

Interview with Naomi Kikoler: Kenya's Elections: An R2P Success Story? TVO – The Agenda with Steve Paikin

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Kenyans turned out in large numbers for last week's presidential election in a race that many international observers worried could turn violent.

There was tension ahead of the March 4 vote, and fears of mass ethnic violence, as in 2007-2008, when 1,133 people were killed and over 663,000 displaced.

Uhuru Kenyatta, who currently faces crimes against humanity charges from the International Criminal Court (ICC), was declared the victor in Kenya's presidential race by the country's electoral commission. His closest rival in the race, Raila Odinga, has refused to concede defeat and is appealing to Kenya's Supreme Court to overturn the results.

In 2012, several regions of Kenya experienced a significant increase in inter-communal violence, resulting in the death of at least 400 people and the displacement of over 112,000. The potential for a recurrence of what happened five years ago was therefore very real.

Kenya's election was also a test for the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (R2P). Although the cases of Libya and Syria tend to dominate headlines when it comes to discussing the doctrine and foreign intervention, proponents of R2P point to Kenya as an example of where R2P has worked.

We had Naomi Kikoler, director of policy and advocacy from the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, on the program in late February to discuss the challenges in enforcing R2P around the world. You can watch her interview above.

Kikoler just returned from monitoring election results in Kenya and, below, tells us her impressions of the vote and the efficacy of R2P in that country. (...)

The Role of the Kenyan Media

In '07/'08, there was a lot of hate speech that was being propagated. There was a lot of coded language that was being used, both on TV, over the radio, in print and I really think that the Kenyan media tried hard this time to make sure they were not used by political actors and others to propagate hate. ... They consistently called for calm. It was really almost a non-stop peace parade that was being broadcasted, and obviously there were exceptions to that, but the

overall broad message was one of calm and peace.(...)

Kenyatta's International Criminal Court Charges

[M]any people have said the presence of the ICC, and the case unfolding [against Kenyatta] was an important reminder to people that there will potentially be accountability, and I think it did play an important ... deterrent role, especially when it comes to influencing the ways politicians behaved. For many politicians contesting the national race, I think they were very aware that they had to be very careful about what they said, and they could in no way use their mantle to incite violence. And I think one of the most important reasons why they were aware of that was because of the ICC case, and they knew because they were national candidates all eyes would be on them.

An R2P Success?

There's always going to be doubt in the sense that it's always hard to prove something when you can't have tangible evidence before you, but having said that, there were a lot of analyses done by very credible organizations and credible researchers that pointed to a number of scenarios by which there could have been possible election-related violence. I think the challenge for those of us who support R2P going forward is being able to extract lessons learned and perhaps some best practices. So if the international community wants to prevent such possible violence in the future, what are the kinds of best practices and lessons learned that we can pull from this particular case? What were the local initiatives or government initiatives that the international community supported and worked with? ... It's really quite remarkable people stayed very patient for essentially six days to find out the results of the elections. I think people would be really angry in Toronto if they had to wait six days to figure out who was going to be elected.

Preventing Future Atrocities

I really do think that this is an example of how prevention is a worthwhile endeavour, and I think it's important for governments, including the Canadian government, to really take to heart that investment in prevention requires considerably less political will to mobilize and a lot less money to carry out than waiting until it's too late to respond and people have already died. Once you've gotten to the stage where crimes are already being perpetrated, it's often very difficult to halt the crimes, but it's also very difficult to go before the [UN] Security Council or other multilateral bodies to get the necessary international political will to act.

See the full article and interview

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