



The Role of Human Rights, Development Assistance, and Peacekeeping: Building State Capacity for Atrocities Prevention

Event Summary

September 4, 2014

United Nations, New York, NY

On September 8, 2014, the United Nations General Assembly held its 6th annual informal interactive dialogue on the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP, R2P) on the theme of the United Nations Secretary-General's Report "Fulfilling our Collective Responsibility: International Assistance and the Responsibility to Protect." The dialogue convened Member States, regional bodies and civil society to deliberate on the report, which focuses on RtoP's "second pillar," or the international community's responsibility to assist states to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. In preparation for the dialogue, the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, and the Stanley Foundation convened an expert panel to further explore three elements of RtoP's second pillar, namely the role of human rights mechanisms and actors to encourage and assist states to prevent atrocity crimes; the impact of development assistance in building state capacity to uphold protection obligations; and the impact of temporary international assistance through the use of peacekeeping and stabilization operations to assist states under stress.

The panel discussion was chaired by Patrick Travers, a consultant for the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, and featured Christen

Broecker, Associate Director and Director of Research at the Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights; Lawrence Woocher, Senior Atrocity Prevention Fellow at United States Agency for International Development; and Alison Giffen, Senior Associate and Co-Director of Future of Peace Operations Program at The Stimson Center. More than 60 civil society representatives, diplomats, and UN officials attended the forum.

Keith Porter, President of the Stanley Foundation, opened the event. He stressed that international assistance within the framework of RtoP should focus on fostering societies resilient to atrocities. "Inequality," he said, "is a precondition for mass atrocities."

Ms. Broecker of the Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights gave an overview of UN human rights actors and structures relevant to bolstering resilience, and specifically focused on how human rights monitoring and promotion encourages capacity building mechanisms. While not all human rights mechanisms and actors directly use RtoP or atrocities prevention language, Broecker pointed out that they do act to express alarm and serve as risk assessment and early warning tools which serve to prevent the escalation of a crisis to one where atrocities may be carried out. Broecker listed several UN mechanisms towards this end,

including special sessions of UN Human Right Council, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Arria-Formula Meetings of the UN Security Council, Commissions of Inquiry, and General Assembly briefings. While some of the aforementioned mechanisms function more as risk assessment tools, Broecker noted that some serve to directly assist as evidenced by the role of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as it works to assist states in building relevant human rights institutions and conducting trainings for national officials. For Broecker, UN mechanisms for identifying human rights-related risk factors for mass atrocities are best pursued not only by one State, but States acting together. This is especially true regarding monitoring and early warning. On this point, Broecker highlighted the work of the UN Office on the Prevention of Genocide and RtoP as it refines its analysis framework which is used to determine the risk of atrocity crimes. "Monitoring is a part of pillar two—States must have the most up-to-date information," she said. Only then can appropriate and timely responses be pursued.

Panelist Lawrence Woocher of USAID focused his remarks on the role of development practitioners in preventing mass atrocities. For Woocher, "mass atrocities represent the antithesis of development" as they destroy human and physical capital, cause mass displacement and humanitarian emergencies, and disrupt productive social and economic activity across all domains. He believes that successful development—broadly conceived—helps "inoculate countries against mass atrocities."

Woocher outlined several steps development practitioners can take to bolster mass atrocity prevention. They should:

- Recognize and communicate the risks of mass atrocities to better inform their own programs and broader actions taken by domestic and/or international actors;
- Respond to escalating atrocity situations with life-saving humanitarian assistance, as well as support programs to help halt spiraling violence; and
- Support recovery from mass violence to reduce risk of recurrence and support overall development prospects through programs focused on rebuilding social cohesion and transitional justice—including accountability, reconciliation, and trauma healing.

Woocher stressed that these items shouldn't be imagined as a linear process. What's more, they should be pursued

jointly among donors, as per the Secretary-General's recommendation for "coordinated and coherent" pillar two assistance.

Alison Giffen of the Stimson Center, the third panelist to speak, focused her remarks on that role peacekeeping operations (PKOs) can and should play towards bolstering pillar two. Giffen noted the timeliness of her presentation, as the UN is approaching the 15 year anniversary of the first mandate for a Chapter VII mandate in a peacekeeping operation. Too often peacekeeping missions get relegated to serve as tools strictly for direct assistance but, as Giffen noted, such operations and the people that compose them, have a role to play in the whole scope of pillar two. Giffen had recently completed on-the-ground research in South Sudan and found that many UNMISS peacekeepers did not understand basic precepts of international human rights law and tools for mass atrocity prevention. Citing this example, Giffen reflected on the need to deliver better training and more clear guidance to peacekeepers and all personnel working with a mission, especially on how to protect civilians and the critical role of assisting states. She also called for better sequencing of operations. For Giffen, due diligence and enhanced planning ensures that protection will "do no harm." Finally, she argued for more a defined division of labor among peacekeepers and partners. Better communication, coordination, and collaboration—particularly with the host government—is critical. For Giffen, "UNMISS is an important case study for us to see how PKOs can play a better role in pillar two."

During the discussion portion of the event, panelists tackled questions on an array of issues, including how to enhance early warning systems for prevention and how best to ensure that development actors and the international community are credible. "Credibility," said Woocher, "comes from consistency." This includes repeated messaging in both the public and private spheres. For Giffen, providing dispute resolution for inter-communal violence and working with communities to recognize what is happening on the local level can bolster early warning efforts.

In closing the event, Patrick Travers highlighted the many themes that emerged from the discussion, including the importance of early action, the need for better pre-deployment training of peacekeepers, and the critical importance of enhanced information sharing and cooperation among actors at all levels. Pillar two is both prevention and response, he said, the lines between them are blurred. "This transition is an area that needs a lot of attention," he said.