

Global Conference for Civil Society on the Responsibility to Protect 20 June 2013, Istanbul, Turkey

On 20 June 2013, the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) convened its first global conference for civil society practitioners on the Responsibility to Protect norm (RtoP, R2P) in Istanbul, Turkey.¹ Over 60 organizations from over 25 countries participated in the conference to exchange strategies for advancing RtoP and mass atrocities prevention around the world.

Civil society organizations, political activists, academic experts, lawyers and others have long been critical drivers in ensuring that governments protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. This rich and active community, which works across the globe to advance the Responsibility to Protect and prevent mass atrocities, can only grow more robust if attention is given to ensuring that these groups and individuals know of one another, communicate about their activities and coordinate across sectors and regions.

ICRtoP convened these civil society representatives for a day-long meeting to exchange best practices to develop and strengthen local, national and regional programs to advance RtoP, and gain a holistic understanding of the work being done around the world on the norm as well as the remaining gaps in activity among sectors and regions. For non-Members, the meeting was also an opportunity to better understand how RtoP relates to and can be incorporated into their organization's work.



ICRtoP Chair and Chief Executive Officer of the Pan Africa Lawyers Union, Don Deya, provides welcome remarks.

The conference began with welcome addresses from Donald Deya, ICRtoP Chair and Chief Executive Officer of the Pan Africa Lawyers Union, and Sapna Considine, ICRtoP Program Director. Mr. Deya set the tone for the day, noting, "Civil society actors have long been both dynamic partners in the creation of national atrocity prevention structures and critical watchdogs to sound the alarm if a state veers off course. Our first goal today is to share our unique knowledge and experiences so that we may strengthen our respective and combined impacts in striving towards these common goals."

The day continued with a panel discussion on the norm's evolution and implementation since its endorsement by all governments at the 2005 World Summit. Participants then divided into two groups to reflect on civil society initiatives on (1) working with national actors to implement RtoP and (2) increasing civil society activity and support for the norm. The final part of the day was devoted to small focused discussions on engaging with regional organizations on RtoP and atrocities prevention. Throughout the day, participants were asked to reflect on their activities as well as their methods of work in promoting RtoP and entrenching atrocities prevention at

¹ This conference directly followed a larger convening organized by the Nexus Fund (www.nexus-fund.org), which featured three days of panel and interactive discussions on cases and agendas related to atrocities prevention. Supported by Humanity United, Wellsprings Advisors, the Open Society Foundation and Rockefeller Brothers, the Nexus Fund made it possible for ICRtoP to hold its meeting.

local, national and regional levels. This report will provide an overview of the key points that came out of each discussion during the conference.

I. Panel on “Surveying the RtoP Landscape”

The opening panel discussion, moderated by **Nana Afadzinu of the West Africa Civil Society Institute**, provided an overview of the legal foundations of RtoP, how the norm has developed – both conceptually and practically, and challenges facing implementation.

The discussion began with a presentation by Professor Sheri Rosenberg from the **Program in Holocaust and Human Rights Studies and of the Human Rights and Genocide Clinic at the Benjamin Cardozo School of Law**, who remarked on RtoP’s foundations in international human rights and humanitarian law, and noted that the norm places an unprecedented focus, and thus creates a political impetus, on the *prevention* of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide. Professor Rosenberg also asserted that we now find ourselves asking not “whether” to act to protect populations from mass atrocities, but “how”, and as such RtoP had already become a “living reality”. Our challenge now is to find a feasible way to operationalize prevention.

Dr. Noel Morada of the **Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect** provided a brief summation of how RtoP developed since Member States unanimously endorsed the norm in 2005. He discussed the level of global, and in particular, African, support for RtoP principles and the impact that the international response to the crisis situations in Libya and Syria, in 2011 and since, had on widespread understanding of and endorsement for RtoP as well as the questions around implementation that these cases raised. Dr. Morada recommended emphasizing the preventive aspects of the norm and dispelling misconceptions that RtoP primarily centers around intervention when atrocities are already occurring, promoting dialogue among stakeholders, and taking lessons from local-level efforts.

