

# RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT ENGAGING CIVIL SOCIETY

A Project of WFM-IGP's Program in Preventing Conflicts and Protecting Civilians

## Empowering Women in the Prevention of Genocide

In situations of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, women and girls are uniquely and often disproportionately impacted. As a result, the international community, including through Security Council Resolution 1325, has outlined proposals and commitments for addressing the particular needs of women and girls in conflict and promoting the role of women in conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

Most of these commitments have yet to be realized. Progress has been impeded by a lack of political will, failures

to understand the gender dimensions of pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict societies, and an absence of institutions and resources to facilitate better protection and promotion of women's human rights. Moreover, until recently, the international community had failed to acknowledge its collective responsibility to protect populations, including women and children, from genocide and other grave crimes against humanity.

**R2PCS** welcomes the endorsement of the Responsibility to Protect in the Summit Declaration (see below). With it, governments can no longer claim impu-

nity within their own borders nor abdicate responsibility for atrocities abroad. This historic endorsement of a new international norm is a promising shift toward human security that makes the protection of civilians an essential element of the exercise of state sovereignty. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is a set of principles intended to guide the international community in preventing and stopping genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This is a commitment to a continuum of actions from prevention to reaction and rebuilding, when necessary, with an emphasis on prevention.

*Continued on Reverse*



*Civil Society can be the agent to turn commitments on paper into action on the ground. R2PCS calls on NGOs to work with their governments to deepen understanding of the R2P principles and to build capacity locally, regionally and internationally to protect populations under threat.*

See reverse side for details on how to get involved as an NGO

*Peace is attainable and is inextricably linked with the advancement of women, who are a fundamental force for leadership, conflict resolution and the promotion of lasting peace at all levels.*

- Beijing Platform for Action

## R2P: A New Security Framework

At the Summit marking the United Nation's 60th Anniversary, world leaders made an unprecedented commitment to the prevention of armed conflict and the protection of civilians by endorsing both a national and international responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

World leaders recognized that security must mean security for all, including protection from genocide and terrorism and freedom from poverty and disease. Collective security requires collective responses and the international community shares the burden with states to prevent atrocities, react

when they do occur and rebuild shattered communities.

By redefining sovereignty to include responsibilities and affirming that state sovereignty can never shield a government when it commits atrocities against its own people, the international community has taken an historic step in rethinking the existing security framework.

The endorsement of a shared responsibility to protect means that people who live under threat of genocide and other gross human rights violations by their own governments, state-sponsored actors or other non-state actors now have a new set of tools to confront the

often deadly indifference and paralysis of the international community.

**R2PCS** is working to build this toolbox and to ensure that the international community puts words into action. The international community must be able to identify potential crises, assist states in averting crises, react peacefully, and, if necessary with force as a last resort, and rebuild communities for sustainable peace. **R2PCS** works to secure national, regional and international commitments to the principles and practices of the Responsibility to Protect and advocates for better instruments to prevent armed conflict and protect populations.

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### The responsibility to prevent

The Responsibility to Protect entails a clear responsibility to prevent genocide and other grave crimes against humanity. Civil society and governments should use agreement on the Responsibility to Protect as a starting point for developing an early warning capability at the UN that is sensitive to gender-specific indicators. The deployment of human rights observers, early diplomacy and mediation are all tools in the R2P toolbox to prevent the eruption of large-scale violence and they should be applied with particular attention to ensuring the participation of women at all levels of preventive action.

Women's rights activists were among the first to realize the importance of addressing root causes of conflict, including the participation of women in government and politics, women's access to economic development and environmental security and their full and equal participation in society. **Responsibility to Protect - Engaging Civil Society** hopes that the long-term impact of R2P will be increased attention and accountability for the international community's responsibility to address root causes. In the immediate future, Responsibility to Protect may prove most effective as a means to hold governments accountable for immediate action on the direct causes of conflict.

### The responsibility to react

When a state manifestly fails to protect its population and the international community has been unable to avert a crisis, there is a collective responsibility to react. Whenever coercive steps, such as sanctions, are required, the R2P principles outline the primacy of human protection; every effort should be made to understand the impact of any such action on women and children in particular.

As a last resort, the Security Council may authorize the use of force to stop genocide or other situations of large-scale loss of life. To ensure the right application of this responsibility, the R2P principles include criteria that reflect a rules-based approach to intervention. These criteria are: (1) the seriousness of the threat; (2) the proper purpose of the proposed military action; (3) whether means short of the use of force might reasonably succeed in stopping the threat; (4) whether the military option is proportional to the threat at hand; (5) whether there is a reasonable chance of success. The use of force raises many questions and **R2PCS** encourages civil society, particularly women's organizations, to engage in this discussion and to work to ensure that any authorization of the use of force is in accordance with SC Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

### The responsibility to rebuild

The R2P principles include a responsibility to help shattered communities rebuild after crisis. The Peacebuilding Commission, called for in the Summit Declaration, could serve as the nexus for the exercise of this responsibility. Local ownership in the process of building peace, including justice, physical and economic reconstruction and long-term development assistance, is essential. Women's organizations should play an important role in decision-making and resource allocation as they can provide an invaluable link between the international community and local populations.

### Looking Forward

The time is now for a new security framework in which threats are understood to be interconnected and security is shared. Governments have already endorsed key principles of R2P; however, the dialogue is just now beginning on the application of these principles and the ways to hold governments accountable for the protection of populations the world over. R2P, in conjunction with existing treaties and resolutions on the role of women in armed conflict, can be a powerful concept in the advancement of a new human security agenda that is more adaptable to the particular needs of women and children.

## Get involved as an NGO

Interested organizations are invited to Join the **R2PCS** Network to connect to other groups that are working toward changes in the way governments, as well as, international and regional organizations respond to emerging humanitarian crises.

More information on our network of about our network of NGOs and a sign-up form can be found at <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/signup> or contact us at [info@responsibilitytoprotect.org](mailto:info@responsibilitytoprotect.org).

For information on UN reform and the 60th General Assembly, including valuable issue-tracking tools and the most up-to-date information, visit our affiliated website <http://www.ReformtheUN.org>

## Support improvements to the international system to protect vulnerable populations

Ask your government to:

- *Endorse the Responsibility to Protect.*
- *Support the establishment of an effective Peacebuilding Commission.*
- *Support the work of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide and the establishment of an Early Warning capability.*

visit <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org> to take action