

SUMMARY OF THE SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY DIALOGUE ON THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT



INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

Introduction

On 6 September 2016, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) held its eighth annual informal, interactive dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP, R2P) at United Nations headquarters in New York. The dialogue followed the release of the UN Secretary-General's (UNSG) eighth, and final, report on RtoP entitled, "[Mobilizing collective action: The next decade and the responsibility to protect.](#)" The report takes note of the accomplishments in advancing RtoP, while also bringing attention to the failures of the international community to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes. In his report, the UNSG identifies the increasingly challenging context facing the world, and provides a range of recommendations for actors at all levels, noting that coordinated action is needed now more than ever to produce tangible results to prevent and halt atrocity crimes. As this is the UNSG's final report, the document may serve as an agenda to guide his successor and support the next UNSG in his/her efforts to continue the advancement and implementation of RtoP. The overwhelming majority of interventions delivered at the dialogue welcomed and expressed support for the UNSG's report. (To read the ICRtoP's summary of the report, click [here](#).)

Opening remarks and morning panel of experts

The dialogue began with opening remarks by H.E. Mogens Lykketoft, the President of the General Assembly (PGA), who reflected on the areas of growing consensus and issues in which further discussion is needed. With regards to the former, he noted that there is agreement on RtoP's limited scope, that the primary responsibility to uphold the principle lies with states, that prevention must remain the central priority for RtoP, and efforts to implement RtoP must occur in accordance with the UN Charter.

Mr. Lykketoft was followed by Jan Eliasson, UN Deputy-Secretary-General (DSG), who highlighted the accomplishments made thus far with RtoP's advancement, and further elaborated on two central themes within this year's report – preventing the commission of atrocities; and halting their recurrence in countries with a history of such crimes. While we have seen much progress since the 2005 World Summit, Mr. Eliasson noted that "*we have yet to fully operationalize*" RtoP. To move forward in implementing the principle, the DSG made a strong call for the international community to take concrete action for prevention, declaring that a prevention agenda needs to be at the core of policies and practice at all levels, including within the UN Security Council (UNSC). He stated that "*effective prevention requires foresight and serious analysis as well as constant attention, support, and political will,*" and reminded Member States that the "*window of opportunity*" is greatest during early stages of a crisis. When it comes to countries that have previously experienced atrocities, Mr. Eliasson noted that national authorities need to be supported so that root causes are properly addressed, and that collectively there is the need to invest in efforts to build sustainable peace.

The opening remarks were followed by a morning panel moderated by Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights and incoming Special Adviser for the Responsibility to Protect, Mr. Ivan Šimonović. The panel featured Mr. Adama Dieng, Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, and Drs. Edward Luck and Jennifer Welsh, former Special Advisers on the Responsibility to Protect. Mr. Dieng stated that the task before dialogue participants was to identify effective means for overcoming remaining obstacles facing the prevention of and swift response to atrocity crimes. He provided an overview of the UNSG's report, noting the Secretary-General's encouragement of the use and modification of existing preventive mechanisms to strengthen strategies for civilian protection, as well as the need for a continued linking between RtoP and other agendas. Mr. Dieng also brought attention to the importance of ensuring unity, particularly at the outbreak of a crisis, and the urgent need to overcome political divisions, recalling the leadership role to be played by the UNSC.

Dr. Luck began his remarks by noting that few mandates before the UN have received as much intensive and sustained attention by Member States. He reminded participants that the international community has repeatedly failed in the prevention of mass atrocities, and that political will is "*in short supply.*" While recognizing the important need to expand the political base within the UNSC, Dr. Luck also stated that it is essential to learn how to prevent atrocities in the absence of unity within this body. He brought attention to the role of the UNGA in this regard, as well as the work of civil society in implementing their individual responsibility to protect. Dr. Luck recalled that RtoP tools are best when applied early, flexibly, and through collaboration across actors. As this is the UNSG's last report, Dr. Luck shared his advice for the next Secretary-General, cautioning him/her to not dilute or lose focus of RtoP's singular focus in preventing and responding to atrocity crimes. He also urged that one must not be discouraged by the pace of change or state of the world, but remember that challenges often produce seminal normative advances, including RtoP, which emerged from the wars and atrocities of the 20th century.

