

CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVES: A View From the Asia-Pacific

Ten Years Since the
World Summit:
Developing Civil
Society's Strategy
for the Responsibility
to Protect in the
Asia-Pacific Region

Event Summary
February 28, 2015
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

ICRtoP

INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT



The
Stanley
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AP R2P

Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

Ten years have passed since the landmark Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm was unanimously adopted by all heads of state and government in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document. By adopting the R2P norm—which affirms that states and the international community have a responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing—the world signaled that sovereignty could no longer be used as a shield for governments to commit heinous crimes against their own populations.

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Nevertheless, tremendous challenges in the Asia-Pacific have arisen with regards to building political support for the norm and taking action to advance its implementation, and such issues must not remain unaddressed or left to government officials and policymakers alone. Lack of awareness of the norm and the obligations it entails, as well as misunderstanding of R2P as a disguised excuse for humanitarian intervention or tool for Western imperialism, remain pervasive in the region. Additionally, there exists a stifling lack of political will among many regional actors to consistently take preventive action and to mobilize when populations are threatened, as witnessed in Sri Lanka and Myanmar.

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These challenges need to be addressed, and action needs to be undertaken in a timely, collaborative, and concrete manner, for R2P remains the only agreed-upon commitment and articulated, tangible political framework for the prevention of and response to atrocities.

Civil society has a unique and vital role to play in addressing these challenges and working toward the implementation of R2P. Organizations such as Human Rights Working Group-Indonesia, a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), can help train and educate Indonesian parliamentarians. Others, such as ICRtoP member Initiatives for International Dialogue, work to ensure compliance with ceasefire agreements in the Mindanao region of the Philippines and hold violators accountable to communities. Furthermore, civil society organizations such as ICRtoP member Alt-ASEAN Burma can empower communities to provide documentation of human rights violations, which can be used to hold repressive governments accountable.

These few examples demonstrate how civil society organizations are some of the most critical actors in ensuring that governments realize their R2P obligations. With 2015 marking ten years since the articulation of the Responsibility to Protect at the United Nations, it is now a critical moment for civil society actors engaged in the prevention of atrocities to recommit to upholding the principles enshrined in R2P, assess the progress and challenges of the past decade, and consider how to strategically move forward.

To discuss the challenges to and opportunities for advancing R2P in Asia, the ICRtoP, the Stanley Foundation, and the Asia Pacific Centre

The organizers prepared this report following the conference. It contains their interpretation of the proceedings and is not merely a descriptive, chronological account. Participants neither reviewed nor approved the report. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

for the Responsibility to Protect gathered representatives of Asian and international civil society for the workshop “Ten Years Since the World Summit: Developing Civil Society’s Strategy for R2P in the Asia-Pacific” on February 28, 2015, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The workshop reflected on the best practices and challenges of the past decade; evaluated the ability of domestic, regional, and international actors to implement R2P; and identified measures that could further operationalize the norm. Representatives of civil society from Australia, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines, as well as those from international nongovernmental organizations, participated in the meeting.

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Reflections on “The Responsibility to Protect at 10: Progress, Challenges and Opportunities in the Asia Pacific”

The workshop began with participants’ thoughts on the outcomes from the major regional conference “The Responsibility to Protect at 10:

Progress, Challenges and Opportunities in the Asia Pacific” held the two days prior. The conference—hosted by the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, in partnership with the ICRtoP, the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, the United Nations, and the Stanley Foundation—demonstrated a growing commitment and political will in the Asia-Pacific toward preventing atrocities and highlighted key opportunities to further embed R2P in the region. Though progress in implementation of R2P could be quickened in the Asia-Pacific, the conference demonstrated a decisively growing acceptance of R2P in the region.

Such embracing of R2P was evident in Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen's opening speech, in which he categorically declared R2P as a friend of sovereignty, and in the 2014 report of the High-Level Advisory Panel on the Responsibility to Protect in Southeast Asia, which noted that R2P was a logical extension of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) commitment to establishing peace.

Nevertheless, the caution with which some regional actors regard the third pillar of R2P, which calls for the UN Security Council to act to protect people from mass atrocities, demonstrates the continued need to internalize R2P within local, national, and regional structures. The aspects of the norm that could be most relevant in the Asia-Pacific include understanding how R2P can assist in achieving post-conflict stability, how the commission of atrocity crimes derails economic development, and how pillar two assistance can be linked to the complementary goal of human security. Participants in the regional conference noted that going forward, actors looking to strengthen R2P within the Asia-Pacific should (1) identify priorities for its promotion, build awareness, and build capacity (including through examining how the United Nations could do more to support ASEAN); (2) utilize existing regional mechanisms to embed R2P instead of creating new ones; (3) encourage states in the region to sign and ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court; (4) create relevant national institutions for atrocity prevention and strengthen existing ones; (5) create regional and national dialogues on R2P; and (6) develop a regionwide early warning system.

During the two-day conference, participants also identified key opportunities and approaches for civil society organizations in the Asia-Pacific, including working to influence the post-2015 ASEAN process in thematic areas related to R2P such as human rights, gender-based violence, and development. A key focus going

forward for regional civil society could be on norm building within existing national or regional architecture—for example, using the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation as key entry points for embedding the Women, Peace and Security framework and the R2P framework. Useful strategies for Asia-Pacific civil society could include emphasizing education and training, conducting relevant policy research, and initiating a new region-to-region dialogue.

