

CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVES

BUILDING STATE CAPACITY TO PREVENT ATROCITY CRIMES

Event Summary
September 9, 2013

ICRtoP

INTERNATIONAL COALITION FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

**FRIEDRICH
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"Effective prevention of mass atrocity crimes requires both early warning and response. The role of civil society is crucial in both of these. Civil society is present sometimes where the government is not."



—Dr. Jennifer Welsh
Special Adviser to the United Nations
Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect

Introduction

Since 2009, the United Nations secretary-general has produced an annual report on the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) to assist in further developing the principle both normatively and operationally. The 2013 report, *State Responsibility and Prevention*, reflects on the primary responsibility of all states to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing—also referred to as Pillar I of the RtoP framework—and includes an overview of risk factors that can contribute to the commission of RtoP crimes and policy options for states to consider toward fostering societies resistant to atrocities.

The Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, and the Stanley Foundation co-organized an event titled “Civil Society Perspectives: Building State Capacity to Prevent Atrocity Crimes” ahead of the interactive United Nations General Assembly dialogue held annually after the release of the secretary-general’s report. Because the General Assembly dialogue provides limited space for direct civil society participation, the event was designed to offer the opportunity to representatives from civil society organizations from throughout the world to share their expertise and experiences in assisting states to prevent the domestic commission of RtoP crimes.

The Importance of Civil Society in Atrocities Prevention

“Civil Society Perspectives” was held on September 9, 2013, and attended by more than 100 civil society representatives, diplomats, and UN actors. The forum was opened by Keith Porter, president and chief executive officer of the Stanley Foundation, who said that while civil society groups have been a key component in the policy arena, these actors have not had enough space to engage with the practical applications and implications of RtoP.

Sapna Chhatpar Considine, program director of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, noted that “when a situation reaches the point where the international community needs to respond militarily, we have all failed in our responsibilities on so many different levels.” For Considine, this was why it was so important to

hear what civil society organizations are doing every day to prevent large-scale atrocities, as “prevention is the core of RtoP.”

Engagement with National Mechanisms

The first panel of the day, “Influencing National Mechanisms and Initiatives for Prevention,” was moderated by Angela Bruce-Raeburn, program officer at the Stanley Foundation, and it featured civil society experts who shared experiences from their organizations in engaging with national mechanisms or working with political actors to implement RtoP. Panelists included Rev. Cannon Thomas Godda of the Inter-Religious Council for Peace in Tanzania; Kyle Matthews, senior deputy director of the Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies; and Dr. Noel Morada, regional director and senior researcher of the Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect in Australia.

Rev. Godda shared his thoughts on RtoP through a religious and faith-based lens, as his organization aims to promote the principles of peace building and equality by working with religious communities throughout Tanzania. With the realization that “religious wars are more dangerous, because they are wars of the heart, not the mind,” the Inter-Religious Council for Peace works to mobilize its network of interfaith religious leaders to engage in constructive dialogue, form interfaith committees, and conduct trainings at a preventive stage. Rev. Godda stressed that the government should work with religious leaders, not sideline them, and in this regard he commended the work of the Tanzania National Committee on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes, and All Forms of Discrimination, for engaging with civil society and religious organizations. Regarding next steps, he stated that civil society must be able to take action to implement the Protocol of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region that guides the work of the Tanzanian committee, including through the creation of national civil society forums.

Matthews then described how his organization’s Will to Intervene Project educates and trains policymakers, particularly parliamentarians, in order to advance policies on mass atrocity prevention. Matthews suggested that one must first build domestic political will

Matthews suggested that one must first build domestic political will before international political will can be fostered toward implementing RtoP. Partisan politics, he added, can often affect the implementation of atrocities-prevention policies, as the Canadian example shows. By engaging with Parliament, civil society can contribute to policy, hold the government accountable, engage with the media, and shape public opinion. Today, Matthews stressed, civil society needs to establish long-term relationships across party lines and find champions within Parliament who have an interest in moving RtoP discussions forward. More time and energy thinking about prevention is needed, particularly on how we can tailor development aid to prevent atrocities.

Morada began by discussing the work of the Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, whose objectives are to mainstream and promote RtoP in the Asia-Pacific region through education,

"How do you increase the legitimacy of the state? You have to link it to good governance and respect for human rights so the state may be seen as taking the responsibility, as part of earning the respect and trust of its citizens."

