



AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail australia@un.int

150 East 42nd Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 www.AustraliaUN.org

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Implementation of the Responsibility to Protect

**Statement by H.E. Mr Gary Quinlan,
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of
Australia to the United Nations**

(Check against delivery)

Mr President

Thank you for convening this historic debate on the Secretary-General's report on how to operationalise and implement the Responsibility to Protect. This is not a debate about the now discredited notion of humanitarian intervention. Rather it is a discussion about protection – the protection of all our peoples against mass atrocity crimes.

In 2005, the world's leaders declared with one voice that the international community should “never again” countenance indifference in the face of mass atrocity crimes. Our leaders also agreed the means through which the international community would prevent and address those crimes, setting out in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the World Summit Outcome document an agreed understanding of the “responsibility to protect”. As the Secretary-General has said, this is a “universal and irrevocable commitment”.

Our task now is not to reinterpret, reconceptualise or renegotiate that agreement. Our task is to implement it. That is Australia welcomes the Secretary-General's report. The report reminds us of what was agreed by our leaders in 2005, and provides us with some considered ideas on how to translate this principle into practice.

We strongly support the Secretary-General's articulation of R2P as resting on three pillars, the size, strength and viability of which are equal.

We also strongly support the Secretary-General's characterisation of R2P as being ‘narrow but deep’.

It is narrow in the sense that it is focused on the prevention of four crimes – genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It is not a panacea for all humanitarian tragedies or human rights violations.

It is deep in that it needs to employ the wide array of prevention and protection instruments available to Member States, the UN system, and regional and sub-regional organisations to assist States meet their primary responsibility to protect their populations.

The Secretary-General's report highlights the diversity of tools in the R2P toolkit, from preventive diplomacy, targeted development assistance program, UN peacekeeping, international justice mechanisms, sanctions and, only as an instrument of last resort, the use of force. Which tool to use in any particular situation will clearly depend on the precise circumstances. The essential operating principle, however, must be that we do respond. Indifference or delay is not an option.

Mr President

Australia has been active in assisting States to fulfil their responsibility to protect their populations. Through Australia's development assistance program we assist States to increase their capabilities for conflict prevention and peace building and respect for the rule of law. As the Secretary-General notes, such programs reduce the likelihood those societies will travel the path to crimes relating to the responsibility to protect. In Timor-Leste, for example, we are strengthening civil society institutions and promoting human rights to help with reconciliation and peace building. Consistent with the call in the Secretary-General's report, we are also developing a deployable civilian capacity to enable us to more effectively respond to emergencies in our region

Australia is also a strong supporter of the Global Centre, of the Asia-Pacific Centre, and of the International (NGO) Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect. We have also established a Responsibility to Protect Fund to advance the R2P principle and support States to build capacity to protect civilians.

Mr President

R2P is the expression of our irrevocable collective commitment to ensure that never again are we confronted with the horrors of another Rwanda or Srebrenica, Cambodia or the Holocaust. As we know, no region of the world is immune to mass atrocity crimes. We must continue our efforts to overcome the gaps in will, imagination and capacity to implement this principle to ensure that we prevent future atrocities, and never again fail people in need.