

The Responsibility to Protect: from early warning to early action

9th Annual Report of the Secretary-General on RtoP

summary of the SG report on the RtoP:

With the increasing prevalence of conflict worldwide, the Secretary-General's Report urgently calls on the international community to renew their commitment to the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, and close the gap between our words and action.

prevention

This year's report is a continuation of last year's theme of prevention. Using a prevention lens, the SG argues that prevention activities center on cooperation and willingness of its participants and proposes multiple ways to strengthen our resolve to act.

collaboration

The SG Report focuses on collaboration: between all levels of government, but also between a wider range of stakeholders. Working together strengthens our resolve and commitment to atrocity prevention activities.

utilization

We need to better utilize the mechanisms that are already available. Using tools from human rights, development, and international relations, we can build atrocity prevention activities into the systems and institutions we have already created.

Prioritizing Prevention and Collaboration



Multilevel collaboration

"No single country can solve the problems we face on its own."

The report largely encompasses strategies of atrocity prevention that center on collaboration at local, regional, nation, and international levels.

Mobilization

"We must include not only those with the greatest responsibility to protect populations but those who are in the best position to support effective action."

State bodies should look to actors such as mediators, human rights defenders, religious and business leaders, and youth for their expertise and advice in prevention and accountability activities.

Using existing mechanisms

"Atrocity prevention must be simultaneously top-down and bottom-up."

The report stresses that we must take advantage of existing mechanisms such as the Human Rights Council, the Universal Periodic Review, and special procedures. By engaging with these mechanisms the international community can connect with actors on the ground and vice versa.

EARLY WARNING: WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?



01

The Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes:

Developed by the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, the document provides a guide geared towards uncovered atrocity risks. The SG encourages more states to adopt and utilize this strategy.

02

The Secretary-General and Special Advisers:

The Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect will continue to monitor potential atrocity risk situations. At the same time, the Human Rights Up Front Initiative focuses on prevention by cutting across the pillars of peace, human rights, and security.



01

Regional Organizations:

Regional and sub-regional organizations have tremendous power to influence national authorities into compliance with atrocity prevention tactics. The AU and EU have also incorporated early warning mechanisms in order to predict potential atrocities into their peace and security platforms.

02

Member States:

States should, individually, incorporate atrocity prevention into its other economic, political, and development policies. By training officials, including military personnel, to recognize potential risks strengthens warning efforts.



01

Organizations and communities:

Reports from civil society organizations that follow ongoing situations as developments occur allow national authorities to create policy that is well informed, accurate and tailored to each scenario.

Early action benefits from the work of a variety of institutions with relevant expertise at local, national, regional, and global levels. The SG Report notes that Member States can actually strengthen their sovereignty by taking swift action, as it reduces the need for international intervention.

The Report proposes a three-pronged approach to incite action in atrocity risk situations:



RtoP needs to be better incorporated throughout the UN system. The UNSG calls on stakeholders to normalize discussions on the RtoP, making it a standing agenda item in the UNGA and for the UNSC to refrain from using the veto in atrocity situations. By making better use of UN mechanisms like the Universal Periodic Review, treaty bodies, and the Human Rights Council, and using UN Field Operations to reduce tensions, states can domesticate the RtoP.



As outlined in Pillar One, states have the primary responsibility for protecting their populations and be accountable towards them. States can undertake accountability measures by adopting and implementing RtoP-related recommendations from human rights bodies. They can also allocate more resources towards addressing root causes such as human rights, development, and prevention activities. Finally, states can adopt additional accountability measures in their national systems or by becoming party to the ICC.



Civil Society is the link between all levels of interaction. CSOs can mediate disputes, support the rule of law and peace building, assist relief, aid, and protection efforts. Including a wide range of participants and communities increases ownership and initiative in avoiding conflict. By giving voice to underrepresented and marginalized populations, societies become more resilient. The SG Report stresses the inclusion of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda as a key activity.

key take aways



The international community continues to fall short of implementing the RtoP

In spite of domesticating the RtoP, states continue to fall short in meeting their responsibility to protect when it comes to preventing atrocity crimes and protecting vulnerable populations.

States should strengthen warning systems and response mechanisms

The international community should strengthen its prevention mechanisms and promote accountability for atrocity crimes. The SG's office found that by including civilians in prevention efforts, societies are able to move more quickly when warning signs are present. The report emphasizes that inclusive efforts increase stakeholder investment in maintaining peace and preventing conflict.

Focus on practical steps of prevention to implement RtoP

The RtoP principle asks us to learn from past injustices in order to build more resilient societies by building institutions and societal expectations that focus on prevention.



We still struggle with the gap between policy and practice

The gap between Member States' commitment to protecting vulnerable people and the marginalization of these populations has grown. Due to the interconnected nature of today's global society, the SG believes there is a need to strengthen cooperation, multilateral institutions, and expand inclusive dialog to address today's crises.

Effective prevention requires prioritizing early warning and early action

Early warning and assessment mechanisms do not necessarily translate into early action, and the report advocates the need to make this the focus and priority in future efforts.

The mechanisms for prevention already exist, but we must use them

We must encourage participation and broaden the range of actors in atrocity prevention. By mobilizing existing resources and institutions, partnerships and effective use of existing mechanisms will make prevention efforts more successful.