

# Minister MacKay's comments on the responsibility to protect at the Munich Security Conference Canadian News Centre

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### February 2013

*The [Munich Security Conference](#), which took place this year from 1-3 February 2013, is an annual meeting of senior government, international and civil society figures from around the world discussing current and future security challenges. The [program](#) of the Conference this year included a breakout session entitled, “[Does R2P have a future](#)”, during which Minister MacKay served as a panelist.*

(...) First, the fact that every forum where we discuss how to make the world a safer place, includes the issue of Responsibility to Protect, means that it has become part of the international dialogue, in the way that - say - deterrence used to be for the international security community. Second, whatever Responsibility to Protect is or isn't, it is not a template for action; there is nothing automatic about intervening, and there is no cookie cutter approach to something so complex and, frankly, fraught politically and operationally. As Kofi Annan said, very rarely will there be international consensus to act.

Just look at the UN Security Council... which should be our comment forum for action. It often fails to come to agreement – just think of the ongoing debate around the tragedy of Syria.

And when we do decide to act, we must make sure that – like the Hippocratic Oath that doctors take – we do not harm.

We must be careful of unintended consequences.

We must not oversimplify intervention.

Third, I believe that Responsibility to Protect is contributing to an evolving international norm around state behaviour. But norms take a long time to settle in, as we know.

But, like the 1925 Geneva Protocol on Chemical Weapons, the Charter of the United Nations itself; the 1948 Convention on the Prevention of Genocide...

We are setting a new standard – an emerging reference point around what sovereignty means; sovereignty is not inviolable.

Responsibility to Protect is not about replacing the sovereignty of states. It is about sovereignty and responsibility.

Which brings me to my final point.

When I think about Responsibility to Protect, I think about responsibility to prevent and the responsibility to rebuild... to follow through on our actions, and to engage early on in a systematic and consistent way to build conditions for the safety and security of people.

As a Minister of Defence, I know that military engagement must be the last resort...

If we have learned nothing from our recent experiences and engagements, we have learned that we have to do more as an international community to prevent using what we call, a comprehensive approach – diplomacy, development, economic engagement. (...)

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[full statement](#)

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