

The Unfulfilled Promise of UN protection Lloyd Axworthy and Allan Rock The Globe and Mail  
15 September 2010

*Lloyd Axworthy is president of the University of Winnipeg and a former Canadian foreign minister. Allan Rock is president of the University of Ottawa and a former special adviser to the United Nations on Sri Lanka.*

Five years ago this week, with the horrors of Rwanda and Srebrenica still vivid in memory, the members of the United Nations vowed to take collective action, including military force if necessary, to prevent or stop mass violence within a state when the national government is unable or unwilling to do so. (...)

(...) As former political practitioners who respectively played a role in the conception of R2P (through the establishment of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty) and then its adoption (by leading the Canadian advocacy and negotiation efforts at the 2005 UN World Summit in New York), we find after five years reason for both encouragement and disappointment.

On the positive side, R2P is increasingly secure as an emerging norm of international conduct. It has been reaffirmed by the UN Security Council in responding to protection issues. The Secretary-General has created in-house mechanisms to institutionalize it. Best of all, a 2009 debate in the General Assembly that might have risked a repeal turned instead into an overwhelming confirmation of its value.

On the other hand, R2P has failed to fulfill its promise in places such as Darfur and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Theoretical advances are of no comfort to defenceless civilians savaged by lawless militias or wicked regimes. Even R2P's most ardent advocates have asked whether anything has really changed. Why didn't this breakthrough save civilian populations whose own governments were unable or unwilling to protect them? We suggest that there are two related issues to be addressed before R2P can move fully from paper to practice.

First, resort to R2P has been timid and halting. In Darfur, it should have been the fulcrum to leverage wider condemnation of the Khartoum regime. Early and vigorous shunning might have halted the state-sponsored violence. In the Congo, the sexual devastation of vast numbers of women by roving criminals is an atrocity needing an international response because the national government is incapable of protecting them. In such clear cases, we should lose our shyness about invoking R2P. Timely and concerted action – even well short of military intervention (the very last resort) – can save lives.

Second, the R2P “toolbox” must be filled with items needed to make the concept operational. The early-warning system agreed to in 2005 has yet to be put in place. R2P still lacks a gender dimension for the protection of women and girls, demonstrated dramatically by the systematic rape of hundreds of females in the Congo this summer and the abject failure of UN peacekeepers to protect them.

Other items of unfinished business include:

- A wider range of targeted sanctions with maximum impact on a rogue regime. More creative thought is needed to develop population-friendly, regime-punishing, pressure-producing, readily enforceable and truly effective sanctions.
- Trained mediators for early deployment to ensure that violence doesn't spiral into mass atrocity. Kofi Annan's intervention in Kenya is a textbook example of R2P at work, preventing the post-election violence from becoming an all-out ethnic bloodbath. Our capacity for such activist diplomacy must be built up.
- A standing rapid-response force with specialized training and equipment, so that protection is only a few hours away when the Security Council authorizes protection. The current practice of cobbling a force together from many contributing countries takes months and produces an uncoordinated team with uneven preparation.

Above all, R2P needs a champion, a role that Canada once played. If we win election to the Security Council next month, our country should rediscover this important cause. (...) By advocating R2P in appropriate cases and fashioning tools to make it effective, Canada can ensure that humanity makes the most of this historic breakthrough.

Read  
[full story](#)