Naomi Kikoler from the **Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect** provided remarks on the norm’s implementation in the context of specific country applications. Noting that she wanted to use her presentation to focus on cases that have received less attention, rather than the frequently discussed crises in Libya and Syria, Ms. Kikoler touched on the situation of the last months of the Sri Lankan civil war in 2009, during which the international community effectively prioritized the Sri Lankan government’s counter-terrorism agenda over protecting populations from atrocity crimes committed by all parties. She then described both the relatively successful preventive efforts undertaken in Guinea in 2009, when a sanctions regime was imposed immediately after the outbreak of mass violence to pressure the government to stop its armed forces from attacking civilians, as well as the considerably more delayed reaction to the post-election conflict in Côte d’Ivoire in 2011, which ultimately resulted in a combined military effort by the UN and the French government to stabilize the situation on the ground. Finally, commenting on the post-election violence in Kenya in 2007 and 2008, Ms. Kikoler highlighted the impact that travel embargos, which were quickly threatened against several of the country’s political leaders in early 2008, had on bringing disputing parties to the negotiating table.

Sapna Considine from the **International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect** closed the panel with a presentation on the stakeholders that are undertaking initiatives to promote and operationalize the norm. Acknowledging that there would be a session later in the day specifically focused on engagement with regional arrangements, Ms. Considine focused her remarks on officials and offices within the United Nations (UN) system, including the Secretary-General, the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and RtoP and their

staff, the General Assembly, and the Security Council; judicial bodies, including the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, regional courts and ad-hoc tribunals; and Member State-driven initiatives and national mechanisms for atrocities prevention. Ms. Considine gave particular attention to the informal Group of Friends of RtoP, convened at UN Headquarters in New York; the RtoP focal points network co-sponsored by the governments of Australia, Costa Rica, Denmark and Ghana; the Latin America Network on the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities spearheaded by the governments of Argentina and Brazil; the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) Regional Committee for the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination, and the corresponding national committees created by its Member States; and the regional forums on genocide prevention organized by the governments of Argentina, Cambodia, Switzerland and Tanzania.

II. Civil society strategies for implementing atrocities prevention

Concurrent workshop 1: Entrenching RtoP and atrocities prevention domestically

The session featured two informal panel sessions on developing a national process for RtoP implementation and engaging policymakers, respectively. During these discussions, each panelist was asked to expand on their organization's programmatic initiatives, reflect on the challenges facing their work, and provide recommendations to improve implementation and assess lessons-learned. The floor was then opened to allow for conversation amongst participants to exchange strategies and practices related to the session theme.

Session 1: Developing a national process

The first panel, moderated by Peggy Hicks from **Human Rights Watch**, included participation by Alex Buskie from the **UN Association of the United Kingdom**, Dismas Nkunda from the **International Refugee Rights Initiative**, Ndifuna Muhammed from the **Human Rights Network of Uganda**, Mary Stata from the **Prevention and Protection Working Group**, and Dr. Noel Morada from the **Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect** as discussants. Some presentations focused on engaging established national mechanisms for atrocities prevention, including the Ugandan National Committee for the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination (developed in line with the ICGLR's corresponding regional committee) and the Atrocities Prevention Board in the United States. Others remarked on their broader advocacy efforts to target governments. In the absence of a specific national institution, one discussant recommended establishing strong partnerships with a State office as an initial step towards the development of a whole-of-government approach for atrocities prevention.



Panel on developing national processes for RtoP implementation.

