Excerpts: (...) JISB: Was the possibility of external intervention inherent in your idea of a sovereignty as responsibility seen as a threat to state sovereignty? 

FD: I used to say that the only threats to governments posed by the idea of sovereignty as responsibility was when they failed to discharge their responsibilities. So if the government functions well in every way in terms of democracy, in terms of equitable distribution of resources, in terms of development, services, then this is the ideal structure of prevention and you are therefore not likely to witness escalating domestic disturbances. Ideally you come in early-on when the country may still be hoping to get help in dealing with situations. That is the kind of prevention where you are helping the country to discharge its own responsibility to its own people and this may generate more cooperation than if you wait until the situation become clearly genocidal, or when the government has failed and it is a collapsed state, or a very weak state, where you can just go in and dictate your will without any risks. Or waiting until the interests of the intervening parties are so high that they’re willing to risk the lives of their people. To wait until you need military intervention has its own problems but if we can get involved, once we begin to see that there is evidence of possible problems, then you can engage in constructive dialogue. For example the diplomatic initiatives which led to a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Kenya in 2008 are now being used as an example of where this aspect of sovereignty as responsibility did work. (…) 

JISB: Critics of R2P say that it has, in fact, changed very little; if there was an intra-state conflict or crisis prior to the emergence of R2P, the issue would have been publicized by NGOs and the international media, and ultimately possibly put on the agenda of the Security Council. The Security Council would have debated the issue and in certain cases concluded that under Chapter VII of the Charter this situation constituted a threat to international peace and security and necessitated some form of intervention. This happened a number of times in the 1990s; since the emergence of R2P you still have this exact same progression up to the Security Council which has the ultimate authority and, crucially, the discretion to act. So has R2P really changed anything?

FD: That’s a very good question and frankly it’s a question that I have begun to ask myself and not only in relation to R2P, but even with respect to my mandate on genocide protection. Now the answer I give to this question I haven’t said much about it to anybody but I’ve voiced it once or twice is that perhaps there is nothing new here. But, what we’re doing is sharpening our consciousness of the problem and rallying forces together with a sharper focus on how to act to resolve, to address these problems, to protect populations. It’s almost a restatement of resolve and perhaps a rearrangement of our tools or a mobilization of the relevant tools and relevant actors, to be alert to what needs to be done and to be mobilized to do it.(…)

Interview: The Responsibility to Protect, Francis Deng
Read the full interview.