

Protection gaps for civilian victims of political violence South African Journal of
International Affairs
Thakur
er 2013

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Octob

This article begins by explaining why the United Nations' civilian protection agenda is particularly relevant and important for Africa and why the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) might be said to be an African norm exported to the rest of the world. Next, it traces the reasons for peace operations' reluctance to use force. It then shows how the civilian protection agenda has tried to fill critical gaps in the existing normative architecture, with both R2P and the Protection of Civilians (POC) resulting from growing shame at the accumulating list of atrocities in which the international community stood by as passive onlookers, frustrations at the 'constitutional' constraints and normative inadequacies rather than indifference and apathy to the plight of civilian victims that produced the passivity, and a determination to reposition the United Nations system to be empowered and capacitated to be able to respond better on both the timeliness and effectiveness dimensions when confronted by repeat occurrences of similar tragedies. The fourth section discusses the merits of the R2P and POC norms in responding to the challenge of civilian protection. The final part notes that, despite these two valuable additions to the repertoire of the international community in dealing with atrocities perpetrated on civilians, there remain many gaps in the protection agenda, as shown in several recent cases.

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