

Inching Toward Global 'Responsibility to Protect'

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The concept of the responsibility to protect (R2P) has been refined and re-articulated, in documents such as the 2001 Canadian-sponsored report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, in the agreed language in the 2005 World Summit outcome document, and in Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon's report on *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*, published in January of 2009 and finally debated in July 2009.

Early opinion on R2P focused on conditions for military intervention to confront mass atrocity crimes, but there is now a broader understanding of the doctrine, one that emphasizes strengthening state capacity to prevent such crimes in the first place.

(...)

This evolved understanding of R2P shifts debate further away from requirements and conditions for intervention, and focuses on the role of the state as one of „sovereignty as responsibility.“ It accommodates the views and concerns of southern governments and, to a lesser extent, civil society organizations, and opens up a broader possible range of responses and actions in support of R2P which have little to do with intervention and more to do with state capacity-building.

(...)

But now that the UN debate on the R2P report has taken place, what initiatives will further promote R2P? In particular, what can civil society do?

Important organizational building blocks for civil society engagement on R2P were laid just prior to the General Assembly debate. In 2008, seven regional civil society consultations on the responsibility to protect were held in capitals around the world. This led to the launch in January 2009 of the new International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP; see www.responsibilitytoprotect.org). The New York offices of the World Federalist Movement–Institute for Global Policy (WFM–IGP) serve as the administrative home for the new coalition.

(...)

So, the picture that emerges is of an R2P bus that is moving forward, slowly. The ICRtoP and Global Centre show there is a growing number of NGOs and academics getting on the bus. But there are large mountains ahead, and no clear consensus on which route to take. The „R2P community“ is comprised for the most part of NGOs, officials and academics who are realistic and understanding of the slow pace of change: many even advocate such incrementalism.

But if R2P is ever to become a reality, there are at least two major changes in the UN“s machinery that are unavoidable. One is the need for a rapid reaction capability for UN peace operations. The other is Security Council reform.

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