

Ray of hope at UN

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Out of the ashes of the sweeping reform that United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed for the institution on its 60th anniversary, one ember of hope is still burning. It is a Canadian initiative, a policy called "responsibility to protect."

Under this policy, the UN will have greater powers to intervene when a member state fails in its responsibility to protect its citizens, as in Rwanda, for example, during the 1994 massacres of 800,000 people.

Until now, the doctrine of non-intervention in the internal matters of a sovereign state held sway, unless the state posed a danger to its neighbours. This doctrine meant that the citizens of countries ruled by despots or revolutionary zealots like the Taliban had no protection from internal human-rights violations, no matter how grievous.

Whether the words now agreed to by the 191-member UN will mean anything when the time comes to commit soldiers and material remains to be seen. But it is a major step forward for the UN membership to recognize formally that the human rights of citizens must trump the sovereign rights of governments.

<http://www.canada.com/montreal/montrealgazette/news/editorial/story.html?id=37f9f5d3-f3cf-4f3d-a7de-e9d1dc35ea68>