

## Responsibility to Protect

*“Sovereignty belongs to the people of a country, and governments have a responsibility to protect their people. If a government fails in its primary responsibility to protect the lives of those living within its jurisdiction from genocide, mass killings, and massive and sustained human rights violations, it forfeits claims to immunity from intervention...if such intervention is designed to protect the at-risk population.”*

~ Gingrich-Mitchell report, ‘American Interests and UN Reform’

### What does the Responsibility to Protect mean?

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After the Holocaust, the world said “Never Again.” Despite this promise, hundreds of thousands of people have since died in organized killing campaigns in Rwanda, Srebrenica and now Darfur. We’ve always had the power to stop genocide; it’s time we kept our word. The international community has a responsibility to protect civilians in any country from crimes against humanity, genocide, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing. The Responsibility to Protect means that no state can hide behind the concept of sovereignty while it conducts—or permits—widespread harm to its population. It also implies that other countries cannot turn a blind eye when these events occur beyond their borders just because it does not suit their narrowly-defined national interests.

The idea was born out of a report entitled “Responsibility to Protect,” by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), with the support of the Canadian government. The report breaks down the responsibility to protect into three specific responsibilities:

- **Responsibility to prevent:** addressing the cause of conflicts and man-made crises;
- **Responsibility to react:** responding to serious situations including the use of sanctions, international prosecution and in extreme cases, even military intervention; and
- **Responsibility to rebuild:** providing full assistance with recovery, reconstruction & reconciliation.

### How will this principle be implemented?

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Many leaders are concerned that heads of state will wage politically-motivated military interventions under the guise of the “responsibility to protect.” In order to avoid the abuse of this principle, there are established guidelines to determine when it is appropriate to use force:

- The threat of a state permitting or committing atrocities must be serious and credible;
- The primary purpose of the intervention must be to halt or avert human suffering;
- Military intervention should be used as a last resort when other peaceful means have failed;
- The scale of the military intervention should be the minimum required to stop the atrocities;
- There must be a reasonable chance of success in halting or averting the suffering

One of the main duties of the UN Security Council is to maintain peace and security. Thus, the Council is the most appropriate body to authorize the use of force for the purpose of human protection. It is important to note that if the Security Council fails to take action or if permanent members threaten to block action, other countries may seek alternative means in responding to such emergency situations and halting atrocious crimes, as was done in Kosovo.

It should not come to that. The massive crimes committed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the current crisis in Darfur show the devastating consequences of allowing crimes against humanity, genocide, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing to occur. It is important that the international community take advantage of this historic opportunity and say “No” once and for all to such conscience-shocking crimes.

## **Is there international support for the ‘Responsibility to Protect?’**

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In the past year, three major reports on the United Nations have endorsed the idea: the *High Level Panel Report on Threats, Challenges and Change*, Secretary General Kofi Annan’s report *In Larger Freedom*, and the bipartisan taskforce report *American Interests and UN Reform*, headed up by former Republican House Speaker Gingrich and Democrat Senate Majority Leader Mitchell. In addition, Britain, Japan, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, the European Union, Rwanda and Kenya have strongly supported the agreement.

## **World Summit 2005**

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From September 14-16, the United Nations hosted the largest gathering of world leaders in history. During the summit, over 150 heads of state signed a document that endorsed the “responsibility to protect.” Countries agreed “to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council, in accordance with the UN Charter...on a case by case basis and in cooperation with relevant organizations as appropriate, should peaceful means be inadequate.”

The final statement also emphasized the important role of the UN Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide. A proposal in an earlier draft of the document – urging the five permanent members of the Security Council (China, France, Russia, U.S., UK) not use their veto power to block action to fulfill this responsibility – was removed.

## **About Citizens for Global Solutions**

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Citizens for Global Solutions envisions a future in which nations work together to abolish war, protect our rights and freedoms, and solve the problems facing humanity that no nation can solve alone. This vision requires effective democratic global institutions that will apply the rule of law while respecting the diversity and autonomy of national and local communities. We work to build political will for our vision in the United States by educating Americans about our global interdependence, communicating global concerns to public officials, and developing proposals to create, reform, and strengthen international institutions such as the United Nations.

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