This last point was one that was echoed by Dr. Welsh, who, in her intervention before the UNGA, declared that we cannot lapse into thinking that the means to prevent or halt atrocities are beyond our reach. The former Special Adviser for the Responsibility

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to Protect brought attention to a number of key issues, such as the challenge that arises when states under stress or their close allies are unwilling to bring situations forward due to fears of having the country put before the UNSC. With regards to moving RtoP forward in the next decade, Dr. Welsh stated that RtoP must be viewed as both a domestic and foreign policy issue, and urged the international community to ensure that deadlock is never used as an excuse for inaction. Also crucial is to learn from previous cases of both prevention and response, so that we can identify key lessons to take forward when operationalizing RtoP.

Informal, interactive dialogue on RtoP

Following the opening remarks and panelists' statements, 68 Member States and one regional organization delivered statements on behalf of 95 States. Four civil society organizations – the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), the Global Centre for R2P, the Asia-Pacific Centre for R2P, and the Canadian Centre for R2P – also delivered interventions. A majority of the statements echoed points from the Secretary-General's latest report, raising the challenging context currently facing the world, the need for unity and restraint on use of the veto in the UNSC in atrocity situations, accountability for perpetrators of atrocity crimes, and action within the UNGA to enhance its involvement in influencing the advancement of RtoP.

The European Union (EU), speaking on behalf of EU Member States as well as Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Iceland, Moldova, Montenegro, Turkey, and Ukraine, stressed the importance of better mobilizing collective action in the implementation of RtoP. In this vein, the EU also called on the UNSC to enhance unity and exercise restraint in the use of their veto powers, urging the UNSC to not vote against credible action to prevent or halt atrocity crimes. The intervention also reiterated support for the Accountability, Coherence, and Transparency (ACT) Group's Code of Conduct and the joint French and Mexican political declaration on regulating the use of the veto. **Throughout the dialogue, 38 Member States and two civil society organizations, including the ICRtoP, brought attention to the devastating effects that inaction due to the use or threatened use of the veto can have on the international community's capabilities to protect populations from atrocities.** As the Secretary-General's report pointed out, unity is especially critical before atrocities are committed, when early warning information arises and prevention measures can be employed to avert atrocities and save lives and resources.

The importance of **prioritizing prevention as a core tenet of upholding RtoP was a major theme** in the Secretary-General's report, but was also discussed by a cross-regional group of over one third of Member States, including Slovakia, Japan, and Argentina. Mexico underscored that *"RtoP is first and foremost the responsibility to prevent."* Several States also cited the importance of investing in and improving early warning mechanisms and early warning information assessment, with a number of States – including Egypt, Croatia, Armenia, and others, such as the Netherlands, speaking on behalf of the 50-member Group of Friends of RtoP (GoF) – lauding the **UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes** for its utility in identifying at-risk countries and implementing RtoP. Slovenia also encouraged use of the Framework of Analysis, adding that the government has recently translated it into Slovenian to raise awareness and ensure the tool's ease of use, emphasizing the preventive function of human rights education. Italy also stressed the primacy of prevention and added the importance of fighting impunity and ensuring accountability in upholding RtoP.

Support for **holding perpetrators of atrocities accountable** for their crimes resounded throughout the dialogue, as over 20 Member States presented arguments for the benefits and necessity of **ending impunity** for such crimes. Australia warned that impunity for such crimes sends a dangerous message to perpetrators, while Bangladesh pointed out that ending impunity is a central aspect of the Responsibility to Protect and acts as an inhibitor for recurrence and a facilitator of reconciliation. The United States also spoke to the dual nature of accountability, including political reconciliation in obtaining honesty and justice for the victims, and legal accountability for the perpetrators, adding that accountability still faces challenges. Speaking in their national capacity, the Netherlands argued that although accountability rests with those committing atrocity crimes, even in the case of atrocities committed by non-state actors, the State is not absolved of its *"primary responsibility to protect its population."* Although the Netherlands also discussed accountability on behalf of the Group of Friends of RtoP, Liechtenstein, a member of the Group, did not align with the GoF statement due to the extreme importance that the country places on the role of the **International Criminal Court (ICC)** in pursuing accountability, stressing the need to discuss the institution even though not all States have joined the ICC. Several States, including Sierra Leone, Belgium, Mexico, and the Netherlands – in their national capacity – **called on all States who have not done so, to sign and ratify the Rome Statute.** More than 20 States and the EU expressed their ardent support for the ICC and underscored the institution's primacy in ending impunity.

