

Key Developments on the Responsibility to Protect at the United Nations

2005-2011



2005 World Summit opens.
UN Photo/Mark Garten



Security Council discusses the situation in the
Democratic Republic of Congo.
UN Photo/John McIlwaine

Since the World Summit in 2005, there have been several key developments with the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP or R2P) at the United Nations. While there remains a need for all actors to continue to discuss how to implement certain aspects of RtoP, we are witnessing a clear transformation of RtoP from an idea into a norm supported by States worldwide.

Responsibility to Protect in the World Summit Outcome Document

United Nations General Assembly Member States embraced the Responsibility to Protect in [paragraph 138-139](#) of the Outcome Document of the September 2005 World Summit. In the historic gathering of world leaders in New York for the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly (World Summit), heads of state and government reached consensus on the Responsibility to Protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

Security Council Resolution on the Protection of Civilians and Open Debates



Security Council debate on the Protection of Civilians.
UN Photo/Marie Gandois

On April 28, 2006, the Security Council unanimously adopted [Resolution 1674](#) on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. Resolution 1674 contains the historic first official Security Council reference to the responsibility to protect: it reaffirms the provisions of paragraphs 138 and 139 of the World Summit Outcome Document regarding the Responsibility to Protect. It also notes the Council's readiness to address gross violations of human rights, as genocide and mass crimes against humanity may constitute threats to international peace and security.

On 28 June, 2006 the Security Council held the first open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The purpose of these semi-annual open-debates is to take stock of developments in the area of protection of civilians, particularly situation-specific information and assess progress in the implementation of commitments made in Res. 1674. They also provide the Council and member states

with opportunities to provide recommendations on steps to be taken to ensure proper follow-up of resolution 1674. Governments were overwhelmingly positive in expressing their support for RtoP in this open debate and in the seven subsequent debates.

Security Council Resolution on Darfur

Because the government of Sudan has flagrantly disregarded its responsibility to protect the people of Darfur, the alarm bells have been ringing for years for the international community to take on the responsibility to protect Darfuri citizens from genocide and mass violations of human rights. On 31 August 2006, UN Security Council passed Resolution 1706 authorizing the deployment of 17,300 UN peacekeeping troops to Darfur. Although the mandate met resistance by Khartoum which prevented its deployment, the resolution referred to paragraph 138 and 139 on the Responsibility to Protect in the Summit Outcome Document and Resolution 1674.



Annan addresses the Security Council on the Darfur crisis.
UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

[Member States References to RtoP and Security Council Resolution 1706](#)

Security Council Resolution on Burma/Myanmar

On 12 January 2007, the UN Security Council met to discuss the situation in Burma/Myanmar. The members of the Council voted on a [draft resolution](#) presented by the United Kingdom and the United States. The peaceful resolution called for a cession of all attacks against minorities, access to humanitarian organizations, cooperation with the International Labor Organization, political dialogue and progress towards democracy, the release of all political prisoners and support for all UN "good offices" in Burma/Myanmar. China, Russia vetoed the resolution and South Africa voted against, arguing that Burma/Myanmar did not pose a threat to peace and security in the region, and that the internal affairs of the state did not have a place within the Security Council. Instead, they suggested that situation in Burma/Myanmar should be taken up by the Human Rights Council.



Security Council meeting on Myanmar.
UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

[Statements of Council Members](#) raised the question of the role of the Council in responding to an intra-state situation where populations are at the risk of mass human rights violations, with many in favor of the resolution and the appropriateness of the Council's jurisdiction. The doctrine of responsibility to protect asserts that the Council is prepared on a case-by-case basis to adopt measures to protect a population from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing when a state manifestly fails to protect its population.

New Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide Appointed

At the 2004 Stockholm International Forum on Genocide: Threats and Responsibilities, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed creating a Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide (SAPG) who would be supported by the High Commissioner for Human Rights but would report directly to the Security Council. In July 2004, the Secretary-General appointed Juan Mendez, Argentinean human rights lawyer and Executive Director of the International Center for Transitional Justice to the post. The mandate for the SAPG, based on 30 August 2001 Security Council Resolution 1366, is to collect existing information, particularly from within the UN system, act as an early warning mechanism, and make recommendations to the Security Council through the Secretary-General. On 29 May 2007, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Francis Deng as the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide.