Several common themes emerged from the presentations, including the importance of and need for using constructive rhetoric in each region when working on atrocities prevention. For example, this may include talking about Article 4h from the African Union Constitutive Act (the AU's founding document)², which asserts that the AU can intervene in a Member State in cases where genocide, war crimes or crimes against humanity

² Article 4(h) stipulates that the "Union has the right to intervene in a Member State pursuant a decision of the Assembly in respect to grave circumstances, namely, genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity."

are being committed, when engaging African governments, or explaining and emphasizing that RtoP is a friend to sovereignty when building support for the norm among states in Asia. Participants also noted the value added in convening different civil society stakeholders to discuss national implementation, given that each actor can bring new ideas on how state-level prevention may be supported. Additionally, civil society's role as a monitor of state institutions, including the security and criminal justice sectors, was highlighted. However, the discussants also remarked on the challenges facing domestic engagement, including the frequent reluctance by policymakers to consult civil society in their efforts to build institutions or develop policy to prevent atrocity crimes. Several discussants also noted that even if mechanisms are created or government champions of atrocities prevention emerge, barriers still exist in allocating the necessary resources to implement action.

Session 2: Engaging with policymakers

A second session on engaging policymakers immediately followed, which was moderated by Debbie Stothard from **ALTSEAN-Burma**. Dr. James Waller from the **Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation**, Casey Karr from the **Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect**, Cameron Hudson from the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**, Tina Park from the **Canadian Centre for the Responsibility to Protect** and Jo Henderson from the **Aegis Trust** sat on the panel. During this session, panelists touched on several different ways that civil society organizations can connect with policymakers. One discussant described trainings and workshops as important opportunities for building partnerships with government actors. Another remarked on their engagement with the RtoP focal points, which are state officials appointed by their government to advance RtoP and mass atrocities prevention within their country. In both cases, one principle challenge is that the government ministry and level at which the officials worked could vary amongst states involved in these processes, which means that the abilities and influences to affect change and promote preventive mechanisms in their government will differ amongst participating individuals. With regard to the focal points specifically, their roles and responsibilities – which ultimately depend on the government context and capacity – remain undefined by the state in some cases. In addition to this direct engagement, one discussant remarked that collaborating with former government, cabinet or congress members can be helpful when engaging in high-level advocacy, though emphasis was placed on the need to keep the issue bipartisan or multi-partisan by diversifying the individuals involved. The role of parliamentarians was also discussed, with a distinction made between measures to engage with parliamentarians convening as a group within their country or having membership in a global network. Either way, these groups and networks can have thematic focuses on or related to RtoP and mass atrocities prevention, or else, if the mandate for the network is broader, bring related topics onto their agendas. However, the robustness of efforts by parliamentarians is often affected by their access to state ministers.

Concurrent workshop 2: Building the civil society constituency of support for RtoP

The strategy session featured two informal panel discussions, one on mobilizing a constituency of support for RtoP and atrocities prevention and another on strengthening civil society capacities to develop RtoP initiatives through workshops and curriculum development. Following remarks by each panel discussant on his or her organizations' initiatives and objectives, the conversation opened to perspectives from the floor.

Session 1: Mobilizing civil society support

The discussion on mobilizing civil society support was moderated by Gus Miclat from **Initiatives for International Dialogue**. Grace Ghaleb from the **Permanent Peace Movement**, Andrew Hudson from **Crisis Action**, Mama Koité Doumbia from **FEMNET-Mali** and Daniel Sullivan from **United to End Genocide** sat on the panel. The discussants

described a variety of methods for engaging with civil society organizations to build support for either RtoP itself or engage in advocacy in country cases. The principle method used by discussants to strengthen understanding and raise awareness of RtoP was the organization of in-person meetings and discussions on the norm to provide



Franck Kamunga (Droits Humains Sans Frontières, assisting as a translator during the session), Mama Koite Doumbia and Dan Sullivan remark on mobilizing civil society constituencies.

