

Summary of the UN General Assembly Thematic Panel Discussion, “From Commitment to Implementation: Ten Years of the Responsibility to Protect,” 26 February 2016

INTRODUCTION

On 26 February 2016, the President of the UN General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, convened a Thematic Panel Discussion to mark the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) at the 2005 World Summit. Mr. Lykketoft and the UN Deputy Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Jan Eliasson, delivered opening remarks.

The distinguished panelists, all of whom have played a key role in the development and implementation of R2P over the past ten years, included: Professor the Hon. Gareth Evans, Co-Chair of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty and of the Advisory Board of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, Dr. Navi Pillay, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Dr. Edward C. Luck, former UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on R2P and member of the Advisory Board of the Global Centre, and Dr. Jennifer Welsh, UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on R2P. The UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng, moderated the interactive discussion.

Over 100 member states attended the event to take stock of efforts to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity over the past ten years. The majority of statements emphasized the importance of prioritizing prevention by strengthening early warning systems and enhancing international coordination when responding to risks of potential mass atrocities. Among the attendees, 38 member states delivered statements while Rwanda spoke on behalf of the 50 members of the Group of Friends of R2P and the

European Union spoke on behalf of its members as well as Turkey, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania and Georgia. Two civil society organizations also delivered statements: the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect.

KEY THEMES

The Global Network of R2P Focal Points

The Group of Friends of R2P, Australia, Costa Rica, Ghana, Nigeria and Spain highlighted the Global Network of R2P Focal Points as an example of efforts taken by states to strengthen national and international architectures for the prevention of mass atrocities. Noting that 51 countries and the European Union have appointed R2P Focal Points as part of the Global Network, the Group of Friends of R2P encouraged all member states to join the largest governmental network dedicated to mass atrocity prevention. The Global Network was also mentioned by several of the panelists.

Support for a UN General Assembly Resolution

There was widespread support for the draft UN General Assembly resolution on the Responsibility to Protect, circulated by Australia, Botswana, Brazil, Denmark, Ghana, Guatemala, Republic of Korea and Slovenia. Countries such as Nigeria, Argentina, Turkey and Japan welcomed the draft resolution and the proposal for R2P to be placed on the formal agenda of the UN General Assembly. Members of the cross-regional group which

drafted the resolution called upon member states to constructively engage in negotiations on the resolution through an inclusive process to ensure the consensus adoption of the resolution this year. In response to concerns voiced by a few states regarding a lack of consensus on R2P, Gareth Evans stated: “the best evidence lies in the General Assembly’s annual interactive debates since 2009, which have shown ever stronger and more clearly articulated support for the new norm, and in the more than 40 resolutions referencing R2P that have now been passed by the Security Council (35 of them after the divisions over Libya in 2011).”

Human Rights

A number of states highlighted the role of national and international human rights mechanisms in operationalizing the Responsibility to Protect and ensuring that early warnings of mass atrocities results in early action to prevent their commission. The EU, Group of Friends of R2P and five states - Slovenia, Canada, Nigeria, Belgium and Argentina - highlighted the role of the UN Secretary-General’s Human Rights Up Front initiative. Romania highlighted the importance of strengthening the cooperation between New York and Geneva by working more with the UN Human Rights Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Switzerland welcomed the establishment of the Group of Friends of R2P in Geneva as a way to streamline synergies between New York and Geneva.

Growing Support for Initiatives Regarding the Security Council

The panelists and member states discussed the role of the UN Security Council (UNSC) in ensuring timely and decisive action to protect populations. The EU and more than 10 member states stressed the importance of the ACT group’s “Code of Conduct regarding UNSC action against genocide, crimes against humanity of war crimes” as well as the French and Mexican initiative on veto restraint. The Group of Friends of R2P called for more frequent and regularized briefings to the UNSC by the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and R2P and encouraged the UNSC to convene a meeting to discuss R2P and mass atrocity prevention in 2016. Spain called for R2P to be placed on the formal agenda of the UNSC while Gareth Evans called for the establishment of a UNSC working group on R2P.

UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect

Nine member states and the EU highlighted the important role the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect play in enhancing the UN’s capacity to prevent mass atrocities. A number of these states welcomed the UN’s Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes as an instrument to address risks of mass atrocity crimes, with Canada remarking: “We believe there are opportunities to ensure better integration of atrocity prevention in a more proactive way and we would advocate for more comprehensive use of early warning tools such as the UN Framework of for Atrocity Crimes.”

Critical Voices

Despite the progress made over the past ten years, a number of states raised concerns regarding implementation of the norm at the international level as well as the moderation of the event. Particularly strong interventions were made by Sudan, Cuba and Syria, who each engaged in the interactive discussion more than once to raise particular criticisms and objections.

PARTICIPANTS

Member States Participating in the Thematic Discussion	
Americas	Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador (statement distributed, but did not speak), Mexico, Nicaragua, Venezuela.
Asia and the Pacific	Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Myanmar, New Zealand, Philippines.
Africa	Burundi, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda (on behalf of the Group of Friends of R2P), Sudan, Tanzania.
Europe	Armenia, Belarus, Belgium, Denmark (on behalf of the Nordic countries: Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), Georgia, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom.
MENA	Egypt, Iran, Morocco, Syria, Turkey.
Regional Orgs.	European Union (on behalf of all 28 EU members, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Georgia and Turkey).