Special Advisor Francis Deng.
UN Photo/Evan Schneider

[Read more on the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide](#)

New Special Adviser to focus on the Responsibility to Protect

At the end of August 2007, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon sent a letter to the UN Security Council President, Mr. Pascal Guyama, proposing the creation of the position of Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect. The position, acknowledged on 11 December 2007 by the Security Council, is to be part-time and on the Assistant Secretary-General level. On 21 February 2008 the Spokesperson for Secretary-General announced that Mr. Ban had appointed Dr. Edward Luck as his Special Adviser to focus on the Responsibility to Protect, as set out by the General Assembly in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 Summit Outcome Document. Dr. Luck's primary role is the conceptual development and consensus building for the evolving norm, to assist the General Assembly to continue consideration of the issue. The Special Adviser on the RtoP works closely with the Office of the Special Representative on Preventing Genocide, Mr. Francis Deng.



Special Advisor Edward C. Luck.
UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras

[Read more on the Special Advisor](#)

UN Secretary-General's report on *"Implementing the Responsibility to Protect"*

Seeing how the 2005 World Outcome Document stressed that the General Assembly should continue consideration of the Responsibility to Protect, this report by the Secretary General entitled '[Implementing the Responsibility to Protect](#)', has been long awaited by Member States and civil society organizations alike. After consultations with governments, UN officials and input from civil society,

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon released on 12 January 2009 the first comprehensive UN document on RtoP. The report clarifies how to understand RtoP and outlines measures and actors involved in rendering the norm operational. It translates paragraph 138-139 of the World Summit into a 'three-pillar approach', namely 1) the protection responsibilities of the state, 2) international assistance and capacity building, and 3) timely and decisive response to prevent and halt genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Secretary-General recommended that the General Assembly meet to consider, based on this report, how Member States will take the 2005 World Summit commitment forward.



Secretary-General introduces report to the General Assembly.
UN Photo/Jenny Rockett

[To view our summary of the report](#)

General Assembly First Debate on the Responsibility to Protect

The General Assembly Debate on RtoP started on 23 July 2009 and continued the full two days of 24 July and 28 July 2009. The 92 Member States (and 2 observers) which spoke on RtoP demonstrated strong interest in the norm and made an important show of support for implementing the 2005 commitment to prevent and halt genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. Governments demonstrated that they were conscientiously considering the proposals in the Secretary-General's report and also raised important issues and recommendations for the General Assembly, the Security Council, the UN departments, regional bodies and governments. Many recognized the important role of civil society in preventing and reacting to these most serious international violations.



General Assembly begins debate on RtoP.
UN Photo/Devra Berkowitz

[View the Coalition's report on the July Debate](#)

UN General Assembly Resolution 308 on the Responsibility to Protect

The first resolution on the Responsibility to Protect was adopted by the General Assembly on 14 September 2009. The resolution ([A/RES/63/308](#)) was introduced on September 14, 2009 by the delegation of Guatemala and was co-sponsored by 67 Member States. The GA took note of the report of the Secretary-General and of the debate in the General Assembly, and decided to continue its consideration of RtoP.

Second Security Council Resolution on the Protection of Civilians

On 11 November 2009, the Security Council at its eighth open debate on the Protection of Civilians (POC) reaffirmed its commitment to prevent the victimization of civilians in armed conflict and ending ongoing violence against civilians around the world in [Resolution 1894](#). This resolution is the second resolution passed by the Security Council under this agenda and it recognizes that States have the primary responsibility to protect their population and reaffirms the provisions in paragraph 138-139



Security Council debates protection of civilians in armed conflict.
UN Photo/Evan Schneider

regarding the Responsibility to Protect. More than twenty States mentioned RtoP in their statements, recognizing that sovereignty comes with the responsibility to protect populations from mass atrocities, and that it is the responsibility of the international community to assist these national governments in fulfilling their protection obligations. Several Member States, mainly European, also welcomed the July 2009 General Assembly debate on implementing RtoP and the consequent resolution on RtoP.

