

General Assembly Interactive Dialogue on Early Warning, Assessment and the Responsibility to Protect

9 August 2010 *The General Assembly (GA) held an informal interactive dialogue on Monday, 9 August on 'Early warning, assessment and the responsibility to protect' in response to the 14 July [report of the Secretary General \(A/64/864\)](#) on the issue.*

The dialogue took place in follow up to the July 2009 GA debate on the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP), where Member States agreed (resolution A/RES/63/308) to continue consideration of RtoP.

On the occasion of the second meeting of the GA on RtoP, a total of 42 Member States, 2 representatives from regional organizations and 2 representatives from civil society spoke at the dialogue. A strong majority of States reaffirmed support for the emerging RtoP norm, welcomed the report of the Secretary General (SG) and called for continued discussions on RtoP in the GA. A range of constructive questions and concerns were raised about how the UN system can best gather and analyze information, develop policy options and translate them into early engagement. Not surprisingly, a few expected detractors continued to question the definition of RtoP and what has been agreed to by the GA.

The next steps at the UN on RtoP will include concrete proposals later this year by the SG to the

Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) and the Fifth Committee on the creation of a joint office between the Special Advisors for the Prevention of Genocide and for the Responsibility to Protect.

I. Opening Statements and Panel of Experts

The dialogue began with a brief opening from Acting GA President, H.E. Mrs. Byrganym Aitimova, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the UN, followed by a short [statement from the Secretary General](#)

. The SG's statement largely echoed his report, recalling that the mandate to strengthen the UN's early warning capabilities originated during the 2005 World Summit, presenting main gaps and challenges with early warning and assessment, and providing an overview of his plans to create a joint office between the Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect. The SG also noted the excellent participation of Member States, which showed strong interest on the subject.

Following the SG's statement, a

panel of five experts

made preliminary remarks. Panelists included

[Dr. Edward Luck](#)

, Special Advisor on the Responsibility to Protect;

[Dr. Francis Deng](#)

, Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide;

[Dr. Bertrand Ramcharan](#)

, First Swiss Chair of Human Rights and former
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ad interim;

[Dr.](#)

[Andrea Bartoli](#)

¹
Director of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University; and

[Dr. Muna Ndulo](#)

, Director for the Institute for African Development, Cornell Law School.

II. Statements by Member States

Following the panel,

42 Member States and 2 representatives from regional organizations

took the floor.

1. General themes and overall support for the Responsibility to Protect

Many Member States **welcomed the latest report of the SG** and voiced their support for **continued discussions of RtoP within the GA**

. While some noted that the focus of this year's dialogue was specifically on early warning and assessment, most Member States nonetheless recalled the basic principles underlying RtoP, as highlighted in the 2009 debate, namely that:

1. the scope of **RtoP is limited to four crimes and violations**; genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity

2. that **RtoP enhances the sovereignty of the States** by emphasizing the primary responsibility of States to protect their populations

3. that **RtoP is rooted in existing international law**

4. that **prevention is the heart of RtoP**.

Many Member States recognized the growing consensus for the norm since the 2005 World Summit and noted the considerable progress that has been made in taking it forward. 2. Early warning and assessment

Noting the gaps outlined in the report, many Member States agreed that

the real challenge is to translate information into analysis and then into action

. Member States spoke of a real need to “develop early understanding”, which could aid in an informed assessment of a particular situation and to the development of policy options. These steps are critical for ensuring

early engagement

to address deteriorating situations before it is too late.

Information sharing, coordination of information and analysis A recurrent theme throughout the debate was the need to ensure that

information received comes from credible sources, provided in a timely way and on a confidential basis

. Multiple sources of information should be sought, including from UN funds, programs and agencies, as well as field missions. Many Member States supported information coming from **civil society**

. There were a few calls for Member States to overcome their inherent unwillingness to provide sensitive information. Consensus was voiced that proper

coordination and cooperation

between multiple actors within the UN system was a crucial premise for improving early warning and early engagement. It was mentioned that the OSAPG’s current

Framework of Analysis

would need to integrate the three other crimes included under the RtoP. Integrating a **gender perspective**

was also recognized as essential for stronger and more accurate prevention system.