Additionally, numerous speakers raised the issue of **improving the format for discussion of RtoP within the UNGA.** Brazil argued that, *"As the most inclusive and democratic organ of the United Nations, this General Assembly should not shy away from its*

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role in shaping the debate on enhancing the protection of populations” from atrocity crimes. Brazil went on to point out that the dialogue, in its current form, does not allow Member States and civil society the proper documentation of the debate or time to fully convey their ideas on RtoP, which would help to better clarify “*outstanding conceptual questions*” and identify areas of convergence. Mexico also emphasized the need for a **UNGA resolution on RtoP** to allow States to fully express their views on the norm. Many Member States, including Poland, Ghana, and Venezuela, as well as the EU and GoF representatives, speaking on behalf of over 70 States worldwide, echoed these sentiments, calling for action within the UNGA on RtoP, including through the adoption of a resolution and/or formalization of the dialogue on the UNGA agenda.

Throughout the day, various Member States and the EU made mention of the **importance of mainstreaming RtoP**, especially in thematic areas such as **development cooperation in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and the **role of non-state armed groups**. The European Union stressed the importance of mainstreaming RtoP, especially in regard to peacebuilding and the SDGs. Rwanda urged Mr. Ivan Šimonović, in his upcoming role as UN Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, to continue the mainstreaming work of his predecessor, Dr. Welsh. Numerous States expressed their continued **support for the UN Office on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect** and welcomed Mr. Šimonović. In the same vein, South Africa urged the future Secretary-General to continue to operationalize and mainstream RtoP. However, the small amount of States which brought attention to such vital areas as disarmament and Women, Peace and Security was notable. **Only two Member States – Croatia and Poland – mentioned the linkage between disarmament and the Responsibility to Protect**. Although seven Member States discussed women in relation to atrocities, **only five States mentioned women’s roles in RtoP advancement – Ghana, Poland, Sierra Leone, Chile, and Finland**. Furthermore, **only two states made note of the distinct impacts of atrocity crimes on women**: the United States referenced the effects that the recurrence of the conflict have had on women; and Botswana underscored the plight of the women and children fleeing the conflict in Syria.

Questions Remain on RtoP for a Small Number of States

A small number of States, such as Cuba, Russia, Venezuela, Egypt, Iran, Azerbaijan, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), expressed their **continued concern with the implementation of RtoP**. Many of these countries noted their **apprehension that the norm could be used to wrongly justify military intervention** and some assessed that that the three pillars of RtoP should be implemented in a sequential manner, in opposition to the views expressed by the Secretary-General in both his first report on RtoP and his latest report. However, a majority of the Member States that participated in the dialogue voiced their support for the Secretary-General’s interpretation of the non-sequential and mutually reinforcing nature of RtoP’s three pillar system. Numerous States underscored their continued view that the use of military force under the Responsibility to Protect is only to be used as a tool of last resort and must be authorized by the UN Security Council. Cuba also raised issues of acceptance with the current international consensus reached around some of the views in the Secretary-General’s report, including some responsibilities that, in the government’s view, go beyond international law. Cuba further asserted that the acknowledgement of the Responsibility to Protect populations against atrocity crimes by all States at the 2005 World Summit recognized the responsibility of States to protect their own populations, while the international community was only tasked with helping or encouraging States to do so. Dr. Welsh spoke to these points, reminding that “*RtoP is not a new principle of international law, nor was it designed to be; it is a political commitment to galvanize political will and capacity.*”

Furthermore, some States called attention to the example of the **implementation of UNSC Resolution 1973 in Libya** in 2011. Russia called the military intervention a failure of the norm, while Venezuela claimed that the response was veiled as humanitarian intervention, but was actually an attempt at regime change. Dr. Welsh addressed concerns about the actions in Libya, saying that we should not use it as a caricature of RtoP, but rather should assess past examples to learn from our mistakes in implementing RtoP. She also noted that the Libyan case reminds us of the primacy of and need to focus on prevention, as well as the need to be aware of the aftermath of conflict and urgency in understanding how to rebuild. Mr. Dieng also added that the situation in Libya underscores the need for the international community to maintain and strengthen its focus on the protection of vulnerable populations, as this will make RtoP a reality.

Civil Society Participation

Four civil society organizations delivered statements, including the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), as well as three ICRtoP members – the Asia-Pacific Centre for R2P (APR2P), Canadian Centre for R2P (CCR2P), and the Global Centre for R2P (GCR2P).

