Focal Point*

### Mass atrocity prevention should be a priority for the role to be effective

For the R2P Focal Point to be effective in the role, it is desirable that mass atrocity prevention be a priority objective for the government concerned. In some cases, this will be made explicit in strategic national policy documents that outline executive commitment and elaborate on the connections between atrocity prevention and the mandates of specific institutional actors. The seniority and stature of an R2P Focal Point can reflect both the seriousness and depth of a government's commitment to this agenda. It can also impact upon the ability of the government to maintain priority over the long-term. Additionally, buy-in from other domestic stakeholders is more readily assured when there are clear indications from the high-level political leadership that atrocity prevention is a priority. Effective leadership can also provide the impetus for the government to undertake the necessary assessment of existing mechanisms and gaps.

### Possible location of the R2P Focal Point within government

**Office of the Chief Executive:** Easy access to the head of state and government. High visibility to the national focus on R2P.

**Foreign Ministry:** The Foreign Ministry is well-placed to coordinate a government's response to, and prevention of, mass atrocities in the region and further abroad.

**Internal/ Home Ministry:** The R2P Focal Point can also be placed within the internal or home ministry. Ties to the security sector could assist the R2P Focal Point in coordinating government action to prevent and halt potential mass atrocities at the domestic level.

### Profile of the R2P Focal Point

Ideally, an R2P Focal Point should have sufficient influence and access within their own national system to be able to promote R2P broadly and to mobilize mechanisms for preventing and halting mass atrocities. The national R2P Focal Point should be institutionalized so as to guarantee: a) its sustainability over time and the emergence of standard operating procedures; b) its political relevance and authority; and c) its capacity to reach out across ministries and departments.

The nature of this institutionalization, however, varies in response to government-specific demands and priorities. In appointing and situating an R2P Focal Point, governments could consider the following:

#### **Political appointment vs. career civil servant/bureaucrat:**

Although a political appointee may have better strategic access to the chief executive/head of government and may be able to influence policy at the highest level, he/she could be vulnerable to changing electoral and political cycles. On the other hand, although a civil servant might face access difficulties, his/her appointment could allow for a greater level of institutionalization within the government.

#### **Breadth of Portfolio:**

Some R2P Focal Points may by necessity be required to balance a large portfolio with wide-reaching demands. Given limited capacities within many governments, the R2P Focal Point could have a varied portfolio that encompasses a broader set of responsibilities, but these responsibilities should correspond with and reinforce the function of halting and preventing mass atrocities.

#### **An office or an individual:**

The R2P Focal Point can be a single individual, but in countries with greater capacity, and/or a strong demand for delegated attention to different elements of R2P implementation, it may be an office.

## **GLOBAL NETWORK OF R2P FOCAL POINTS**

One of the purposes of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points is to improve inter-governmental coordination to prevent and halt mass atrocities. As members of this

Global Network, R2P Focal Points engage in multilateral diplomacy and coalition-building focused on mobilizing action for mass atrocity prevention or response.

The core objective of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points is to create a “community of commitment” that increases states’ capacity to implement R2P’s three-pillar framework. The community is conceived as a network, not a coalition. Members remain free to determine their own approach to specific situations and policy applications.

### ***Specific functions of the Global Network***

#### Foster strong regional and international connections

R2P Focal Points can strengthen national mechanisms for R2P and establish regional connections, while collectively they can reinforce links at the regional and global levels. The network helps foster bilateral cooperation among members and creates flexible opportunities to match needs and build relationships for mutual support as well as identify partnerships for project and crisis specific policy developments.

#### Effectively mobilize action

Regions and sub-regions have the potential to function as core loci for early warning and post-atrocity support, as states within the same region are well-placed to identify the early symptoms of neighbors under stress. The Global Network could serve as the connective tissue between countries in the region, even in the absence of strong regional organizations. This can serve as an effective first point of contact to share information and discuss options related to situations of concern. The network can develop ties between the R2P Focal Points and the United Nations system, including with the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. As an interconnected network, R2P Focal Points can then harness these linkages in order to mobilize global responses.

### ***Meetings of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points***

The Global Network of R2P Focal Points meets at least once a year. Countries committed to the initiative are encouraged to host the meetings.

The first meeting of national R2P Focal Points was held in May 2011. The meeting served the purpose for setting up the Global Network. Thirty-one countries, representing all regions of the world, participated in this

meeting. The meeting provided the participants with an opportunity to highlight conceptual questions and challenges. Participants recognized that for the initiative to move forward, greater clarity was required regarding the role and responsibilities of national R2P Focal Points.

The second meeting was held on 29 September 2012. Thirty-six countries representing all regions of the world participated in the meeting. At the second meeting, appointed R2P Focal Points who have defined their roles within their respective national context shared their experiences. Particularly noteworthy were the interventions made by Denmark, Australia and Costa Rica, who over the course of the year reflected upon how the R2P Focal Point can implement strategies within their national context to prevent mass atrocities. Participants also discussed the role of regional organizations and other national and global capacities needed to make the Global Network effective.

The third meeting was held on 11 and 12 June 2013 in Accra, Ghana and was co-hosted by the governments of Denmark and Ghana along with the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre. More than thirty-five countries and three regional organizations attended this meeting, where representatives from Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Liberia announced their intention to appoint a R2P Focal Point in the near future. This was the first meeting of the Global Network to be held in Africa and the location was instrumental in allowing for the diversity represented at a senior level at the meeting. The agenda of the meeting aimed at encouraging genuine discussion of substantive issues while limiting the number of formal speeches and presentations.

The fourth meeting of the Global Network was held on 12 and 13 June 2014 in Gaborone, Botswana and was co-hosted by the governments of Botswana and the Netherlands along with the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect. More than 31 countries and the UN Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect attended the meeting. The focus of the Botswana meeting was capacity building and R2P, including the impact of security sector reform, rule of Law and understanding the legacy of mass atrocities in communities affected by mass atrocity crimes.

The fifth meeting of the Global Network was held on 23 and 24 June 2015 in Madrid, Spain and was co-hosted by the governments of Spain and Chile along with the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and the

Stanley Foundation. More than 50 countries and the UN Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect attended the meeting. The focus of the Madrid meeting was "10 Years of the Responsibility to Protect: Responding to New Challenges and Threats to Vulnerable Communities."

### *Secretariat*

The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect acts as a Secretariat for the Global Network. The Secretariat provides administrative support, assists network members in informational exchange, and helps match needs for deeper cooperation as desired by members. The Secretariat also assists governmental hosts to organize annual meetings of the Global Network.

In early 2013, the Secretariat launched a closed email list whereby R2P Focal Points could communicate with one another and receive relevant updates regarding international efforts to prevent mass atrocities. This list is a helpful tool in sharing information and enhancing communication between members of the Global Network.

For additional information about the Global Network please contact Savita Pawnday at the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect by e-mail at [spawnday@globalr2p.org](mailto:spawnday@globalr2p.org) or telephone at +1 212-817-2104 or +1 917-680-5477.