

**Regional Capacity to Protect, Prevent and Respond: UN-Asia Pacific Strategy and Coordination**

Keynote Address: Dr. Edward Luck Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary General on the Responsibility to Protect

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some of you know, at the UN we do not consider

**R2P**

to be ten years old because we start counting from the time of the Outcome Document in September 2005. By this measure,

**R2P**

is not quite seven years old as a concept. Even at seven years, it is fair to say that

**R2P**

is in its adolescence. Adolescence is a period of change, a period of testing, a period of some uncertainty, and that is certainly true for

**R2P**

. So let me, in a rather tentative way, talk about nine lessons that I think we have learned over these years:

***1. First and foremost: the foundation of R2P is prevention.***

We were very impressed by the 2011 report by the study group of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific, which put forward some ideas on early warning mechanisms that we think might even be emulated by other regions. (...) But there remains a provocative question in terms of prevention in this region – are regional leaders now prepared to prevent another round of atrocities, like the killing fields of Cambodia in the late 1970's? This region has developed very vigorous, innovative and rather generous early warning-early response mechanisms to prevent or reduce the damage from future tsunamis, like that in December 2004. We recognize at the same time that the effort made to prevent natural disasters, or damage from natural disasters, has moved much more rapidly and with much more alacrity than a similar effort to prevent casualties from man-made atrocities. As the Secretary-General noted in his speech in Singapore last month, 'violence, like water, comes in waves.' The number of casualties from the killing fields was at least four times that of the tsunami and yet efforts to prevent that kind of man-made violence edges along inch-by-inch while there is a really wide and very innovative response when it comes to natural disasters.

**2.**

***Prevention is not enough.***

Because prevention does not work in every case, any coherent strategy must focus on both prevention and response. Some member states are more comfortable talking about prevention than they are about response, but then they are only dealing with about half the puzzle. They are not talking about a strategy; but rather something that is comfortable politically but really does not make sense operationally because response and prevention have to work hand-in-hand.

3.

***Every situation is distinct.***

No two situations are identical. No two situations should have exactly the same response. We need a different mix of tools and actions, different kinds of actors, and different timing in different places. I do not think that is inconsistency. To assume that consistency means that every crisis response has to look identical is a false understanding of consistency. That is a theoretical consistency, but in practice we need to use tools as intelligently and as flexibly as possible in each case.

4.

***We need a wide range of tools to try to make a difference.***

We need to draw on everything in Chapters VI, VII and VIII of the Charter to fulfill the responsibility to protect. If you actually try to graph the number of times different tools are invoked, it is almost an iron rule that the less coercive the tool, the more often it is used. The really coercive tools, like coercive use of military force, are rarely used. Ninety percent of the literature—ninety percent of the journal articles—only focus on the use of coercive force, but that is the atypical example of R2P in practice.

5.

***We need partners and partnerships.***

The UN's role in a normative sense is unique because of its universality. But in an operational sense it always looks for partners in regional and sub-regional arrangements. We also should not forget the idea of the individual responsibility to protect. R2P is not something only for governments and it is certainly not only something for international and regional bodies. Individuals have responsibility and individuals can make a difference. They can be whistle-blowers; they can say no to incitement and incendiary rhetoric or targeting of certain groups within societies; they can influence political decisions by their governments; and, very importantly, those who might be victims often have options for self-protection. (...) Civil society is enormously important, as are partnerships with national institutions, public-private partnerships, and legislative partnerships.

6.

***We are short on incentives.***

Everyone focuses on the part of paragraph 139 of the World Summit Outcome Document about the use of force and coercive measures, and that is understandable. But it is important to not lose sight of the last phrase about the need to assist states under stress. We see a lot of states showing signs of stress, but both the academic community and NGOs, and very definitely governments, have to give more thought about how to assist states before violence escalates. The second pillar is the least explored and least understood aspect of the Secretary-General's

strategy. What can the international community do to assist states so that they don't go down this road, and if they start to, to help them pull back?

7.

***R2P offers a distinct perspective for thinking about crises in a lot of places.***

We see this almost every day in New York in the interaction between the Joint Office that Francis Deng and I share on genocide prevention and R2P and how we deal with the big players within the system: the Department of Political Affairs; the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; the United Nations Development Programme, and other offices and agencies. I find that we ask different questions and therefore come out with different answers. I would argue, even if it is a very small office and doesn't have a lot of muscle, it is important that someone is asking, not just about conflict resolution, and not just about preventing traditional conflicts, but about preventing atrocities.

(...)

8.

***Reactions to Libya and Syria suggest that, politically, times are changing.***

I think all members of the Security Council and all member states feel a political push to be concerned about the way populations are treated. It is important to understand that the principle of R2P was never at question in Libya. I don't think any of the members of the Council were saying 'we're not concerned about populations; we're not concerned about the responsibility to protect them.' The response to Libya was not testing the principle of

**R2P**

, but a set of tactics. Can you protect people from the air? What are the costs if you protect them from the air? Then some member states were concerned by the connection between

**R2P**

and regime change, followed by debates on the important Brazilian initiative, responsibility while protecting. Although some people talk about a 'backlash' from Libya, we noticed that the Council, despite misgivings by some members, didn't run away from

**R2P**

last year. (...) It demonstrated, in what I think was a very nuanced and intelligent response, that there are different ways to use

**R2P**

in different situations, across all three pillars of the Secretary- General's approach.

Many of us are disappointed, of course, that the Security Council has been unable to take a more united, proactive, and effective approach to the crisis in Syria. But there has been a far more vigorous international response than that to the 'Hama rules' violence of 30 years ago,

when the world was largely silent in the face of mass atrocities there.

9.

***R2P can make a difference.***

Atrocity crimes unfortunately have been with us for many centuries and we're not going to push a button and stop this kind of violence. But we do see from a lot of research that incidents of atrocity crimes have been declining. This is not just because of

**R2P**

and certainly not just because of the UN, but we'd like to think that

**R2P**

is part of that trend. As the Secretary-General said in his speech in January, 'we don't pursue the Responsibility to Protect because it is easy, we pursue it because it is right.' We recognize that these things are going to take some time. We need a step-by-step approach. We need a balanced and careful understanding of what

**R2P**

is all about. We have to keep looking forward and we have to keep the momentum going and work better on the combination of global, regional and sub-regional arrangements and how we can do this together.

(...)

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**[full statement](#)**

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