an overview of RtoP, answer any questions about the norm's relevance and implementation and dispel remaining misconceptions. A key challenge raised by discussants was the limited resources to facilitate such events, which in turn make it more difficult to address pervasive misconceptions. In addition, capacities vary among civil society groups that participate in these events to then engage policymakers or raise support for RtoP among other organizations. With regard to building advocacy movements around country situations, one discussant remarked on developing a large, public grassroots movement, and noted that in general this form of activism had largely shifted from offline, in-person and written formats to online methods. One challenge that was underlined in building a large movement lay in ensuring that people are given enough information to elicit empathy and conduct activism and not be presented with an

over-simplified version of events. In contrast, another panelist discussed creating smaller coalitions of civil society organizations to undertake quiet and behind-the-scenes action. In this regard, emphasis was placed on considering advocacy targets based on the potential impact that a civil society coalition could have as well as the amount of leverage the international community as a whole already has on the issue at hand. It was also noted that such engagement involve collaboration on the objectives of advocacy with all partners at an early stage so that the message doesn't weaken to appease the organizations involved. Discussants urged that when conducting such work organizations bear in mind that, frequently, humanitarian and political groupings need to use separate advocacy messages so humanitarians can maintain a neutral status.

Session 2: Building civil society capacity

The discussion on building civil society capacity was moderated by Angela Bruce-Raeburn from the **Stanley Foundation**. Nana Afadzinu from the **West Africa Civil Society Institute**, George Kegoro from the **International Commission of Jurists**, Cissa Wa Numbe from the **UN Association of the Democratic Republic of Congo** and Rachel Shapiro from the **International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect** sat on the panel. During this session, the discussants agreed that to build civil society capacity to advance RtoP or play an active role in preventing mass atrocities – whether your target audiences are organizations, individual activists, youth, lawyers, judges or others – the focus is often initially on awareness-raising. Many of these actors do not have a comprehensive understanding of RtoP or its principles, and still others – judges were highlighted specifically in this regard – are unaware of the role they can play or how they may be impactful in preventing atrocity crimes or ending impunity for their commission. Several discussants had recently developed toolkits on RtoP and atrocities prevention, and remarked on their plans to use the publications in workshops with civil society actors, emphasizing that – in addition to other organizations and policymakers – universities and schools may be ready audiences for such events. A common point of interest among participants was to assess the practical impact of such workshops with various target audiences. Discussants also focused on engaging with civil society actors that interfaced with local communities or with policymakers on a regular basis. One challenge presented for both the development of publications and convening awareness-raising workshops was that the material used

often only exists in English, and that facilitating organizations do not necessarily have the capacity to undertake translation.

III. Break-out groups on engaging regional and sub-regional organizations

For the final portion of the day, participants divided into five groups to discuss best practices in engaging with regional and sub-regional organizations on RtoP. Each of the groups focused on one of the following organizations or regions: the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN); the African Union (AU) and League of Arab States (LAS) – these two organizations were discussed in a joint session because of their overlap in membership; the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR); and Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) arrangements. Each conversation was facilitated by a moderator who posed questions to a small group of discussants, and then opened the conversation to participants. Discussants were tasked with remarking on how their organization engages their regional and sub-regional bodies; the challenges that they encounter in this engagement; and how RtoP is or may be incorporated into their existing regional strategies.



Participants during strategy session on the Association of South East Asian Nations.

The session on the **Association of South East Asian Nations** was moderated by Sarah Teitt from the **Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect**, with Gus Miclat from **Initiatives for International Dialogue**, Debbie Stothard from **ALTSEAN-Burma**, and Dr. Pranee Thiparat from **Chulalongkorn University** participating as discussants. These contributors asserted that within the South East Asian region, human rights protection policy is often considered the sole responsibility of the state itself, bespeaking a strong tendency towards non-interference. However some of the discussants did point out that if language on RtoP were shifted to emphasize the primary protection obligations of the state and the responsibilities encompassed in sovereignty, rather than international action, this could open doors for engagement with and entrenchment of the norm. Participants discussed

the possibility of rallying civil society support for RtoP during important days of activism, for example the International Day of Preventing Impunity or the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances. To this end, there was consensus that civil society needs training materials for awareness-raising initiatives in the region and would benefit from guidance on how to incorporate the norm into advocacy.

