

## Protection of Civilians: Security Council Open Debates Reference RtoP

On 28 April 2006, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1674 on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. [Resolution 1674](#) contains the first official Security Council reference to the Responsibility to Protect. On 11 November 2009, during its eighth debate on the POC, the Security Council adopted [Resolution 1894](#), in which Member States expressed a continued commitment to RtoP.

Semi-annual [open debates](#) of the Security Council on the protection of civilians around the world and the Security Council's response to these crises have become a regular follow-up to the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict resolutions.

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## Background on the Protection of Civilians Agenda

The protection of civilians agenda is a framework for the UN's diplomatic, legal, humanitarian, and human rights activities directed at the protection of populations during armed conflict. The Security Council has included the protection of civilians as a thematic issue on its agenda since 1999, with a particular focus on the duties of states and the role of the Security Council in addressing the needs of vulnerable populations including refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), women and children.

This agenda is directed at ensuring that all parties "understand how their responsibilities for the protection of civilians should be translated into action" (as described by the Secretary-General in his [28 November 2005 report](#)). In this context, the [World Summit Outcome Document](#)

endorsement of a responsibility to protect populations against genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing was a major development for the Security Council to consider (see more below).

## Security Council Resolution 1674

On 28 April 2006, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1674 on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict. [Resolution 1674](#) contains the first official Security Council reference to the Responsibility to Protect: it "reaffirms the provisions of  [paragraphs 138 and 139](#)

of the World Summit Outcome Document regarding the responsibility to protect populations

from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.”

Inclusion of RtoP in this resolution received considerable governmental support, as evidenced by the Security Council open debate on 9 December 2005 at UN HQ in New York. Twenty-one governments spoke in favor of RtoP and its inclusion in the Protection of Civilians resolution. View a transcript of the [morning](#) and [afternoon](#) sessions of this debate or view the [excerpts of statements on RtoP](#).

The resolution on the protection of civilians was expected to pass in December 2005, but reference to RtoP was among the major points of disagreement among member states that stalled negotiations. Some Security Council members expressed opposition to any further codification of a Responsibility to Protect, seeking to undo or at least restrict the achievements of the Summit in this area. Others wanted the Security Council to refrain from discussing RtoP prior to the consideration of these concepts in the General Assembly. As a result, the final resolution language on RtoP is weaker than the [original draft resolution](#).

### **Security Council Resolution 1894**

On 11 November 2009, during its Eighth Debate on the Protection of Civilians in armed conflict, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1894, which contains the following paragraph on RtoP:

*Reaffirming the relevant provision of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document regarding the protection of civilians in armed conflict, including paragraphs 138 and 139 thereof regarding the responsibility to protect population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (...)*

In this resolution, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to RtoP and reiterated their continued efforts to prevent the victimization of civilians in armed conflict. Resolution 1894 drew upon Resolution 1674, adopted on 28 April 2006, which contained the first official Security Council reference to RtoP.

During the Eighth Debate, after the resolution was adopted, fifty-six Member States in addition to Palestine and Malta, the Non-Aligned Movement, the EU, and the African Group made statements, and fourteen of these Member States referred to RtoP during their statement. ( [see more about the eighth debate](#)

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[SC Resolution 1894](#)

and the

[excerpted statements](#)

by Member States.

### **Security Council's Focus on RtoP**

In the World Summit Outcome document, specifically Paragraph 139, world leaders pledged that the international community, acting through the Security Council “was prepared to take collective action” in a timely and decisive manner” when states are “manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.”

With a reaffirmation of this provision in Resolution 1674, the Security Council itself accepts the commitment made at the September Summit and further codifies RtoP principles into the UN system: according to the UN Charter, all UN member states are obligated to accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council.

Neither the resolution nor the Summit Outcome Document, however, automatically ensure that timely action will be taken by the Security Council. The World Summit Outcome language leaves the Security Council the discretion as to when it might act (“on a case by case basis”). For millions of civilians suffering or at risk of violence as a result of armed conflict, Security Council action often come too late, if at all. The Security Council must work to fulfill this commitment by responding earlier to warning signals using a range of measures commensurate with the seriousness of the threat to populations. This responsibility must be a political priority for member states as they deliberate on next steps for current and future crises. Reform of the Security Council’s working methods – for example, an agreement by permanent Council members to refrain from use of the veto in instances of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing – is also imperative.

### **Security Council Open Debates**

**Nine open debates have been held so far. For a summary of the discussions, along with excerpts of government statements and full transcripts of the meeting,** [click here](#) .

Semi-annual open debates of the Security Council on the protection of civilians around the world and the Security Council’s response to these crises have become a regular follow-up to the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict resolutions. Some governments hope that these regular briefings, high-lighting situations where civilians are in danger around the world and giving Member States the opportunity to make statements on the Security Council’s role in protecting civilians, will be a new mechanism to spur better and earlier responses to these crises. A few governments have noted [Security Council Resolution 1612](#) on Children in Armed Conflict as a possible model.

### **Concerns**

In the last year, there have been concerns from Members States regarding the potential effects of associating the RtoP agenda (which remains a misunderstood concept) to the protection of civilians agenda, a long and hard-won campaign in the Security Council. However, as the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect writes in its January 2009 [Policy Brief](#) , “It is vital that fulfilling and advancing the well-established agenda of the protection of civilians in armed conflict is not held hostage by the controversy associated with RtoP. Yet it is not possible to deny the relationship between these two agendas that share legal underpinnings, moral force and Security Council commitments. Instead, supporters need to challenge misperceptions and

misrepresentations of both. This requires supporters to mount a robust, articulate defence of the connections and differences between the protection of civilians and R2P; to reject inaccurate characterizations that reduce either agenda to the use of force; and to remind critics that the common moral purpose of both agendas is to respect our common humanity and limit human suffering.”

**Additional Resources:**

[Civil Society letter to the Security Council calling for R2P in the Protection of Civilians resolution \(PDF\)](#)

[January 2009 Policy Brief by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect on the relationship between R2P and the &#160;&#160; Protection of Civilians](#)

[Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict \(2001\) \(PDF\)](#)  
[Security Council resolution 1296 \(2000\) \(PDF\)](#)    [Security Council resolution 1265 \(1999\) \(PDF\)](#)