

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Open Statement on the Situation in Libya 22 February 2011 (...) United Nations (UN) member states must uphold their 2005 commitment to the responsibility to protect (R2P) and take immediate action to protect the population of Libya from mass atrocities. (...)

(...) The potential for continuing or even escalating atrocities is all too real with few signs that the Libyan government plans to act in accordance with its responsibility to protect. Muammar Gaddafi has made clear his readiness to commit atrocities in a bid to maintain power, stating in a speech today that those challenging the government “deserved to die” and that he will fight those protesting his regime “until the last drop of blood. (...)

International actors must similarly not stand by and allow for the perpetration of mass atrocities. The responsibility to protect requires that where a government is manifestly failing to protect its population the UN Security Council must be prepared to take timely and decisive action to protect populations at risk. As the Libyan government clearly abdicated responsibility for protecting its population when it began shooting civilians in the street, member states must take steps to prevent the further commission of atrocities. Such steps may include:

- Calling on the government of Libya to uphold its responsibility to protect and halt the commission of atrocities;
- Establishing a no-fly zone over the entire country, pursuant to chapter VII of the UN charter, to prevent aerial attacks on civilians;
- Implementing a complete arms embargo prohibiting the sale, transfer or delivery of any weapons or military equipment to the government of Libya;
- Imposing targeted sanctions on key regime figures including Muammar Gaddafi, his family and others known to be inciting or ordering the commission of atrocities against civilians;
- Creating a commission of inquiry, with possible referral to the International Criminal Court, to investigate whether crimes against humanity have been committed by the Libyan government, security forces and foreign mercenaries.

UN member states and international organizations such as the African Union and the Arab League, which recently expelled Libya from its membership, must give their support to these measures as well. In addition, Libyan security forces should be encouraged to uphold international standards and exercise restraint. Member states should be prepared to offer safe haven to Libyan military or diplomatic personal that refuse to participate in the commission of crimes against civilians.

The evidence of crimes perpetrated against civilians is clear. There has been widespread condemnation of these horrific atrocities, but action must follow words. In keeping with the responsibility to protect, member states should use all available measures and leverage to end atrocities in Libya. (...)

Read full statement
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