The **joint session on the African Union and the League of Arab States** was moderated by Donald Deya, ICRtoP Chair, from the **Pan Africa Lawyers Union**, and featured Carnita Ernest and Eyob Balcha Gebremariam from the **Centre for Citizens' Participation on the African Union**, Grace Ghaleb from the **Permanent Peace Movement**, and Ziad Abdel Tawab from the **Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies** as discussants. During this session, the discussants underlined the importance of coalition and network structures for civil society organizations engaging with the AU and LAS. The LAS, in particular, has only recently established a department to consult with civil society organizations, and because the criteria for participating groups remains so stringent, it has proven easier to engage the League on behalf of a coalition. Discussants also acknowledged the need to develop systematic information-sharing capacities across regions, both within Africa and with stakeholders outside the continent. The value-added in south-south dialogue to reflect on best practices in engagement with other regional bodies was particularly emphasized. Moving forward, participants agreed that civil society actors should

focus more support and resources towards increasing and enhancing their access to regional and sub-regional organization meetings and summits.

The strategy session on the **Economic Community of West African States** was moderated by Omolara Balogun from the **West Africa Civil Society Institute**, and featured Mama Koité Doumbia from **FEMNET-Mali** and Naomi Kikoler from the **Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect** as discussants. Consensus was quickly reached that though ECOWAS has the institutional foundation for RtoP, given its conflict prevention framework and various mechanisms to respond to mass atrocities, it lacks the capacity to make these existing tools functional and effective. One clear example of this, the discussants noted, could be found in the early warning system ECOWAS maintains with the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding; though ECOWAS receives information, it lacks the resources to decisively act on or analyze these alerts. Further engagement on these capacity issues could come from civil society if there is a coordinated effort, and participants during the session agreed that the West Africa Civil Society Forum (WACSOF) would be the appropriate platform upon which to cooperate, given that WACSOF is the only civil society organization with an official consultative relationship with ECOWAS. Participants also touched on the idea of engaging with RtoP focal points, several of which have been appointed by West African states. Though challenges remain in that a given focal point may not have a regularized interface with civil society, such engagement may present an additional entry point for advocacy on atrocities prevention within the region.

The session on the **International Conference of the Great Lakes Region** was moderated by Dismas Nkunda from the **International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI)**, and featured Deirdre Clancy also from IRRI, Hassan Shire Sheikh Ahmed from the **East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project**, Ndifuna Muhammed from the **Human Rights Network of Uganda**, and Dr. Ashad Sentongo from the **Genocide Prevention Program at George Mason University** as discussants. During this session, discussants focused on the ICGLR's Regional Committee and Protocol on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and All Forms of Discrimination and the corresponding national committees that have thus far been created by the governments of Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Rwanda, Kenya and Congo-Brazzaville. Under the protocol, each member state is obligated to create a national committee; however, discussants generally agreed that the national committees had not yet shown themselves to be sufficiently organized or resourced to prevent or respond to threats of atrocity crimes. Consequently, they emphasized the need for civil society to increase their focus at the domestic level, encouraging and assisting these governments as they form well-functioning committees and garnering the political will to operationalize them. Discussants and participants also remarked on the potential value-added in engaging with affiliate members of the ICGLR, for example Egypt.



Discussion on the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region.

The discussion on engaging at the regional level in **Latin America and the Caribbean** was moderated by Andrei Serbin Pont from the **Coordinadora Regional de Inversiones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES)**, with Camila Asano from **Conectas**, Diego Padilla from the **Instituto de Relaciones Internacionales y de Investigación para la Paz (IRIPAZ)**, and Dr. James Waller from the **Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation** participating as discussants. The discussants agreed that because, in most cases, the regional and intergovernmental organizations in the LAC region are difficult to engage on atrocities prevention, it is frequently more strategic to

work directly with national governments. One of the challenges discussed that confronts collaboration between civil society organizations, whether their engagement is undertaken nationally or regionally, is that groups can sometimes be aligned to a given state; in these cases, such ties need to be taken into account when coordinating advocacy efforts. In addition, there was consensus around the importance of rhetoric and terminology used, and that among governments in the LAC region, emphasizing human rights and atrocities prevention is typically better received than RtoP language.

