

Civil Society and RtoP

AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL BY THE INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

How Can Civil Society Implement the Responsibility to Protect?

In 2005, all heads of state made a historic recognition that sovereignty entails an obligation to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing by endorsing the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP, R2P) in the World Summit Outcome Document. Civil society organizations (CSOs) have been at the forefront of efforts to advance RtoP through their contributions to the prevention of atrocity crimes, as well as by holding national, regional and international actors to account when they fail to uphold their protection obligations. Despite progress made in advancing RtoP, the startling breadth of atrocities committed since 2005 illustrate the tragic consequences of the failure to consistently fulfill RtoP and the urgent need for all actors, including civil society organizations, to take renewed efforts to protect populations from atrocities. To assist in increasing understanding of the impact of CSOs in upholding RtoP as well as spurring further action for atrocities prevention, this document will provide an overview of initiatives led by organizations throughout the world as well as suggestions for additional steps to promote and implement RtoP and atrocities prevention.

Early Warning and Monitoring

Early warning for the prevention of atrocity crimes involves the collection, analysis, and communication of information at the first signs that a volatile situation could escalate to the level of mass atrocities. This information is then used to advise strategies for timely and effective preventive action.

CSOs have a crucial role to play in monitoring potential crises, collecting data on emerging situations, and passing information to relevant national, regional and international early warning bodies.

CSOs can contribute to early warning activities by:

- Using the '**Framework of Analysis** for Atrocity Crimes' produced by the United Nations Office for the Prevention of Genocide as a resource to assist in early warning by identifying common risk factors and early indicators of atrocity commission.
- Monitoring potential crises on the ground or remotely through fact-finding initiatives and media monitoring, looking in particular for indicators of mass atrocities or incitement.
- Alerting other actors to potential and nascent conflicts by sharing early warning information and assessments with national, regional and international early warning mechanisms, including during vulnerable periods such as political transitions and elections.

ICRtoP MEMBERS IN ACTION

The **Alternative ASEAN Network on Burma** works constantly to document human rights abuses – an early indicator of atrocity risk – against vulnerable populations through exhaustive publications like their “monthly bulletin” updates. Likewise, the **West African Network for Peacebuilding** (WANEP) established the West Africa Early Warning and Response Network (WARN) to monitor and report on socio-political situations that could degenerate into mass atrocities. WANEP is also currently developing the National Early Warning System (NEWS) to complement ECOWAS’ early warning activities with grassroots information and analysis.

THE **ICRtoP** CONVENES AND COLLABORATES WITH CIVIL SOCIETY, MEMBER STATES AND REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS TO: STRENGTHEN NORMATIVE CONSENSUS FOR RtoP; FURTHER UNDERSTANDING OF THE NORM; PUSH FOR STRENGTHENED CAPACITIES TO PREVENT AND HALT RtoP CRIMES, MOBILIZE NGOS TO PUSH FOR ACTION TO SAVE LIVES IN RtoP-SPECIFIC SITUATIONS.

CONTACT US AT WWW.RESPONSIBILITYTOPROTECT.ORG

Advocacy and Education

Advocacy and education should seek to improve understanding of RtoP and its associated obligations among governments, parliamentarians, the public, media representatives, and academia.

These efforts can create a constituency of support to encourage actors at the national, sub-regional, regional and international level to mainstream RtoP principles and an atrocity prevention lens in their work.

Advocacy and education can take the following forms:

- Call for politicians to make references to RtoP in relevant documents and statements, pass legislation that domesticates the norm's principles (e.g. ensuring equal rights for minorities, criminalizing the commission of atrocity crimes), and conduct internal reviews of national and regional capacity to prevent and respond to mass atrocities.
- Speak out when RtoP is being abused or misused and clarify when it should be applied.
- Publish policy briefs, op-eds, and other research and educational materials to improve understanding of RtoP, country situations, and various related themes (women, peace and security, human rights, peacebuilding/peacekeeping etc.).
- Hold public or closed-door educational events targeting NGOs, policymakers, and the general public aimed at building understanding of RtoP among these groups.
- Connect with other NGOs, academic institutions, and the public using social media to share news and analysis, publications, and events that relate to atrocities prevention.
- Convene or support regular dialogues with a small group of NGOs where they can debate and discuss the latest updates on RtoP, its application to crisis situations, the response of governments and regions to normative developments, and strategize on advocacy.

ICRtoP MEMBERS IN ACTION

In 2012 and 2014, the **Permanent Peace Movement**, in partnership with ICRtoP and the UN Office for the Prevention of Genocide, held workshops convening local civil society representatives from the Middle East and North Africa. The workshops were the first held in the region and sought to raise awareness of RtoP, as well as provide the opportunity to discuss strategies for the advancement of atrocities prevention in the Middle East and North Africa.

Mediation

Civil society members are well-placed through their local knowledge and proximity to crisis-affected communities to encourage disputing parties to negotiate and resolve crises non-violently, as well as support, participate in, or lead efforts to mediate or resolve conflicts that can lead to the commission of atrocity crimes.