*—Noel Morada
Regional Director and Senior
Researcher, Asia-Pacific Centre for the
Responsibility to Protect, Australia*

training, and engagement with government stakeholders. He said that RtoP's support in this region was limited due to traditional concepts of sovereignty upheld and enshrined in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations charter. Asian states, he said, are home to multiethnic societies, and therefore nation-state building remains ongoing. Morada agreed with Matthews that civil society needs to find local champions for RtoP when working to push the norm forward and also stated that there should be support and engagement at both the local and national levels. Post-Libya, there is an increased need to promote the norm as a friend of sovereignty

and clarify that RtoP seeks to prevent atrocities. Education, training, and the increased translation of RtoP documents into local languages could have a positive effect in this regard.

During the questions-and-answers portion of the discussion, panelists reflected on how best to institutionalize and deepen the concepts of prevention in the regions in which they work. Matthews stressed that the Canadian Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Genocide is creating a new crop of leadership informed about what RtoP is and how it should be applied. Morada then noted that the challenge for the Asia-Pacific region was to “look for existing norms at the community level which can be linked to RtoP in the long run.” Rev. Godda linked durable prevention to economic equality, professing that, “If we can share, I think we can achieve.”

Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect Provides Keynote Address

The morning’s proceedings were followed by a keynote address by Dr. Jennifer Welsh, special adviser to the United Nations secretary-general on the Responsibility to Protect. She was introduced by Adama Dieng, special adviser to the United Nations secretary-general on the prevention of genocide, who welcomed and congratulated her on her recent appointment as special adviser. In her first public presentation as special adviser, Welsh discussed the crucial role of civil society in the prevention of RtoP crimes. “Effective prevention of mass atrocity crimes,” she said, “requires both early warning and



From left to right, Angela Bruce-Raeburn, Rev. Canon Thomas Godda, Kyle Matthews, and Noel Morada.

response, and the role of civil society ... is crucial in both of these.” Civil society, she added, is often present in places where government authorities are not, and civil society representatives are sometimes the only witnesses when atrocities are committed. In Kenya, she noted, civil society’s actions to ease tensions were an important factor in avoiding the escalation of violence before and after the 2013 presidential elections.

Reflecting on the General Assembly dialogue process, Welsh raised the question of whether actors should consider lobbying for the inclusion of the annual dialogue on the General Assembly’s formal agenda. She also discussed the need to incorporate an atrocity-prevention lens in other thematic areas within the UN system—particularly human rights, conflict prevention, and the protection of civilians—and by doing so, mainstream RtoP throughout the system. There should be a targeted approach, she said, for the prevention of RtoP crimes across mandates. To assist in this process, Welsh said her office is working on expanding its analysis framework to cover all four RtoP crimes and violations.

Asked how the Syrian crisis will impact the future of RtoP, Welsh recalled the range of UN, state, regional, and civil society actors that have taken action to uphold RtoP and assist in protecting populations. When asked about role of the UN Security Council in the norm’s implementation, she said there was an opportunity within her office to explore working methods of the Security Council and engage more closely with it to address issues of inconsistency in response.

Civil Society Experts Discuss Preventing Atrocities in Their Countries

The afternoon panel, “Country Cases of Prevention in Practice” focused on civil society organizations’ experiences in influencing policy development for the prevention of atrocities. The session was chaired by Tiberiu Galis, executive director of the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, and featured Valnora Edwin, Director of the Campaign for Good Governance in Sierra Leone, Paola Alejandra Castillo Diaz, subdirector of the Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos (Center for Legal Action and Human

Rights) in Guatemala, and Stephen Kirimi, chief executive officer of the Peace and Development Network Trust in Kenya.

Edwin began her presentation with a reflection on her personal experiences during the conflict in Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2001, noting that she was not just speaking as a civil society representative but as a survivor of mass atrocities. She also provided a brief overview of her organization's work since the war ended in Sierra Leone. Her organization brings school children to "sites of consciousness"—including where atrocities occurred during the war—to educate and create a culture of remembrance. Her organization has worked with state actors to provide medical services for victims, publish reports on past atrocities, and assist in supporting work to promote countrywide truth and reconciliation. Challenges to enhancing state capacity for prevention, she said, include a lack of political will to work on the subject, the difficulty of fractured party politics, the continued marginalization of women, and economic issues such as youth unemployment.

Diaz stated that over the past eight years, Guatemala has seen those who committed crimes against humanity and genocide brought to justice after a fight against impunity that has lasted more than 30 years. Her organization engaged directly with the prosecutor's office during the trial of former *de facto* President Efraín Ríos Montt by working with victims from the Mayan Ixil community to gather their testimonies—ten of whom testified against Ríos Montt during the trial. Although Ríos Montt's conviction was overturned, Diaz declared that it is important to remember that it was proven during the trial that he was responsible for the creation and implementation of a policy of genocide. Reflecting on the experience of her country, Diaz stated that the international community must do more to assist governments in postconflict situations to implement recommendations from peace processes. She further stressed the critical importance of truth and memory to ensure the healing of a society affected by atrocities.

