

We Owe Them Protection

Mia Farrow

Globe and Mail

3 November 2008

Mia Farrow is a humanitarian, actor and a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. She will be participating in the 1 December 2008 Munk Debate on Humanitarian Intervention, where she will face off against former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. John Bolton. More information on the Munk Debates can be found at <http://www.munkdebates.com/>. Also appearing will be Gareth Evans and Rick Hillier.

At 6 a.m. on Aug. 25, Kalma camp, home to 90,000 displaced Darfuris, was surrounded by Sudanese government forces. By 7 a.m., 60 heavily armed military vehicles had entered the camp, shooting and setting straw huts ablaze. Terrified civilians - who had previously fled their burning villages after being attacked by this same government and its proxy killers the janjaweed - hastily armed themselves with sticks, spears and knives. Of course, these were no match for machine guns and automatic weapons. By 9 a.m., the worst of the brutal assault was over. The vehicles rolled out leaving scores dead and more than 100 wounded. Most were women and children. The early-morning time of the attack ensured no aid workers were present as witnesses. (...) How is it that a military assault on displaced civilians in a refugee camp creates barely a ripple in the news cycle? How does such outrageous human destruction prompt so little outrage? How is it that those who have been tasked with protecting the world's most vulnerable population have failed - and failed, and then failed yet again - in their central responsibility? What does this say about the United Nations and the powerful member states? How have we come to such a moment? (...)

The message of the Kalma massacre is chillingly clear for Darfuris. But this assault on civilians in full view of the international community raises the question of what the massacre says about the rest of us. The only message we have sent to the Sudanese government is that they can now attack refugee camps and the world will watch and do nothing.

Smoothly, many in the international community lament Darfur's genocide but say that its solutions are beyond the boundaries of national interests and they invoke the concept of "national sovereignty." I contest that statement. The United Nations has, in 2005, clearly stated that the international community, through the United Nations, has the **responsibility to "protect"** populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity."

"**Responsibility to protect**" means the international community must "react" when states are unable or unwilling to protect those living within their borders. The international action can be political, diplomatic, economic or military. The latter should be at the ready in "extreme and exceptional cases," which it defines as "cases of violence which ... shock the conscience of mankind."

The **responsibility to protect** has redefined the concept of sovereignty by clearly stating that it involves not only the rights of nation states, but the responsibilities of civilian protection they

bear. The responsibility to protect marks the end of centuries of inviolate borders and impunity within them. In principle.

The reality is something else. Over my 10 trips to the Darfur region since 2004, I have seen men, women and children fleeing for their lives. In terror they fled their burning homes, in terror they endured the rapes and unthinkable atrocities. In terror and dread they await the next attacks. In terror they have waited for more than five unthinkable years for protection that has not come.

Source: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20081031.wcofarrow03/BNStory/specialComment/home>