Proposal of the Secretary General to create a joint office

Many Member States voiced support toward efforts to ensure collaboration of the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Advisor for the Responsibility to Protect including the

creation of a joint office

, which would align the complementary mandates and ensure budgetary efficiency. Questions were raised as to how specifically the office would address the gaps in the coordination of information, how the Special Advisors would divide their work and how the

emergency convening mechanism

would operate. One Member State asked whether it might make sense to create an RtoP office headed by a USG which would have different departments (genocide, etc.). Another State indicated the wish that the Special Advisors

speak publically during crises

, as they did in their joint statement on crisis in Kyrgyzstan. Member States indicated that they **were looking forward to hearing additional details about these proposals**

, which Dr. Luck explained would come later this year during the ACABQ and 5th

Committee meetings. Some Member States questioned whether governments should have a

role in voicing

how the SG structures his office

(as per Article 97 of the UN Charter). Finally, some Member States mentioned that while strengthening the UN Secretariat was important,

effective prevention would come from building regional and national capacities

Cooperation with regional organizations and sub-regional organizations

There was wide consensus that

regional and sub-regional organizations are key partners for the UN on early warning, capable of collecting and providing information and engaging early to prevent and stabilize crises.

The European Union, the African Union and ECOWAS in particular were mentioned since they are closely cooperating already on the development of early warning systems and early engagement frameworks. The proposal to

continue discussions in the GA

, specifically on the subject of the role of regional and sub-regional organizations next year, was particularly well received by Member States.

Support for civil society organizations (CSO) in contributing to early warning

A high number of Member States recognized the

crucial role that civil society organizations

can play in providing early warning information to key actors. CSOs often have access to conflict zones and are in direct contact with victims, allowing them to provide unique types of information.

3. Expected opposition to RtoP

Strong opposition only came from a few States which mentioned similar criticism as had been heard in last year's GA debate on RtoP (

[see 2009 ICRtoP report](#)

). These statements questioned whether RtoP had a

legal status under international law

, misrepresented RtoP as a doctrine aimed at justifying

military intervention

and insisted that RtoP was inherently contradictory to

national sovereignty

. The need to reform the

Security Council

to address the selectivity in its reaction to crisis situations was also reiterated, as well as the need to increase the

role of the General Assembly

rather than the Security Council in taking measures to address mass atrocities. New concerns touched on whether Member States should have the principal role in making decisions for taking RtoP forward, as opposed to it being centralized within the Secretariat or with the two Special Advisers. Similarly, there was a minority of Member States who questioned

whether a mandate from the GA exists for RtoP

III. Statements from civil society

Finally, two CSOs were given the opportunity to take the floor.

[Ms. Doris Mpoumou](#)

, Director of the

International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect

emphasized the strong support of civil society for the Responsibility to Protect, adding that CSOs can play an important role in providing early warning information, mobilizing in the face of RtoP crimes, and being close partners for the UN and Member States in advancing RtoP.

[Ms. Mónica Serrano](#)

, Executive Director of the

Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

recalled that strong lessons from the past demand that efforts for enhancing the capacity for early warning and assessment be taken seriously. She stressed that RtoP challenges the notion that the international community cannot confront and halt the most heinous of crimes.

IV. Collection of Statements from Member States (in order of presentation):

Cuba

[Costa Rica](#)

India

[Benin](#)

[United States](#)

[Senegal](#)

[European Union](#)

[Netherlands](#)

Bosnia and Herzegovina

[Argentina](#)

[Guatemala](#)

(
[Español](#)
)

[El Salvador](#)

[Germany](#)

Chile

Islamic Republic of Iran

[Brazil](#)

United Kingdom

France

Canada

[Tanzania](#)

Peru

[Pakistan](#)

Sudan

[Nigeria](#)

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Botswana

[Switzerland](#)

Uruguay

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Georgia

Ghana

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China

African Union (observer)

Italy

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