Following Diaz's remarks, Kirimi reflected on the 2007 and 2008 postelection crisis that left hundreds of thousands of Kenyans displaced and more than 1,000 dead. Since the crisis, he said, the Kenyan government has undertaken reform efforts and has become more active in addressing the root causes of the strife, including

poverty, unemployment, and the lack of national cohesion. His organization has acted to promote the strengthening of state capacity to prevent atrocities by lobbying for appropriate legislation to be adopted; participating in the truth, justice, and reconciliation process; advancing national peace policies; and monitoring security sector reforms. Kirimi reflected on several remaining challenges, including the cases still before the International Criminal Court, particularly those of current Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta and Deputy President William Ruto. “Society is deeply divided” over the International Criminal Court prosecutions, he said, and going forward, “it’s important for civilians to build resilience and reconcile differences.”

During the questions-and-answers portion of the discussion, panelists addressed the role of religion and faith-based organizations in promoting RtoP. According to Kirimi, the religious sector in Kenya is partisan and ethnicized. “Politicians lean on certain tribes, and religious figures follow,” he said. Edwin described those in the faith-based community in Sierra Leone more positively, saying they were “key players in the reconciliation process.” Diaz noted the large role played by the Catholic Church in dialogue during the Guatemala Peace Accords. Religious authorities, she said, “have a role to protect.”

RtoP's Strength as a Tool for Prevention

To close the day, Michèle Auga, executive director of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung’s New York office, expressed how the day’s dialogue enabled participants to draw lessons and experiences from one another to better build societies to prevent atrocities by domesticating RtoP. Auga said that more “people-to-people RtoP” at the community level is needed, as is deeper institutionalization of the norm. To bolster the norm, she said, greater commitment to Pillar I is essential, as well as a robust civil society.

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.



"It's important to build resilience
for our people so we reconcile
our differences."

—Stephen Kiriimi
*Chief Executive officer, Peace and
Development Network Trust, Kenya*

Participant List

Welcoming Remarks

Keith Porter, President and Chief Executive Officer, The Stanley Foundation

Sapna Chhatpar Considine, Program Director, The International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect

Chairs

Angela Bruce-Raeburn, Program Officer, The Stanley Foundation

Tiberiu Galis, Executive Director, Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation

Panelists

Paola Alejandra Castillo Diaz, Sub-Director, Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos

Valnora Edwin, Director, Campaign for Good Governance, Sierra Leone

Thomas Godda, Inter-Religious Council for Peace Tanzania

Stephen Kirimi, Chief Executive Officer, Peace and Development Network Trust

Kyle Clinton Matthews, Senior Deputy Director, Will to Intervene Project, Montreal Institute for Genocide and Human Rights Studies, Concordia University

Noel M. Morada, Director, Regional Diplomacy and Capacity Building, The University of Queensland

Speakers

Adama Dieng, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, United Nations

Jennifer Welsh, United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and Responsibility to Protect

Michèle Auga, Executive Director, New York Office, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

Organizers

Anthony DiRosa, Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation

Suzanne Knijnenburg, International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect

Volker Lehmann, Policy Analyst, Friedrich-EbertStiftung Foundation

Mike Otterman, Communications Officer, Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation

Patty Papke, Director of Production, Events, and Iowa Partnerships, The Stanley Foundation

Angela Patnode, Associate, International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect

Megan Schmidt, Outreach Officer, International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect

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

About the Organizers

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

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung—New York Office

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a German political foundation committed to the advancement of public policy issues in the spirit of the basic values of social democracy. FES has 110 offices around the world, and FES New York serves as a liaison between the United Nations, FES field offices, and partners in developing countries to strengthen the voice of the Global South. FES New York contributes to UN debates on economic and social development, and on peace and security issues. www.fes-globalization.org/new_york/

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

The Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation

The Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (AIPR), established in 2005, works to prevent genocide by building a community of government officials around the world who are educated about contemporary approaches to genocide prevention and who effectively work as a community to build a functional global architecture for prevention and response to mass atrocities and genocide. AIPR does this through educational programs for officials from ministries of justice, defense, foreign affairs, national human rights institutions and militaries and through programs of policy development assistance to their institutions. www.auschwitzinstitute.org

