

**“From Commitment to Implementation: Ten Years of the Responsibility to Protect”  
Thematic Panel Discussion Convened by the President of the General Assembly**

**Statement by William Pace**

**International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect**

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1. Mr. President, Mr. Deputy Secretary-General, Excellencies, colleagues, I am honored to speak on behalf of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect at today’s unprecedented thematic panel focusing on RtoP. President Lykkesoft, we especially appreciate your presidency’s support for the Responsibility to Protect norm. My name is William Pace, founding Steering Committee member of the ICRtoP. The ICRtoP is the world’s only global civil society network, whose 89 members work to prevent and respond to atrocity crimes through the implementation of the Responsibility to Protect.
2. We would like to thank the Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng, for moderating this meeting, and for his extraordinary work as Under Secretary-General, as well as congratulate the very distinguished panel of Special Adviser Jennifer Welsh, Navi Pillay, Edward Luck and Gareth Evans.
3. Mr. President, the fact that the General Assembly is gathered here today to mark the ten-year anniversary of this landmark achievement is itself a sign of the enormous progress the Responsibility to Protect has made in becoming a universal norm. We celebrate the increasing consensus that sovereignty cannot serve as a shield to commit the worst crimes under international law. However, we must not be blind to the difficulties that lie ahead with the implementation of RtoP. The criminal starvation of entire communities in Syria, the grisly use of cluster munitions against civilians in Yemen, and the abduction of women in South Sudan and Nigeria are just a few reminders of the limitations of well-meaning rhetoric on RtoP.
4. Nevertheless, such challenges only serve to reinforce, not undermine, the need for the Responsibility to Protect, and increase the urgency of taking strong, tangible actions to implement the norm. Those actions to put RtoP into practice can take many forms. At the ground level, the ICRtoP encourages governments and international organizations to **deepen their cooperation with civil society** as a way to uphold RtoP. Civil society actors are often the first to witness indicators of atrocities and their commission, and are thus frequently the primary preventers and responders to these crimes. Investing in civil society is therefore an investment in the prevention of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing.
5. At the national level, the ICRtoP urges States to consider **building national architectures for atrocity prevention**. A “whole of government” approach can transform atrocity prevention and responses from fragmented, often delayed reactions—discussed only after such crimes are imminent or ongoing—into a core priority of the state. The ICRtoP welcomes action by States to undertake such an approach, which can include appointing a Focal Point, developing a national platform, creating a Parliamentary Group, etc., as this will enable governments to become better equipped to prevent and respond to atrocities more quickly and efficiently.

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6. In order to strengthen implementation of the norm at the national, regional, and international levels, the ICRtoP would like to underscore the importance of mainstreaming RtoP within other thematic agendas that share similar conflict prevention strategies and objectives. For example, **sustainable development assistance** that spurs economic growth and social development can defuse triggers or incentives for committing atrocity crimes. In the same vein, **disarmament initiatives** that strive to prevent “the means” with which atrocities are perpetrated from falling into the wrong hands can bolster a State’s ability to uphold its RtoP. Additionally, strengthening the role of women in the implementation of RtoP—as well as recognizing how gender-based human rights violations can serve as indicators of atrocity crimes—can enhance implementation of both RtoP and the **Women, Peace, and Security** agenda. To improve our collective capacity to prevent atrocities, we must therefore strive to better understand how existing programs and activities on these other thematic issues can explicitly address the risk of their commission.
7. Mr. President, when it comes to timely and decisive responses within the Security Council, there has perhaps stood no greater impediment to implementing RtoP over the past ten years than the irresponsible use of the veto in situations of atrocity crimes. Within the past few years alone, we have seen four vetoes destroy the possibility of any unified international response to crimes against humanity and war crimes in Syria. We witnessed a veto that denied the recognition of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre as a genocide. We have watched even the *threat* of a veto sabotage continued discussions on the atrocity crimes in the DPRK. The hundreds of thousands that have suffered from atrocities, partly as a result of this inaction, show us the difficulties of fulfilling our Responsibility to Protect when the veto is wielded in this negligent manner. In this regard, the ICRtoP strongly urges States to **support the “Code of Conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes”, as well as France and Mexico’s political declaration for a regulation on the use of the veto.**
8. Mr. President, extremely important to upholding any of these recommendations on RtoP will be having a continued forum within the General Assembly to discuss the norm. As such, the ICRtoP urges States to support the **draft resolution on RtoP, which would include RtoP on the General Assembly’s formal agenda.** The adoption of RtoP was a collective achievement within *this* UN body. Each one of the States here deserves credit for its adoption; all are affected by the crimes it seeks to prevent; and therefore all have the duty to participate in General Assembly discussions on the UN’s next decade of implementation. The ICRtoP hopes that all delegations will use this opportunity to show the same courage and optimism we saw ten years ago at the World Summit by passing a resolution and recommitting themselves to the norm.
9. In closing, Mr. President, the ICRtoP stands ready as a partner for governments, regional bodies, and the international community to ensure that, in another ten years, we are not only congratulating ourselves on building consensus around a norm, but on having built an international community resilient to atrocities.