



LOBBY FOR THE UNITED NATIONS 2007-08

Background information and suggested questions for MPs

THE UN'S ROLE IN IMPLEMENTING THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

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The Responsibility to Protect (R2P)

The 'responsibility to protect', agreed by member states at the 2005 UN World Summit, is the duty of states to intervene, using peaceful or forceful means, to stop large-scale atrocities when governments have shown themselves unable or unwilling to protect their own populations.

The principle represents one of the most significant developments in international humanitarian law in recent years. It provides a normative basis for humanitarian intervention, and points to a growing consensus that sovereignty should no longer be used as a shield for genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

To what extent has R2P been implemented thus far?

Since its adoption by the General Assembly in 2005, the principle has been invoked in several Security Council resolutions:

- In April 2006, the Security Council adopted a thematic resolution on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict which contained the first formal reference by the Council to the responsibility to protect.
- Reference to the 'protection of civilians' has since featured in a number of country-specific resolutions, such as those on the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sudan (but in the preambular rather than operative paragraphs).

However, as the ongoing crisis in Darfur demonstrates, there is a gap between the normative commitments made by UN member states and actions taken when faced with massive human rights violations.

The case of Darfur

The conflict in Darfur is the clearest test-case for the responsibility to protect. The Sudanese government has proved unable or unwilling to protect its own citizens from mass killing and forced displacement. Over 200,000 people have been killed since 2003, and over 2 million displaced; instability is spilling over into neighboring countries. The international community therefore has a responsibility to protect the people of Darfur, through the Security Council. What has the Security Council done thus far?

- In August 2006, the Council adopted resolution 1706, extending the existing UN peacekeeping mission in Sudan (UNMIS), stationed in the south of the country since 2005, to Darfur, in the west of the country. The expanded mandate specified the protection of civilians as a key task for the force. However, the mission never deployed because of Khartoum's objection to the presence of UN troops in Sudan, and China's insistence that the deployment of the mission was made contingent upon the consent of the Sudanese government.
- On 31 July 2007, the Council adopted resolution 1769, which mandated the establishment of a UN-AU hybrid peacekeeping operation for Darfur (UNAMID) under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Comprising around 26,000 uniformed personnel at full strength, the mission, scheduled to deploy next year, has the protection of civilians as its central mandate.
- On 26 September 2007, resolution 1778 established a UN operation in Chad and the Central African Republic (MINURCAT) along with a supporting EU military force of 3,000 troops. The purpose of the mission is to provide security for the villagers and refugees who live near the Darfur border and so are under threat from cross-border incursions by fighters from Sudan. The EU force is authorised under a UN Charter Chapter VII mandate to use "all necessary measures" to support MINURCAT and protect civilians in danger.

These missions may constitute an important step forward in civilian protection. However, it remains to be seen whether deployment will be delayed or undermined by the host states, or indeed whether they will be effective in protecting local populations.

Applying R2P beyond Darfur

Are there other situations to which R2P might apply?

- In 2006, the Security Council was called on to urge Uganda to fulfil its responsibility to protect its own civilians, of whom an estimated 2 million are displaced.
- The international community has been accused of not responding to protect civilians threatened by mass killings, forced displacement and war crimes in Somalia and the eastern DRC.
- The economic and human rights situation in Zimbabwe has incited calls for greater international pressure to be applied to protect Zimbabwean citizens from their own ruthless regime.
- And, most recently, the Burmese military regime's violent suppression of peaceful protests has prompted calls for action based on R2P.

What should the UK government do?

- Keep the pressure up on the government of Sudan through the Security Council to ensure the full and speedy deployment of UNAMID, and to arrest and transfer the individuals indicted by the International Criminal Court (ICC).
- Urge China and AU and Arab League states to engage fully with the government of Sudan to implement resolution 1769 and reach a negotiated settlement with the rebel groups.
- Provide logistical assistance and technical expertise to the UN-AU peacekeeping force, and encourage other states to commit resources to the mission.
- Work to ensure that humanitarian workers and UN and AU staff are provided full access to civilians, and demand that all attacks on humanitarian workers cease.
- Urge all rebel groups to engage fully and constructively with the UN-AU facilitated peace process.
- Build the capacity of the UN and regional organisations, especially the AU, to respond effectively to gross human rights violations.
- Encourage the AU to engage constructively with the Zimbabwean government to end the human rights abuses being perpetrated against the Zimbabwean civilian population.
- Keep the pressure up on Burma at the Security Council to cease the crackdown on protesters, release political prisoners, and participate constructively in a process of national reconciliation and democratisation.

Ask your MP to sign:

- EDM 2739, calling for the government to investigate and, if necessary, press for action against the offshore and international network of businesses owned by and linked to the government of Sudan.
- EDM 1102 calling on South Africa and all AU states to condemn the widespread violations of human rights in Zimbabwe and to take immediate steps towards restoring the civil rights and democratic freedoms of the population.
- EDM 1868 calling on the British Prime Minister to make democratic reform in Burma a foreign policy priority.
- EDM 1861 calling on the international community to urgently address the suffering of the Burmese people and to secure the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.
- EDM 1971 calling on the government to increase efforts to secure the release of jailed parliamentarians in Myanmar and on the UN Special Envoy to press for the release of all political prisoners.

Ask your MP these questions about Darfur:

- What support is the government providing to UNAMID and MINURCAT?
- What action will the government take to secure further Security Council action if the government of Sudan further delays or hampers the AU-UN peacekeeping force in Darfur?
- What action is the government taking to persuade the rebel groups that have not signed the Darfur Peace Agreement to participate in the peace process set for the end of October 2007?
- What action has the government taken to ensure that humanitarian workers are protected from attacks?
- What is the government doing to promote greater acceptance of R2P among the AU and Arab League states, as well as China and Russia?