

Council on Foreign Relations
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The following excerpt, written by Stephanie Hanson, News Editor at the Council on Foreign Relations, gives an account of the principles, architecture and mechanisms of the African Union (AU). The article argues that while the AU is still struggling to conduct reform in its governing bodies, it plays an increasing role in peacekeeping in the African continent.

() The African Union seeks to increase development, combat poverty and corruption, and end Africa's many conflicts. "The AU is the world's only regional or international organization that explicitly recognizes the right to intervene in a member state on humanitarian and human rights grounds," write Roberta Cohen, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, and lawyer William G. O'Neill in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. The AU drew these guidelines based on the recommendations of a 2001 report from the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty entitled **The Responsibility to Protect**. The report asserts that "Sovereign states have a **responsibility to protect** their own citizens from unavoidable catastrophe -- from mass murder and rape, from starvation -- but that when they are unwilling or unable to do so, that responsibility must be borne by the broader community of states."

Experts say the AU's implementation of these new goals is still an aspiration, not a reality. Reforming the OAU is a "monumental task," says Robert O. Collins, an Africa expert and professor of history at the University of California, Santa Barbara, "particularly when you have many countries with lots of poverty and domestic problems." But regional bodies take many years to grow into their charters, and many have heralded the African Union's early peacekeeping involvement in countries such as Burundi and Sudan as important steps. Jennifer Cooke, codirector of the Africa program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said in testimony before the Senate's African Affairs subcommittee that the African Union is still at a "fragile stage," but it "has begun to generate some early promising returns". ()

To read the article in full length, please refer to:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/01/AR2008050101585.html>