This can be accomplished by:

- Encouraging governments to establish national mechanisms for resolving tensions at an early stage, by identifying risk factors, root causes, and improving communication between the state and at-risk communities.
- Establishing local mechanisms for dispute resolution between communities to counter hate speech and violent incitement.

- Ensuring the participation of vulnerable groups in negotiations, particularly women, in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1325 and other commitments to upholding women’s security and human rights.
- Directly facilitate mediation between conflicting parties or support state and international efforts by providing expertise, resources, and a neutral forum for the negotiation process, as well as ensuring the prioritization of both the immediate protection of civilians and long-term stabilization goals.

ICRtoP MEMBERS IN ACTION

In 2014, the Netherlands-based group **PAX** facilitated peace negotiations between the Government of South Sudan and the Cobra Faction of the South Sudan Democratic Movement/ South Sudan Defence Army (SSDM/A). PAX provided conflict mediation expertise and logistical support to negotiations that resulted in a ceasefire agreement between the two parties.

Training

CSOs can utilize their thematic expertise to provide training to policymakers, military, police and other civil society actors that is aimed at filling the gap between knowledge and implementation of RtoP and related elements.

Training can be facilitated in the following ways:

- Use ICRtoP’s **‘Toolkit on the Responsibility to Protect’** as a model to produce additional guidance that can be tailored to your country or region by including relevant case studies and other specific information. Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect has translated ICRtoP’s toolkit into three Asian languages – **Mandarin, Bahasa Indonesia and Khmer**.
- Provide training to military and civilian personnel to prepare these actors for protection operations, focusing on the ability to recognize indicators of mass atrocities, minimize civilian casualties, and prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence and threats to children in armed conflict.
- Provide legal training to national and regional judicial institutions on international human rights and humanitarian law, the rights of women, children and other vulnerable groups, as well as other protections necessary for the prevention of atrocities and transitional justice processes.

ICRtoP MEMBERS IN ACTION

In November 2014, The Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, in partnership with the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, held their inaugural **training course** on implementing RtoP in practice. The course gathered military and civilian officials from across Africa to familiarize them with the theoretical and operational applications of the norm.

Coordinating Bodies/Networks

Coordinating bodies, as well as national, regional and international networks are critical tools for information-sharing, collaboration, early warning, and otherwise expanding the community of actors dedicated to making the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities a living reality.

Civil society can strengthen these bodies and their impact by:

- Inviting national focal points to events, meetings and other opportunities to share information and analysis of government approaches to atrocities prevention, as well as your own organization’s work on RtoP.

- Encouraging, through the focal point, regular reviews of government policies on RtoP implementation, and provide recommendations on how to improve the work of the focal point and the government as a whole in this regard.
- Working with the focal point to develop a national RtoP action plan to coordinate and institutionalize a “whole-of-government” approach to preventing and responding to atrocity crimes, in line with the model of the U.S. Atrocities Prevention Board.
- Where no focal point or high level official has been appointed, engage with your government about establishing such a position and liaise with coordinators of focal point networks, such as the **Global Network of R2P Focal Points**, for assistance with advocacy.
- In parliamentary countries, form a partnership with members of parliament who are willing and dedicated to championing an active cross-party parliamentary working group on atrocities prevention similar to those established in the UK and Canada by **Aegis Trust, UNA-UK** and the **Montreal Institute of Genocide and Human Rights Studies**. Where Parliamentary Groups already exist, use them as a mechanism to directly access key decision-makers and ensure enhanced activity related to atrocity prevention.

ICRtoP MEMBERS IN ACTION

In 2012, 18 Latin American states joined the **Latin American Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention** organized under the leadership of Argentina, Brazil, and the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation. Working through each state’s national focal point, the network seeks to institute a “culture of prevention” through education and implementation of preventive programs in government organizations.

Post-Crisis Rebuilding and Reconciliation

In the aftermath of a crisis in which mass atrocities have occurred, communities that have been torn apart by such conscience-shocking violence will need assistance in rebuilding institutions and ensuring justice and reconciliation to prevent the re-commission of atrocity crimes.

Civil society can:

- Work with government, intergovernmental and civil society actors to conduct a community-based needs assessment and ensure reconstruction strategies are devised and implemented with the participation of crisis-affected populations.
- Similar to mediation efforts, ensure that the indispensable voice of vulnerable populations, such as minority groups and women, are represented in peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts.
- Prevent the spread of leftover weaponry by educating communities on the dangers of the illicit transfer of small arms and light weapons, encouraging voluntary disarmament, and assisting in or facilitating civilian disarmament programs.
- Promote justice and accountability by facilitating access to transitional justice mechanisms, educating stakeholders on the process, collecting relevant data and information, representing victims, and ensuring reparations where possible.

ICRtoP MEMBERS IN ACTION

Since 2005, the Uganda-based **African Youth Initiative Network** has been working to assist victims of the Lord’s Resistance Army. The organization has complemented the government’s national transitional justice plan by developing a roadmap through inclusive consultations with affected communities, government, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders.

Note: For more information on the sources and links provided above, view the online version at: www.responsibilitytoprotect.org