General Assembly Dialogue on Early Warning, Assessment, and the Responsibility to Protect

The General Assembly held its second meeting focusing on the Responsibility to Protect on August 9, 2010. The informal interactive dialogue saw the participation of 42 Member States, 2 representatives from regional organizations, and 2 representatives from civil society. Constructive questions and concerns were raised on how the UN system can best gather and analyze information, develop policy options and translate them into early engagement. The majority of States reaffirmed their support for the emerging RtoP norm and welcomed the Secretary General's report on Early Warning, Assessment and the Responsibility to Protect. In addition Member States called for the continued discussion on the RtoP in the General Assembly.



Secretary General addresses Assembly dialogue on RtoP.
UN Photo/Evan Schneider

The UN will take its next steps on the RtoP later this year with concrete proposals to be made by the SG to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the Fifth Committee on the creation of a joint office between the Special Advisors for the Prevention of Genocide and for the Responsibility to Protect.

[View the Coalition's summary on the August Dialogue](#)

Security Council Resolution 1973 on Libya

Following a range of earlier attempts to implement peaceful measures, such as diplomatic incentives, asset freezes, arms embargo, and ICC referral, the UN Security Council adopted [Resolution 1973](#) on 17 March 2011, approving a no-fly-zone, calling for an immediate cease-fire and tightening sanctions on the Muammar Qaddafi regime in Libya.

This was a follow-up to [Resolution 1970](#), which first called upon Libya's "responsibility to protect" by referring the situation to the ICC and imposing initial financial sanctions as well as an arms embargo. Language from Resolution 1973 called the enforcement of a no-fly zone and for "all necessary measures to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat or attack... while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form." The Resolution condemned the Libyan government for failing to comply with international law and for allowing gross violations of human rights and attacks that may amount to crimes against humanity.



Refugees from Libya Queue for Food at Tunisia Transit Camp
UN Photo/OCHA/David Ohana

Five Member States, China, Russia, Brazil, India and Germany abstained, allowing Resolution 1973 to pass without a veto. While the ultimate adoption of a no-fly zone on March 17 is the first time the Security Council has authorized a military response to protect populations in a non-consenting state, this was likely due to the influence that regional organizations had in supporting stronger measures, notably the African Union, Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council. That Member States prioritized the protection of civilians from mass crimes reflects a historic embrace of the RtoP principles agreed to at the 2005 World Summit.

[View additional information on the Libyan crisis](#) and our [two-page FAQ](#)

Security Council Resolution 1975 on Côte d'Ivoire



Peacekeepers Patrol Ivorian Town Hit by Post-Electoral Fighting
UN Photo/Basile Zoma

In response to the escalating, post-election violence against the population of Côte d'Ivoire, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted [Resolution 1975](#) on 30 March 2011. The Resolution condemned the gross human rights violations committed by supporters of both Gbagbo and President Ouattara stating, "the attacks currently taking place in Côte d'Ivoire against the civilian population could amount to crimes against humanity." The resolution cited "the primary responsibility of each State to protect civilians," called for the immediate transfer of power to Ouattara, and reaffirmed the

mandate of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) to “use all necessary means to protect life and property.”

Resolution 1975 mandated targeted sanctions against Gbagbo and his close supporters, while reaffirming the UN mandate in Côte d'Ivoire to protect civilians and the use of all necessary means to protect them, while preventing the use of heavy weapons. In an effort to protect the people of Côte d'Ivoire from further atrocities, a military operation began on 4 April 2011 and Gbagbo's hold on power ended on 11 April when he was arrested by Ouattara's forces after days of fighting with UNOCI and the French military.

[View additional information on the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire](#)

For additional information, please see our website at www.responsibilitytoprotect.org