



**PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

231 East 51st Street, New York, NY 10022
Tel: 212-826 0840 x 104 · Fax: 212-826 2964
Website: <http://www.mfa.gov.sg/newyork>

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR ALBERT CHUA,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SINGAPORE
TO THE UNITED NATIONS,
AT THE INFORMAL INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE
ON THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT (R2P)
5 SEPTEMBER 2012**

Mr Chairman,

1 Mr President, thank you for convening this discussion. I also thank the Secretary-General for his commitment to this important issue.

2 Singapore has long been a supporter of R2P. The 2005 World Summit Outcome Document outlines a clear commitment by our Leaders to strengthening the international community, in particular the United Nations', response to impending mass atrocities. We welcome the Secretary-General's report A/66/874 as a continued contribution to pushing the R2P concept forward. In particular, the report provides a useful examination of the wide range of implementation tools under Pillar Three.

3 As other colleagues have already dealt with the SG's report in detail, I will not cover the same ground. Instead, to stimulate debate, I propose to be frank, even provocative. If we do not want such thematic debates to be ritualistic rehashing of well-canvassed views, we must tackle the heart of the matter head-on. I will make three points.

4 First, we need to move beyond the mantra that all three Pillars of R2P are equally "important", "interactive", "mutually reinforcing" and "supportive". I doubt that Member States would have any problems with Pillars One and Two as it is expected that all states will promise to build

strong domestic norms and institutions to protect their own people from heinous crimes like genocide, and the international community will naturally try to assist them. Moreover, the commitments under Pillars One and Two are already enshrined in existing international obligations with regards to human rights, state responsibilities and national development. In other words, Pillars One and Two are window dressing.

5 Pillar Three, on the other hand, is the crux. The notion advanced in Pillar Three is that *should a national government fail in its responsibility to protect, the international community must take action in a timely and decisive manner*. This is the fundamental principle behind the R2P concept. No one can seriously object to non-coercive measures such as negotiation, preventive diplomacy, good offices or mediation. Instead, the concern is over the use of coercive or military measures against the will of Member States. If we are serious about making R2P a foundation of the UN's work in ensuring international peace and security, we need to focus on this critical aspect.

6 My second point is that we must acknowledge the deep ambivalence over the role played by the Security Council. For all the rhetoric about other parts of the UN system dealing with R2P, it is ultimately the Security Council that will respond to R2P situations. Though many have hailed the Security Council's actions in Libya as a vindication of R2P, the reality is far more complex. There remain deep concerns over how Libya was handled. Some would say that there was "buyer's regret" amongst those Security Council members who had supported Council action in Libya. How R2P was invoked to justify Council action on Libya has cast a long shadow, resulting in the current impasse over Syria. Arguably, what happened with Libya has not only not helped the long-term development of R2P but may have done it damage.

7 Against this backdrop, Brazil's paper on "Responsibility While Protecting" is an important effort in bringing these issues into focus and contributing to an honest discussion on R2P. I do not see how we can make real progress with R2P and in particular, Pillar Three, unless hard questions like those raised in Brazil's paper about the workings and decisions of the Security Council are debated and answered.

8 My third point is that we need to discuss in particular the use of the veto by Permanent 5 members in R2P situations. Let me put the question bluntly - how can we, the UN membership, be assured that in times of need, the Security Council will actually act “in a timely and decisive manner”? During the genocide in Rwanda, there was no UN intervention because some P5 members resisted defining the massacres as genocide. Worse still, the Security Council withdrew most of the UN peacekeepers in Rwanda, thereby condemning many innocent Rwandans to death. If the membership of the United Nations is prepared to allow the Security Council to invoke the principle of R2P to justify coercive or even military action, the Council must in turn commit to exercising this responsibility “without fear or favour”.

9 However, is there real commitment to R2P where it counts the most, in the Security Council, especially when R2P intersects with national interests? The problem is not just that vetoes are used to block action in R2P situations; at least some of those countries are honest about what motivates their refusal to act. The problem is that when push comes to shove, even those who claim to be fervent supporters of R2P are not willing to take real steps to uphold it.

10 One small example serves to illustrate this point. Earlier in May, Costa Rica, Jordan, Liechtenstein, Singapore and Switzerland – what was formerly known as the Small 5 or S5 - tabled a resolution on improving the working methods of the Security Council. This resolution was ultimately withdrawn for a number of reasons, most notably the strong and unified opposition from the P5. P5 members were particularly unhappy about the proposals concerning the veto, including the recommendation that they consider refraining from using the veto to block Council action aimed at preventing or ending genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

11 In other words, the P5 refused to agree that their veto power should not be used to block action in impending R2P situations. They wanted to reserve *their* right to use *their* veto power, even if there was evidence of impending mass atrocity crimes. And this position was shared by *all* the P5 members. Even those P5 countries who are fervent supporters of R2P, who loudly and repeatedly express outrage at what is happening within the Council on Syria, particularly when the double-vetoes were

exercised, are the same ones who adamantly reject any limitations on the use of the veto. Trumpeting one's moral outrage over the Council's non-action seems to be particularly hypocritical because whatever divisions there may be amongst the P5 on R2P, they are united in their common interests in having no limits placed on their use, or even abuse, of the veto.

12 If the international community wishes to make genuine progress on R2P, we must tackle these difficult and fundamental issues head-on. Certainly, the General Assembly can continue to hold thematic discussions on R2P but at its core, if those who hold the greatest responsibility for ensuring the implementation of R2P are not willing to act in a responsible manner, where does it leave the rest of us?

13 I am particularly struck by one of the "lessons learnt" that the Secretary-General mentions in his report: that it is critical to apply R2P principles consistently in rhetoric and implementation so as to guard against accusations of double standards and selectivity. We do not seem to be learning this lesson well. Support for R2P will be affected if the principle is seen to be applied selectively, as this will lead countries to be cynical about the agenda behind R2P. For R2P to become an international norm that can deter impunity and prevent mass atrocities, it cannot be tarnished by suspicions of domestic agendas, national self-interest or worse still, political grandstanding. Otherwise no number of Secretariat reports, thematic debates or high-faluting statements will be able to change the fate of R2P becoming merely a catchy buzzword to bolster our collective sense of moral righteousness.

.....