

## Assessing RtoP in Caracas with WFUNA

We have long contended that the task for diplomats and those groups seeking to partner effectively with them is to invest considerable energies listening to and exploring remedies for state concerns regarding a wide range of sometimes controversial security issues.

In the case of the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) norm the tendency for advocates is to divide states into those who support the norm and those who are opposed. It seems to us more prudent to accept that much of the support for and criticism of the RtoP norm is relative. Some governments see the norm as inspirational for a wide ranging application of UN and other international resources to address the threat of mass atrocities. Others see the UN system as significantly flawed, run primarily by large states that refuse to apply the necessary levels of assessment and transparency to help build confidence in the wisdom and efficacy of their decisions.

It is the allegedly dangerous and inconsistent misapplication of the norm that worries some states. RtoP assumes an institutional framework that is deficient in at least three ways: the lack of assessment and transparency in the Council, the lack of robust, reliable tools on prevention, and the lack of a standing, rapid response, implementation capacity in those hopefully rare instances when diplomacy and preventive tools fail to stem the violence. While some states invoke sovereignty concerns, their actual concerns seem more closely related to fairness in implementation and a genuine commitment to preventive engagement. These are concerns, at least in our view, that all states should share not only the most identifiable RtoP skeptics.

Recently, Global Action was pleased once again to join the World Federation of UN Associations in their efforts to engage local UN Associations and civil society on RtoP while discussing core objections of some of the more wary governments on RtoP. This time, the workshop was in Caracas and attracted an inquisitive and largely enthusiastic group of 60 NGOs, journalists and government officials who seemed to find the norm compelling despite the Venezuelan government's largely critical (though evolving) reaction to RtoP.

The workshop was led by a useful blend of local and international resource persons who helped participants both understand the norm and explore local options for response. As with other WFUNA events, including in Kenya where we were also privileged to participate, an important thematic contribution is tying protection of civilians and prevention of atrocity crimes to the distinguished legacy of Dag Hammarskjöld, former UN Secretary General and a pivotal figure in the UN's ongoing struggle to build capacity sufficient to meet the diverse and growing expectations that global citizens have of UN agencies. We suspect that were Mr. Hammarskjöld still with us, he would embrace the RtoP norm (and Brazil's complementary "Responsibility While Protecting proposal) as a logical extension of the UN's commitment to the marginalized and defenseless. However, like us, he would recognize the UN's inherent structural impediments to fair and full implementation. Hammarskjöld would insist, we think, that if the international community can embrace such a hopeful and transformational norm, it can also do all that is needed to get implementation right.

## **Presentation for Venezuela UNA**

**February 2012**

Workshop Honoring Dag Hammarskjold and Exploring Means to Strengthen the Responsibility to Protect

As you know, part of why we are here today is to honor the legacy of Dag Hammarskjold. He was a legend in a system that has produced too few. The job of UN Secretary General has gotten harder since Hammarskjold held the position – the UN has many more responsibilities and some of those have very high stakes – but all Secretaries General reference the passion and wisdom that Hammarskjold practiced.

Hammarskjold had a healthy regard for sovereign decision-making by governments, but also understood the need for the international community to demonstrate its collective willingness to alleviate human suffering and injustice. Like his successors, he had to navigate difficult terrain between the demands of permanent Council members and the cries of the poor, the marginal, the afflicted. In a system that appears to have more functional independence than it actually has, citizens worldwide often expect more from the UN than it has the strength or capacity to deliver. Hammarskjold was one of the leading lights of the UN who recognized the need to address in a robust way the gap that separates expectation and performance.

As you know, the other main purpose of this workshop is to explore options for promoting the responsibility to protect, which Laura Spano and others have capably explained. Around the world, we need to look harder and longer at how the RtoP norm arose, the problems it seeks to solve, the tools with which it seeks to address those problems, and perhaps even some of the damages done when available response tools and capacities fail to rise to the level of the norm they seek to implement.

As many of you recognize, Venezuela has not always been a supportive country where RtoP is concerned. But this week, your government made a conciliatory statement in response to Brazil's proposal on 'responsibility while protecting' which was proposed as a complementary rather than competing norm. Venezuela heaped praise on Brazil and vowed to follow its lead as this supplemental norm is flushed out in preparation for the GA debate on the 'third pillar' this summer. But Venezuela also asked the hard questions that it asks often, is not alone in asking, and for which there have still not been adequate responses. Questions about fairness in application, about using military intervention in part to protect civilians but also to effect regime change and provide openings for what Venezuela called 'mercantile interests.'

Part of the blame for this confusing application lies in the nature of the UN itself. New York is, indeed, the global capital of self-importance, and governments at headquarters tend to feed off this psychology in a way they might not if the UN were located in Dakar

or Caracas. You rarely if ever hear diplomats concede that a problem is beyond their capacity let alone apologize for mistakes. Genuine assessment is rare, especially in the Council. It is not really clear that diplomats are listening attentively to each other and even less clear that NGOs are actually listening to diplomats.

In our personal lives, if our friends or lovers don't take our concerns seriously, the deeper those concerns tend to become. It is often same with governments. The less their policy objections are taken seriously, the harder – less flexible – the policy tends to become.

Thankfully, people around the world still 'root' hard for the UN but wonder if the institution has the combination of skills – including skills of fairness and communication – to get critical functions like protection of civilians right.

And there can be no doubt that these getting protection right is essential to the successful promotion of RtoP and other, complementary norms. We must ask of ourselves and of the UN system: How do we assess protective efforts in an honest and transparent way so that, if military force is again an option, we can truly practice responsibility while protecting? How do we hold the Council to standards of transparency befitting its enormous responsibilities in the peace and security area?

I don't think an honest response to these questions is too much to ask. Schools and hospitals and football teams and police departments are expected to assess and improve delivery. As important as these functions are, global governance and the need to address threats of mass atrocities command significantly greater concern. The stakes are higher and we need a commitment to excellence on protection that recognizes just how high they are; indeed, the UN's credibility might now rest with our ability to get protection right.

This is a pivotal moment in the UN's ability to prove that it has what it takes to prevent and address these threats. Diplomats and UN agencies hear enough from my office on these issues – too much in fact. They need contact with a broader range of voices. Take the learning of this day in, integrate it with work you are doing on small arms or gender or development or other security-related policies, and help us do what we can to make this system work in a more effective and trustworthy manner. There are many good people at headquarters and in the missions who are trying hard to make protection work and they could use more of your help. .

I'm old and tired and a little crazy and basically disagreeable. By the time I reach 60, I would like to make sure that all these protection issues are in better, younger hands. Hands like Laura's . Hands like Early's. Hands like yours. Commit yourself today to make a bolder impact on global policy. We stand ready to help magnify your voices in this most important and perilous time in the history of the UN. We have for too long had important conversations on global security without your involvement. This was not Hammarhjold's intent. It must end. Let it end here.