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(...) Getting agreement on UN action that will actually move Zimbabwe out of [its] crisis will take deft diplomacy. Among the Security Council's 15 members, only Britain and the US have so far shown an appetite for tough action. The allies of Zimbabwe's ruling party, Russia and China - most likely because they do not want to set a precedent for greater scrutiny of their own human rights and electoral practices - will probably employ familiar arguments about the UN's policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of member states or say that the situation in Zimbabwe, though serious, presents no threat to international peace and security, to dissuade security council intervention.

But with the unanimous adoption in 2005 of the doctrine that each state has a **responsibility to protect** its own citizens from the most egregious of human rights abuses, a new instrument for Security Council action now exists. Although states retain their sovereignty over their territory, if they fail to protect their own citizens from grave human rights abuses, the international community, including the Security Council, has an obligation to intervene.

The UN high commissioner for human rights, Louise Arbour, in her statement over the weekend made it clear that, in her view, the Zimbabwean authorities are failing to discharge their **responsibility to protect** all citizens, regardless of political affiliations, from severe human rights abuses.

(...) South Africa needs to play an active role in crafting a convincing UN plan to pull Zimbabwe out of its present quagmire. Without leadership from South Africa, the other members of the Security Council are not likely to go much beyond empty statements.

(...) Everyone, apart from Robert Mugabe and a few people in the ruling party agrees that in order to end the present crisis, Zimbabwe needs a government with a clear mandate from the people. The question for the Security Council today is how to go from here to there, leave behind the rhetoric and look for practical measures to force Mugabe to step aside.

() Whatever is said today, it seems inconceivable that without robust international action, Mugabe's hidebound regime will change course and open the way to a democratic transition. In the face of Mugabe's stonewalling, the Council needs to unite and stand behind the people of Zimbabwe. What's needed is not more condemnation -as morally justified as it may be- but effective international intervention.

Full text available at:

http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/gugulethu_moyo/2008/04/decision_day_for_zimbabwe.html

To read Louise Arbour's alarming statement on violence in Zimbabwe, please go to:

<http://www.unhchr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/BB073B7B294BC46FC1257438003A0672?opendocument>