

Informal Discussion on “Responsibility while Protecting”

International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect 21 February 2012 Excellency, Mr. Special Adviser,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I wish to express my gratitude to the Permanent Mission of Brazil for the opportunity to speak at this informal discussion, and thank Minister of External Relations, Ambassador Patriota, and Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, Dr. Luck, for chairing this meeting.

2. I have the pleasure to take the floor on behalf of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (the ICRtoP); a growing Coalition composed of over 40 national, regional and international civil society organizations from various sectors dedicated to advancing the Responsibility to Protect, and to building the capacities necessary to prevent and halt genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. The ICRtoP believes that the Responsibility to Protect is founded on the need to prevent mass atrocities and as such our Members give primary consideration to strengthening prevention mechanisms.

3. Excellency, the ICRtoP would like to emphasize two critical points before discussing “responsibility while protecting” – first that it is necessary to recall the vast spectrum of responsibilities under the RtoP framework, with prevention at the core of the norm, and that there is a broad range of measures available for the protection of populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

4. Second, the ICRtoP would like to state that while we welcome all initiatives that aim to advance the Responsibility to Protect and build the capacity of the United Nations, Member States, regional organizations and civil society to protect populations from the most egregious human rights violations, we firmly oppose any attempt to renegotiate the conceptual foundation of the norm as unanimously endorsed at the 2005 World Summit.

5. Furthermore, ICRtoP believes that genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing are by definition and under international law threats to international peace and security, thus requiring Member States and the UN to take preventive and reactive measures when faced with the threat of these crimes.

6. The ICRtoP notes that the concept we are discussing today, “responsibility while protecting”, is in many ways a response to the concerns that arose following the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1973, and not a reflection on the norm itself. We believe that discussions on “responsibility while protecting” can provide a forum for actors at the local, national, regional and international levels to engage in dialogue on the broad range of tools within the RtoP framework

and assess best practices in preventing and responding to the threat of mass atrocities. We hope that discourse on “responsibility while protecting” can act as a vehicle for analysis and reflection on implementing measures in the face of the imminent threat of the four crimes. Constructive discussion is crucial ahead of this year’s General Assembly dialogue, which will focus on the spectrum of measures available to governments, regional and international organizations, and civil society under the Third Pillar of RtoP.

7. The International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect urges that the discussions around this concept focus on lessons learned and on how we can all strengthen the measures needed to protect populations. The Responsibility to Protect articulates the primary responsibility of governments to protect their populations and places responsibility on the international community to assist States in building the capacity necessary to fulfill their protection obligations. In the event that a government is unable or unwilling, Member States have recognized that they bear a responsibility to take timely and decisive action to prevent and respond to the threat of mass atrocities.

8. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his 2009 report entitled *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*, developed a three-pillar framework (A/63/677). The Secretary-General never called for the chronological sequencing of the pillars but rather established them together as representative of the full scope and range of measures necessary to protect. Every crisis situation is unique and requires a response according to the circumstances and needs of the population. All actors must have the full range of tools available when operating to prevent or halt crimes under RtoP. Re-structuring the three-pillar framework would risk creating a system for prevention and reaction that fails to consider the particular elements of a crisis. Furthermore, the chronological sequencing of the three pillars would risk impeding timely and decisive action by limiting the array and flexibility of measures available and establishing required actions to be taken regardless of the needs of those under threat of mass atrocities. It is in this regard, that ICRtoP strongly believes that the conceptual foundation of the Responsibility to Protect must not be renegotiated.

9. Civil society works to galvanize the political will to prevent and halt the commission of mass atrocity crimes through improving understanding of RtoP, and alerting actors to at-risk situations. Furthermore, NGOs play a critical role in monitoring the implementation of RtoP by actors at the national, regional, and international levels, and as such we too believe it is necessary that responsibility be exercised while protecting. Relevant bodies must recall their responsibility to protect beyond authorizing measures and analyze the effectiveness of actions soon thereafter. Those implementing preventive or reactive mechanisms must remain informed of the developments on the ground and aware of the progress of measures undertaken to protect populations. Emphasis should be given to enhancing the methods of various bodies to address such issues to ensure the success of future action to prevent and halt mass atrocities.

10. The International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect urges the Mission of Brazil and Member States to continue engagement with civil society organizations as we all work towards the common goal of creating a world free of such egregious human rights violations. In addition to engaging with actors at all levels and conducting programmatic work examining the various tools available under the Third Pillar ahead of the General Assembly dialogue, the ICRtoP will conduct further analysis on “responsibility while protecting” and will release an educational document on the concept featuring perspectives from civil society. We hope that today’s dialogue will inform constructive discussion on the norm and strengthen the commitment of all States to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.

Thank you.

For a PDF of the statement, see [here](#) .