

Women as Solutions to and Victims of the Threat of Mass Atrocities:

Integrating Gender Perspectives into the Third Pillar of the Responsibility to Protect

Background Concept Note

The Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) norm was affirmed by the international community in 2005 with the aim to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (hereinafter “mass atrocity crimes”). As outlined in the Secretary-General’s 2009 report¹, there is a three pillar strategy on implementing the doctrine:

1. Every State has a responsibility to protect its populations from mass atrocity crimes.²
2. The international community also has a responsibility to assist States in meeting those obligations.³
3. The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means in accordance with Chapters VI, VII and VIII of the Charter. If such means prove inadequate and a state is “manifestly failing” in its efforts to protect civilians from the four specified crimes, then the international community, working with regional organizations, can engage in collective action, in a timely and decisive manner.⁴

Thus far, the implementation of RtoP inadequately addresses the need to protect populations from gender-based crimes, such as rape and other sexual violence, but also has yet to fully integrate women's skills and capacities in preventing and addressing mass violence.⁵ Such gaps can be seen in the Secretary-General’s 2009 report on *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*, where minimal direct references to Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 were made. SCR 1325 acknowledges women’s participation in decision-making levels; their protection from sexual and gender-based violence; and the importance of including gender perspectives in peace negotiations and mediation, peacekeeping operations, and peacebuilding. The SG’s report did not give much attention to promoting women as agents of change in the most critical areas of peace and security. Similarly, minimal references were made to SCR 1820, which focuses specifically on widespread sexual violence in conflict as an element of international peace and security.⁶ Therefore, while references were made to rape and sexual violence in the 2009 report, such crimes were not directly linked to the responsibility of the international community to protect populations from such acts.⁷ The responsibility still remains with the international community to protect populations from widespread violence, such as the situation in Libya where reports show that men have been raped while in detention facilities, and women have been abducted and subsequently raped.⁸ In general, there has not been sufficient analysis and discussion among the

international community's stakeholders on how these crimes could amount to mass atrocities and how the responsibility to protect applies to these situations.

The international community cannot effectively promote international peace and security, nor successfully protect civilian populations from the four crimes within or beyond the mandates of RtoP, without taking into account the particular needs, skills and perspectives of women. Thus, in carrying out the RtoP pillars, and most especially the challenging third pillar, the international community can and must do more to integrate women's perspectives and voices into all policy discussions focused on prevention and protection.

To help ensure this integration, we propose the following concrete steps:

1. At the international level, UN Member States should do more to highlight roles that women are already playing in the prevention of mass atrocities, and also do more to increase women's direct participation in a wide range of peace and security initiatives, as set out in SCR 1325.
2. At the national level, RtoP strategic discussions relating to the general implementation of the norm should highlight the significance of women's contributions (as leaders in conflict prevention, as aids to survivors and ex-combatants, as national focal points for RtoP discussion and strategic planning, etc) in such implementation strategies.
3. Member States should be encouraged to include RtoP language in the development of their National Action Plans (NAPs) on 1325 to help highlight the roles that women can and are already playing in calling attention and responding to the threat of mass atrocities.

As this framework evolves, it is clear that the international community has a responsibility not only to protect civilians from the commission of mass atrocity crimes, but, most importantly, to prevent such crimes from occurring in the first place. In order to do so effectively, RtoP policies need to consider women's contributions both as potential victims of mass violence, but also as agents of stability and change at all levels of engagement with the threat of such violence.⁹ The RtoP framework can be more effectively implemented with its integration of women whose multifaceted roles can range across cultures and political regimes as they represent leaders of conflict prevention and resolution activities to assistants to survivors of conflict and ex-combatants.¹⁰

¹ A/63/677

² 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, 31 http://globalr2p.org/media/pdf/WSOD_2005.pdf.

³ 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, 31

⁴ 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, 31

⁵ See, Stammes p. 9.

⁶ See, Stammes p. 12.

⁷ Stammes, p. 12.

⁸ See, A/66/657, p. 11

⁹ Eli Stammes, *The Responsibility to Protect: Integrating gender perspectives into policies and practices*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs Report 2010, p. 21.

¹⁰ Stammes, p. 22-23.