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A theme across interventions was the importance of civil society, and the need for collaboration between actors at all levels. The ICRtoP statement, delivered by Gus Miclat, Executive Director and Co-Founder of the Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID), highlighted the primacy of prevention and stressed the impact of civil society in the implementation of RtoP, calling for the institutionalization of partnerships between organizations and national, regional and international actors. This was echoed by APR2P, CCR2P, and GCR2P as they called for enhanced efforts to support international cooperation to prevent and respond to atrocities, including through joining the global R2P focal point network by appointing a national focal point on RtoP.

Civil society strongly focused on the need to undertake efforts for mainstreaming RtoP across sectors and within intergovernmental bodies. The APR2P stressed the critical nature of mainstreaming RtoP, particularly within regional networks like the Asia Pacific Partnership for Atrocities Prevention (APPAP), which works in a region where some countries are beginning work aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict. The GCR2P and CCR2P both made note of the distinctive effects of atrocity crimes on women and children, with the GCR2P calling attention to the plight of the Chibok girls in Nigeria at the hands of Boko Haram and the enslavement of Yazidi women by the Islamic State. CCR2P called for special attention to be given to the protection of women and children, noting the rampant use of child soldiers and sexual violence in conflicts across the world. The ICRtoP also called for prioritizing the mainstreaming of RtoP, pointing to the inclusion of women in peace and security processes as a proven means to contribute to sustainable peace, while also noting that discriminatory policies against women can serve as early warning signs for atrocities. The ICRtoP also raised the importance of development cooperation and the incorporation of an atrocity prevention lens in development programming, which have the potential to play a vital role in preventing the commission of atrocities and helping societies to rebuild in the aftermath of such tragedies.

Closing Remarks by the Panelists and the President of the General Assembly

Panelists were allotted some time to reflect on the day's discussion and respond to some of the issues raised, such as those on Libya. Mr. Dieng began by welcoming the majority of the participants' reaffirmation of their commitment to RtoP. He also noted that we must recognize the failures of the international community to prevent genocides, as was the case in Rwanda, so that we can learn from them, saying that *"we owe it to the survivors"* to not let such crimes happen again. He also stressed the importance of addressing root causes, including hate speech, a point which former Special Adviser on RtoP, Dr. Edward Luck, picked up on in his remarks. Dr. Luck discussed the difficulty of countering incitement for the commission of atrocity crimes, with Dr. Welsh bringing attention to the importance of inclusive governance and warning against the adoption of exclusionary policies. Mr. Luck also responded to interventions calling for the sequencing of the three pillars. He warned that crises do not follow a predictable pattern and therefore we cannot develop rigid sequences for action to prevent the escalation of situations. He also stressed that the pillars cannot be sequenced as, for example, States always have the primary responsibility to protect populations as a core tenet of sovereignty.

In delivering closing remarks, H.E. Mogens Lykkesoft took note that the dialogue had been a step forward in addressing the challenges facing RtoP's implementation by providing an opportunity for discussion on how the international community might overcome such obstacles. He concluded by reminding States to remember the inspiration behind their commitment to RtoP in 2005, emphasizing that the implementation of RtoP *"constitutes the moral duty in full accordance with the principles of the United Nations."*



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The International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect convenes and collaborates with civil society, Member States, and regional and sub-regional organizations to strengthen normative consensus for RtoP, further the understanding of the norm, push for strengthened capacities to prevent and halt genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and mobilize NGOs to push for action to save lives in RtoP country-specific situations.

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Collection of Full Interventions (in speaking order):

Panelists

[H.E. Mogens Lykketoft](#)
[UN Deputy Secretary-General Mr. Jan Eliasson](#)
[UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Mr. Adama Dieng](#) (French)
[Former UN Special Adviser on R2P Dr. Edward Luck](#)
[Former UN Special Adviser on R2P Dr. Jennifer Welsh](#)

Regional Organizations

[European Union](#) - on behalf of Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, Iceland, Moldova, Montenegro, Turkey and Ukraine, and European Union Member States)

Member States

[The Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect](#) - presented by the Netherlands

[The Netherlands](#) - in national capacity

[Latvia](#) - on behalf of Estonia and Lithuania

[New Zealand](#)

[United Kingdom](#)

[Belgium](#) (French)

[Brazil](#)

[Mexico](#) (Spanish)

[Italy](#)

[Australia](#)

[Thailand](#)

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[Rwanda](#)

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

[Vanuatu](#)

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[Sierra Leone](#)

Iran

Azerbaijan

Civil Society Organizations

[Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect](#)

[International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect](#) (Pour la version française s'il vous plaît cliquez [ici](#).)

[Canadian Centre for the Responsibility to Protect](#)

[Asia-Pacific Centre for R2P](#)

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