

UN Must Prevent Libyan Slaughter

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In 2005, world leaders unanimously agreed that in situations where governments were manifestly failing in their sovereign duty, the international community, acting through the United Nations, would take "timely and decisive" action to honour the collective **responsibility** to **protect** people against atrocity crimes. Libya today is the place and time to redeem that pledge.

The United Nations' record on the Arab world is no less patchy than the West's. Having degenerated into internal security states backed by the U.S. national security state, Arab regimes were politically exhausted and morally bankrupt. It was the UN that, almost a decade ago, provided the moral compass and intellectual leadership with the Arab Human Development Report, written mainly by Arabs themselves. Yet Libya was also elected to the UN's main human rights watchdog.

Both the Rwanda genocide and the Srebrenica massacre happened on Kofi Annan's watch as the top UN official for peacekeeping. After becoming secretary-general, he pushed for a new doctrine to take effective action.

With Canada's help, an international commission formulated the innovative principle of the "**res**

ponsibility

to

protect

," known as R2P.

Describing R2P as one of his most precious achievements, Annan used its preventive pillar as a prism to mediate in the post-election violence in Kenya in 2008. The current secretary-general, Ban Ki-moon, has put his full weight behind R2P.

The language of R2P refers to state inability or unwillingness as the catalyst for the international **responsibility to protect** being activated. But often the state itself is the perpetrator of atrocity crimes when security forces, meant to protect people, are instead let loose in a killing spree.

That is the situation today in Libya, where many have already been killed and a carnage is feared. After 42 years of autocratic rule, Moammar Gadhafi is using deadly violence to crush and kill his people in open revolt against his dictatorship. He has vowed to fight to the last drop of his blood. The UN should grant him his wish.

R2P provides the normative and political cover to deal robustly, promptly, effectively and, if necessary, militarily with Gadhafi's threat to his people. Action will also help the UN and the West to cleanse their consciences of the stain of being passive spectators in Rwanda and Srebrenica and of complicity in privileging stability over freedom for the Arabs. In effect, the Arab world was declared a democracy - and human rights-free zone.

R2P is narrow - it applies only to the four crimes of ethnic cleansing, genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes - but deep: There are no limits to what can be done in responding to these atrocity crimes. Conversely, global support for R2P is broad but shallow. Libya is the perfect opportunity to convert the noble sentiments and words of R2P into deeds.

Over the past week, the UN Security Council, Human Rights Council and Ban Ki-moon have called on Libya to respect its **responsibility to protect** and uphold human rights and international humanitarian laws. On Saturday, the Security Council imposed sanctions on Libya and referred Gadhafi to the International Criminal Court. Those who reject the ICC but refer others to it - China, India, Russia, the U.S. - violate natural justice and are guilty of gross hypocrisy.

The crisis has escalated beyond the point of return. Calls for restraint are no longer enough. When Gadhafi says protestors deserve to die and his son warns of a river of blood, the world must meet the challenge, not duck it yet again. Helped by many Libyan diplomats defecting en masse and joining calls for international intervention, the Security Council must forthwith implement R2P and declare and enforce a no-fly zone - if Libyan pilots fly, they die.

For Gadhafi's trial at the ICC to be morally credible, it must be backed by criminal investigations of the foreign banks that have parked his ill-gotten gains in violation of global anti-corruption agreements, and public shaming of Africans who elected Libya to the Human Rights Council and Westerners who armed his thugs.

See [full article](#) , and March 1st article in the Toronto Star called “ [It's time for the UN to hold Gadhafi responsible and invoke doctrine of 'responsibility to protect'](#) ”

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