The Responsibility to Protect, a new norm for the prevention of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, shares natural linkages with a variety of different sectors. As such, civil society, which includes non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, and the media, is already contributing to the advancement of RtoP and the prevention of and protection from mass atrocities. These efforts include, for example: monitoring crises with an eye on indicators of mass atrocities, and then sharing early warning information with relevant actors; encouraging parties to resolve crises non-violently and supporting or participating in mediation efforts; assisting in post-conflict reconstruction by facilitating peace and development processes; and advocating for the strengthening of institutions to prevent the reoccurrence of atrocity crimes.

Conflict Prevention

Conflict prevention refers to actions that can be undertaken by governments, intergovernmental bodies, and civil society to avoid, minimize or contain violent conflict and involves a range of operational and structural measures. While operational measures strive to prevent the imminent threat of conflict, structural prevention focuses on the long term development of institutions and addresses socioeconomic and political factors that can lead to conflict. Many of these tools are also used to prevent RtoP crimes; however, the scopes of the two agendas are distinct. While conflict prevention seeks to halt the commission of violent armed conflict, RtoP is limited to situations where the four crime and violations, which can occur during both times of conflict or peace, may be committed or are ongoing. Importantly, armed conflict can be an indicator of mass atrocities, illustrating the importance of ensuring preventive efforts continue even after a conflict begins. As such, an ‘atrocities lens’ should be applied to national, regional and international responses to conflict to make certain that policy decisions take into account risk factors for the commission of RtoP crimes.

Human Rights

International human rights law and standards—including the Genocide Convention; Convention against Torture; Covenants on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—are the very foundation of RtoP. Protecting human rights is a core element of responsible sovereignty, and measures to uphold these obligations assist in creating an environment where atrocity crimes cannot and will not be committed. Such actions may include domesticating human rights standards through the adoption of relevant legislation, becoming parties to human rights instruments, and supporting regional and international human rights mechanisms. While not always amounting to the scale of widespread and systematic RtoP crimes, human rights violations are indicators for the
RtoP and...
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commission of atrocities. As such, by documenting and raising alarm on human rights abuses, actors can assist in preventing violations that could result in mass atrocities, as well as ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.

International and Regional Justice

International and regional justice mechanisms and institutions contribute to preventing and responding to mass atrocities by ending impunity, deterring would-be perpetrators, and delivering justice to victims. These institutions work to investigate cases where populations are at risk, and then indict, try and sentence perpetrators, regardless of rank or title, for the commission of atrocities. Additionally, they work to facilitate transitional justice by ensuring accountability for massive human rights violations and establishing a basis for sustainable peace and reconciliation. The International Criminal Court (ICC), which came into force in 2002, is the first permanent international judicial body mandated to investigate the commission of atrocity crimes and try alleged perpetrators. The ICC codifies individual criminal accountability, without impunity for heads of state, and, under the principle of complementarity, investigates possible mass atrocities when national and regional judicial capacities fall short. At the regional level, courts and judicial bodies can enforce state compliance with human rights agreements, providing additional fora through which the commission of RtoP crimes can be investigated and prosecuted. Ad-hoc tribunals have also been established to try individuals responsible for atrocity crimes.

Humanitarian Assistance

Humanitarian assistance includes measures taken by governments, UN bodies, as led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), regional organizations, and civil society to save lives, relieve distress and maintain the dignity of victims during humanitarian emergencies such as conflict, war, or natural or human disasters. While humanitarian actors largely work to provide services in accordance with the guiding principles of neutrality, independence, humanity and impartiality, each actor and humanitarian service delivery organization determines its own relationship with these principles. Like RtoP, humanitarian assistance is founded on international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, and both agendas view the state as responsible for protecting civilians. However, humanitarian actors require the permission of the host state to deliver aid and services, whereas some reactive measures to protect populations from RtoP crimes are implemented without the consent of the concerned state. Additionally, both agendas place critical importance on the role of the international community to assist if state capacity is limited. Humanitarian assistance is critical for protecting populations from RtoP crimes and can serve as one element of a comprehensive strategy to prevent atrocities, but such responses must not be implemented in place of other tools. Additionally, although humanitarian actors provide life-saving assistance to populations threatened by atrocity crimes, the agenda’s scope is broader than RtoP, as humanitarian assistance seeks to aid civilians during a range of natural and human-made emergencies, whereas RtoP’s application is limited to the four crimes and violations.

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding activities seek to reduce the risk of conflict, or prevent its recurrence by enabling countries to successfully build sustainable peace and promote development. To this end, the peacebuilding agenda includes a broad range of initiatives, such as examining and addressing root causes of violence, reforming legislative and judicial processes, curtailing access to arms, providing support to victims, and establishing reconciliation mechanisms, many of which are also atrocity prevention tools. RtoP and peacebuilding both place responsibility on the state to implement and drive action, and acknowledge that the international community must assist in building state capacity. However, it is only under RtoP that the international community is obligated to respond should the state fail to protect populations. Additionally, as with many other agendas, actions employed under both RtoP and peacebuilding must be tailored to the needs of the country. Despite these similarities, the scope and goals of RtoP and peacebuilding differ as RtoP focuses specifically on preventing and halting mass atrocities, whereas peacebuilding broadly seeks to prevent conflict or its reoccurrence. At the international level, the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), which is a political and non-operational body, is tasked with assisting countries emerging from conflict by advising on peacebuilding strategies and coordinating actors and resources within and outside the UN system. While the Commission is not limited to situations
where RtoP crimes have occurred, several countries on the PBC’s agenda, including Burundi, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, have experienced such atrocities.

