Introduction

The international communitys evolving recognition that conflict affects men and women differently is an essential first step in developing gendered responses to conflict, empowering women in the prevention and ending of conflicts, and the rebuilding of communities after conflict.

That men and women are often tasked with different roles within conflict settings, are affected uniquely by the conflict and may be differently able to contribute to preventing and stopping conflicts, as well as rebuilding communities afterward, is a radical departure from decades of thinking and policies that rendered both crimes against women and womens roles in conflict situations invisible.

Recognition of the gendered nature of conflict was codified in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000), two key documents outlining the rights and obligations of the international community, governments and civil society with regard to women in conflict.

R2P is an important complement to existing commitments to protect womens human rights and security. The agreement on R2P at the World Summit, by redefining sovereignty as a set of rights and responsibilities, gives the international community a new tool to challenge governments which are unwilling or unable to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. R2P and SCR 1325, read together, outline important commitments by governments to take decisive actions to prevent and stop mass crimes against populations, including against women and children.

Call to Action There is now a need to support the implementation of commitments made in SCR 1325, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA), Beijing + 5 review and R2P to protect women in conflict situations and engage them in the resolution of violent conflicts and the rebuilding of peaceful societies. These commitments address all three areas along the R2P continuum as outlined in the ICISS report (PDF).

Prevention SCR 1325, BPFA and the Beijing +5 review all recognize the inextricable link between the equality of women in a society, their access to development and the prevention of violent conflict. It is hoped that as the international community recognizes its responsibility to
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protect all populations from genocide and other grave crimes against humanity, it will also recognize the high cost of waiting for crises to become acute before taking preventive steps, including by addressing the root causes of conflict.

However, R2Ps special attention to high-threshold crimes and situations in which crises are acute or there is an imminent threat of genocide or other large-scale violence is an equally important piece of an emerging conflict prevention framework. As there is much progress left to be made in the development of a comprehensive system of conflict prevention, R2Ps focus on high-threshold crimes directs the international communitys attention to averting the most urgent crises by addressing the direct causes of conflict. It will be essential to mainstream a gender perspective in preventive measures aimed at the direct causes of conflict, as well as in the development of conflict indicators.

Womens organizations may be especially well placed to sound the alarm in crisis situations as women are often the earliest victims in an emerging conflict. Networks of women may also be able to establish early responses to emerging conflict and should be considered valuable partners by the international community.

Reaction When preventive efforts have failed and a government is unable or unwilling to avert a crisis, the international community has a responsibility to take action to prevent genocide and other grave crimes against humanity. The primacy of protecting populations in violent conflict falls not only on the offending or failing government, but extends to the international community in its response to the crisis. Whether through violent or non-violent measures, the international community must make the protection of populations a priority. This is a critical development for the worlds women and the international community should be held to account through clear criteria for intervention, which takes into consideration the impact of any action on women and other vulnerable populations.

The UN and individual states should improve their capacity to measure the impact of actions on women and meet their commitments to develop gender-sensitive responses, including through the deployment of specialized police units and the training of peacekeepers in areas of gender-based violence and protection. Women and womens organizations must also be engaged in the process to end the conflict, including early negotiations between parties.

Rebuilding The cyclical nature of conflict means that the same essential qualities for conflict prevention are equally important in rebuilding after conflict. Thus the equality of women in all aspects of life must be a priority from the earliest stages of rebuilding. Because issues concerning gender are often viewed as systemic, or even intractable and essential aspects of culture, there is a tendency to marginalize womens rights, especially in its practical implementation, in favor of what are considered more immediate needs for the community. However, precisely because the role of women in society is systemic and affects all aspects of life for the entire community, it is essential that the full participation of all members of the community be ensured in the rebuilding process.

Whether in demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration projects, humanitarian relief, land reform, justice and reconciliation mechanisms, community policing programs or political and
economic development, the ability of women to participate and the impact of such programs on the female population must be given full consideration by the international community.

**Challenges** The ICISS report laying out R2P principles failed to acknowledge the gendered nature of conflict and the role women can play in all three areas of the R2P continuum. Luckily, others have taken on the challenge of applying a gendered lens to R2P. INSTRAW issued the report *A sight for Sore Eyes: Bringing Gender Vision to the Responsibility to Protect* and activists have begun the debate on the R2P principles and their consequences for women around the world. Many women's rights organizations and others engaged on issues of women, peace and security have remained open to the contribution R2P can make to the international community's ability to protect women in situations of armed conflict or other grave crises. Nevertheless, much work remains in developing a truly gendered approach to R2P.

Just as gender mainstreaming in the implementation and understanding of the R2P principles must be a priority, so should R2P be considered for what it can contribute to the existing body of governmental commitments on the protection of women's human rights. Continued education of diverse groups on the principles of R2P is ongoing; however, feedback on new visions for R2P, particularly ideas for making R2P gender-responsive is desperately needed.

For more information view our fact sheet on [Empowering Women in the Prevention of Genocide](#).