

Obama is upstaging Canada on the human rights front Kyle Matthews Ottawa Citizen 1
5 August 2011

Kyle Matthews is lead researcher for the Will to Intervene Project at the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, Concordia University

(...) With all eyes focused on Washington's debt ceiling crisis and the game of political brinkmanship between the Republicans and Democrats, President Barack Obama recently made history by announcing important strategic steps to make "never again" a reality. The White House announced it will make the prevention of genocide and other mass atrocity crimes a foreign policy priority through the establishment of a new Atrocities Prevention Board. (...)

(...) The new Atrocities Prevention Board will bring together senior officials from the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon, and myriad other agencies to coordinate a whole of government approach to engage "early, proactively, and decisively" to prevent and interdict mass atrocity crimes. (...) (...) It may all sound very bureaucratic, but this move is crucial to the advancement of the **Responsibility to Protect (R2P)**, an emerging international norm that can trace its roots to Canadian leadership. R2P is a political concept that asserts national governments must exercise their sovereignty in a responsible manner, meaning they must do everything possible to protect their citizens from the most horrific human rights abuses. If a particular government is unwilling or unable to comply with this basic rule, then the international community must take quick action and fill the protection void. (...)

(...) President Obama's decision to create the new Atrocities Prevention Board is worthy of the attention of Canadians because no other government in the world has gone this far in making a political commitment to R2P, thereby rendering it more likely that the 1948 Genocide Convention will be enforced. (...)

(...) In 2011 alone we have witnessed mass atrocity crimes in Libya, Syria, Ivory Coast, Darfur and South Sudan. Despite having played a leadership role in the historic formulation of R2P, and taking part in the current NATO mission to protect civilians from the wrath of the predatory government in Libya, Canada is lagging behind its allies in institutionalizing genocide prevention as a foreign policy priority. As a signatory of the Genocide Convention and having endorsed R2P in 2005 at the UN Global Outcome Summit, the government of Canada should consider modernizing domestic institutions and build new capacities so that it can continue to contribute to international peace and security in an era of failing and failed states. (...)

(...) The Will to Intervene Project, an initiative spearheaded by the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies at Concordia University, issued an in-depth study in 2009 that laid out in meticulous detail what measures Canada and the U.S. could implement to improve their capacities to prevent and swiftly interdict mass atrocity crimes. The U.S. government has now acted on three of the recommendations advanced in that study, while the Canadian government has yet to implement a single one. President Obama's directive states

plainly that the prevention of mass atrocities is a concern of national security interest, and this is true for Canada too. (...)

See full
[article](#)

.