IV. Conclusion

This conference was inspired by the idea that civil society around the world would welcome an opportunity to not only meet other organizations, academics and activists working on atrocities prevention, but to consult with and learn from one another. With this in mind, the meeting was designed to be a forum for participants to strategize together on ways to enhance their impact on policymakers at every level, build functional preventive institutions within state, regional and international organizations, increase the constituency of support for RtoP and atrocities prevention among other civil society actors, and more. It became clear that after the conference, following this exchange of practices, including successes and challenges, these individuals would walk away with new ideas and ready partners to continue and strengthen their work, increasing the already active and diverse movement of organizations advancing RtoP. Building on the momentum of this event, ICRtoP will continue convening civil society organizations for additional strategy sessions specific to regions and to sectors of work.

In addition, to continue facilitating this cooperation and engagement between groups, ICRtoP is in the process of developing an **interactive online map of this community of practitioners**. The map will feature ICRtoP members and other civil society organizations working to advance the Responsibility to Protect and mass atrocities prevention, academic experts and think tanks focused on the norm, government focal points on RtoP and others. Using this tool, which will be available at no cost on the ICRtoP website, one can find groups working in their field that they can consult on a given project; reach out to an expert to facilitate a workshop on the norm; or engage with their government's appointed RtoP focal point.

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Organizations Represented

Aegis Trust
United Kingdom

Africa Youth Initiative Network
Uganda

African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies
United Kingdom

Altsean-Burma
Thailand

Asia-Pacific Center for R2P
Australia

Ateneo de Manila University
Philippines

Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation
United States

Benjamin Cardozo School of Law
United States

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
Egypt

Canadian Centre for R2P
Canada

Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies
Serbia

Center for Peoples' Dialogue
Sri Lanka

Centre for Citizens' Participation
in the African Union
Ethiopia

Chulalongkorn University
Thailand

CIVICUS
South Africa

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
United Kingdom

Conectas
Brazil

CRIES
Brazil

Crisis Action
United States

Droits Humains Sans Frontières
Democratic Republic of Congo

E.O.NE.P.E.
Greece

East and Horn of Africa HRD Project
Uganda

Enough Project
United States

FEMNET-Mali
Mali

Foundation for Human Rights Initiative
Uganda

Friends Church Peace Teams
Kenya

George Mason University
United States

Global Action to Prevent War
United States

Global Centre for R2P
United States

Human Rights Network-Uganda
Uganda

Human Rights Watch
United States

Human Rights Working Group
Indonesia

Imparsial
Indonesia

Initiatives for International Dialogue
Philippines

International Commission of Jurists - Kenya
Kenya

International Refugee Rights Initiative
Uganda

Invisible Children
United States

IRIPAZ
Guatemala

ISIS Malaysia
Malaysia

Legal Support for Children and Women
Cambodia

Pan Africa Lawyers Union
Tanzania

Permanent Peace Movement
Lebanon

Refugee Law Project
Uganda

Rights Now
Sri Lanka

Stanley Foundation
United States

Stimson Center
United States

Sudan Democracy First Group
Sudan

Sudan Unlimited
United States

The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative
United States

Turning the Tide
Kenya

UNA-DRC
Democratic Republic of Congo

UNA-Sweden
Sweden

UNA-UK
United Kingdom

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
United States

United States Institute of Peace
United States

United to End Genocide
United States

West Africa Civil Society Institute
Ghana

WFM-Institute for Global Policy
United States

Women Under Siege
United States