The Proliferation and Trade of Small Arms and Other Weapons

The irresponsible transfer of weapons and ammunition, along with the proliferation of illicit small arms, have a direct impact on the prevention of mass atrocities and can hinder a government’s ability to protect its population. In part because small arms and ammunition can be easily transferred, stolen or diverted, they are frequently the weapons of choice in armed conflicts. Illicit arms can also fuel disputes that might otherwise be solved through diplomatic efforts, risking the escalation of conflict to the level of mass atrocities, and may be used to undermine a state’s security sector, as well as regional or international capacity-building mechanisms seeking to stabilize potential crises. Governments have adopted and continue to strengthen platforms for legislative reform to curtail the illegal transfer of arms and ammunition. In 2001, Member States committed to stop the illicit and irresponsible trade of small arms through the UN Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons. Additionally, in September 2013, the Security Council adopted Resolution 2117 regarding the prevention of the illicit transfer and usage of small arms and light weapons. The Resolution specifically recognized the impact of the use of such weapons in the commission of atrocity crimes and reaffirmed the Responsibility to Protect, as included within the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document. With regards to regulating the transfer of conventional weapons, states adopted the Arms Trade Treaty in 2013, which includes provisions to prevent arms transfers where there is substantial risk that the weapons will be used to commit atrocity crimes.

The Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict

The protection of civilians agenda (POC), which has been included as a thematic issue on the UN Security Council’s agenda since 1999, is a framework for the UN’s diplomatic, legal, humanitarian, and human rights activities to protect populations during armed conflict. The Responsibility to Protect is closely related to POC, as both agendas seek to protect individuals and are grounded in international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law. References have been made to RtoP during previous debates on POC among Member States, as well as within UN Security Council Resolutions 1674 (2006) and 1894 (2009), the

Women, Peace and Security

While further action needs to be taken to enhance the development of a gender approach to RtoP, the norm’s framework can serve as an essential complement to the existing set of intergovernmental commitments to women’s human rights and security, such as the Beijing Platform for Action and UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1888, 1889 and 1960 on women, peace and security. “Engendering the Responsibility to Protect” entails incorporating women’s leadership and ensuring that there is equal representation in preventing and stopping atrocities, as well as resolution and rebuilding efforts. Alongside the recognition and promotion of the role of women in these processes, there has been an increased awareness that conflict and post-conflict reconciliation affect men and women differently. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has reiterated that rape and other forms of sexual violence could amount to mass atrocities, and that gender-based violence can be an early warning indicator of RtoP crimes. Nonetheless, sexual and gender-based violence continues largely unabated, with limited information and resources to understand why. This pattern must be reversed to ensure more effective prevention when populations are threatened by RtoP crimes and violations.
Exploring the Relationship between the Responsibility to Protect and Your Sector

What more can your organization do to advance RtoP?

While the Responsibility to Protect begins first and foremost with the state, civil society organizations are crucial actors and ready partners for making the prevention of atrocities a reality. Civil society can take a range of actions independently or as part of a network to promote RtoP, including:

- Building understanding of RtoP by educating the public, governments, parliamentarians, media, private sector, and academia;
- Conducting research and publishing policy briefs on various aspects of RtoP and related themes;
- Calling for national, regional, and international actors to strengthen early warning mechanisms to prevent atrocities and to take action when there is an imminent risk to populations;
- Advocating for increased support of the norm by calling for politicians to make references to RtoP in relevant statements and documents as well as the adoption of legislation to domesticate the norm's principles.
- Using the RtoP norm to hold governments, regional, and other intergovernmental bodies accountable for their shared commitment to prevent and halt atrocity crimes.

Join the ICRtoP!

In addition to the above actions, your organization can join the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, the global civil society network dedicated to advancing the Responsibility to Protect and atrocities prevention more broadly at the international, regional, sub-regional, and national levels. The Coalition believes that:

- A global network of civil society organizations dedicated to the prevention of mass atrocities is essential to amplify the voices of all organizations as we call on governments, regional organizations, and the international community to strengthen their capacities to prevent and halt mass atrocities.
- Working in a coalition allows NGOs to draw on the membership’s global expertise and can facilitate information sharing and collaboration.

To learn more about how your organization can become part of the global movement to prevent atrocities and advance RtoP, visit www.responsibilitytoprotect.org or contact us by email at membership@responsibilitytoprotect.org

INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

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, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing, and mobilize NGOs to push for action to save lives in RtoP country-specific situations.

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