A Civil Society Stocktaking of R2P's Past and Future

After discussing outcomes from the two-day regional conference, workshop participants split into two strategy groups to discuss R2P's progress and challenges and to identify opportunities for the future implementation of the norm. Discussion topics included how R2P has been implemented in practice in the region; how R2P has been mainstreamed or operationalized at the national, regional, and international levels; and how civil society can strengthen collective efforts to fulfill R2P.

One key example of R2P in practice in the region has been civil society activities in Burma, where documentation of atrocities against populations was intrinsic to putting political pressure on Burmese authorities. For example, the international campaign to get the situation in Burma on the agenda of the UN Security Council, while it did not result in the passing of a resolution, did help push the regime to begin a reform process. In a related vein, documentation of atrocities in the region has been crucial for the purposes of both justice—for instance, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia for the prosecution of Khmer Rouge officials—and for remembrance, such as with Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in Timor-Leste and Philippines. Another key example of R2P in practice was in Cambodia. After identifying the lack of national awareness and acknowledgement of the genocide committed by the Khmer

Rouge, particularly among students, civil society organizations and academics worked to write a comprehensive textbook on the Khmer Rouge reign, with the key belief that educating populations about past crimes can help prevent future atrocities. The Cambodian government subsequently approved the textbook in 2009, and teachers nationwide were trained on its contents, as the work is a mandated part of the national education system.

Much work remains to be done to domesticate the principle in the region, and efforts by Cambodia and the Philippines to sign the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court need to be encouraged and supported. The work already being done by civil society organizations to track trends or collect evidence can help contribute to the development of a national or regionwide early warning system. Participants identified parliamentarians as important and underutilized actors in atrocity prevention.

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On the regional level, Malaysia's recent proposal for an inter-ASEAN peacekeeping force could be an exciting opportunity for cross-regional conflict prevention and response, especially since such an idea could build upon the national peacekeeping training centers that already exist. R2P proponents should also look to capitalize on the growing divergence between pillar two, which calls for the international community to assist states to build capacity and human security, which could get key regional states to become more dedicated to the norm. On the negative side, however, there is a growing fear that ASEAN has a "containment" policy when it comes to engaging with civil society and that external and internal pressure need to be maintained on the organization to encourage closer civil society engagement. Participants also discussed the critical need for the

United Nations to assess conditions for and implement both R2P and the Human Rights Up Front initiative in the field in the Asia-Pacific.

Finally, the workshop explored several new ways to strengthen the civil society movement for R2P in the Asia-Pacific. One idea was for R2P advocates to begin to use “approachable” language to demystify the norm. For instance, civil society could create educational documents to explain what R2P means practically for a refugee or for a women’s protection advocate in the field. In order to engage more fully with actors still skeptical about the norm, civil society should think of how to couch R2P language in the thematic areas of interest to regional actors, such as peacebuilding or peacekeeping.

Civil society representatives agreed that awareness raising, even ten years after R2P’s adoption, remains crucial. While the norm still needs high-profile supporters in the Asia-Pacific, some participants cautioned that personalities matter greatly in ASEAN and that civil society actors should carry out risk assessments regarding who might become R2P champions.

Civil society representatives agreed that awareness raising, even ten years after R2P’s adoption, remains crucial. Also, there was a need to be more systematic and strategic about awareness raising, which could be achieved through a civil society information-sharing portal or by focusing on R2P or mass-atrocities training in the Asia-Pacific. Agreeing on priorities and the communicating activities, which could be done through the ICRtoP, could help ensure that regional duplication is minimized and cooperation maximized. Future collaboration and coordination among civil societies will help ensure that the unprecedented progress since 2005 continues and expands.

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Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only. Participants attended as individuals rather than as representatives of their governments or organizations.

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Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect

The Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect is a research, policy and engagement centre based at The University of Queensland, in Australia. Established in 2007, its mission is to deepen and advance understanding and policy on the Responsibility to Protect principle and mass atrocities prevention and response in the Asia Pacific region. The centre works with partners and regional networks throughout the Asia Pacific region to deepen understanding of the Responsibility to Protect, build greater consensus, and facilitate thinking and practice aimed at implementing the principle in the region and more broadly. www.r2pasiapacific.org

The International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect

The International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) is a global network of civil society organizations dedicated to advancing RtoP at the international, regional, subregional, and national levels. For the past ten years, ICRtoP has worked to build a constituency of civil society support for the norm, and the coalition now has members representing every region and working in a wide range of sectors, including women's rights, conflict prevention, human rights, genocide prevention, and international and regional justice. www.responsibilitytoprotect.org

The Stanley Foundation

The Stanley Foundation seeks a secure peace with freedom and justice, built on world citizenship and effective global governance. It brings fresh voices, original ideas, and lasting solutions to debates on global and regional problems. The foundation is a nonpartisan, private operating foundation, located in Muscatine, Iowa, that focuses on peace and security issues and advocates principled multilateralism. The foundation frequently collaborates with other organizations. It does not make grants. www.stanleyfoundation.org