

SPOTLIGHT ON R2P



Inaugural Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) and Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect Workshop on Atrocity Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) Port Vila, Vanuatu on 25-26 July 2023

The inaugural Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Workshop on Atrocity Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) was held at the MSG Secretariat in Port Vila, Vanuatu on 25-26 July 2023. In line with the agreement between MSG and the APR2P Centre to collaborate on issues of shared interest such as peace and security, the workshop provided an opportunity to introduce the concept of atrocity prevention and its connections with MSG regional security priorities to high level government officials from MSG nations.

The workshop opened with powerful and supportive comments from MSG Secretariat Director General, Mr. Leonard Louma, OBE, who urged participants to consider the need to look at national policies, regulations, and laws in MSG countries to accommodate state commitments on R2P. Noting the unfamiliar language of R2P and atrocity crimes to the Pacific region, the Director General emphasised the importance of clearly defining and localising terms relating to atrocity prevention. Topics covered during the workshop included: MSG security agenda, including climate change

and transnational crime; an overview of R2P and early warning risk factors; a session specifically on the Melanesian context of risk and mitigation factors (eg, international humanitarian law in domestic legislation; regional commitments that align with R2P such as Boe and Biketawa Declarations, PIFS 2050 Strategy); and a summary of statements made by Melanesian States in United Nations forums in support of R2P.

Participants engaged in lively talanoa sessions throughout the program, and the dialogue touched on many important issues for deeper exploration in future workshops, such as cybersecurity, youth justice, mis/disinformation, sovereignty as responsibility, gender priorities). An in depth session was delivered on the nexus between climate change, security and atrocity prevention, in light of MSG Leaders having declared that the Pacific is facing a climate emergency that threatens the livelihoods, security and well-being of its people. The potential for climate change effects to exacerbate the risk of atrocities was discussed, including through displacement of populations; social, political

and economic instability or upheaval; and tensions over land and resource competition.

Two interactive activity sessions were held on the newly released Framework for Action on R2P, which is intended as a practical guide for States and regional bodies to implement R2P. In the first group activity, country representatives looked at “1.4: Build the professionalism, effectiveness and legitimacy of the police and security forces” to assess what their country is already doing well, (eg, codes of conduct, legislation), and to identify areas where more could be done (eg, reviews, accountability, training etc). Participants found the Framework useful and undertook to share it with relevant departments.

The second activity focused on possible regional responses to a hypothetical situation of escalating violence and risk of atrocities, asking participants to consider how their States (unilaterally or as members of a regional body such as MSG) could take steps to ensure the protection of the population.



It was agreed at the workshop that MSG members would reaffirm their commitment to R2P in relevant forums, and undertake inter-agency consultation to identify existing policies that support atrocity prevention. There was a broad commitment to follow up training sessions by MSG and APR2P targeted towards particular elements of MSG governments, such as security sector, police, defence departments, foreign affairs departments, and also with national and regional networks of defence ministers, police ministers, and other forums.

Pacific launch of Framework for Action

The Framework for Action on R2P, which came out earlier in July, was officially launched at the MSG Secretariat at 4pm on 25 July – the first in the Asia Pacific region to host a launch event.

Opening remarks were offered by the Australian High Commissioner to Vanuatu, Her Excellency Heidi Bootle, who noted the long history of support for R2P among Pacific nations and urged representatives of Melanesian states to use the R2P Framework for Action within their departments.

R2P Pacific Director Romulo Nayacalevu briefly spoke on the R2P Framework for Action and introduced the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary General on R2P, Mr George Okoth-Obbo, who joined the event via zoom. The Special Adviser said it was “profound” to speak to the subregional focus of Melanesia on the “pathway of pre-

vention”. He emphasised Melanesian support for R2P and its “...leadership in embedding it, in socialising it on the ground.” Mr Okoth-Obbo highlighted the significance of localisation of R2P, and the role of regional organisations like MSG in regional security and conflict prevention.

MSG Director General Mr Leonard Louma, OBE was proud to host the launch and said “I firmly believe that the R2P framework will assist provide practical tools to assist our governments contribute to monitoring, risk assessment and early warning on atrocities”.

Human rights-civil society dialogue

On Thursday 27 July, the APR2P Centre, in partnership with the Chair of the Vanuatu Human Rights Network, Anne Pakoa, co-hosted a dialogue for women human rights defenders and civil society actors. The talanoa involved representatives from organisations including Vanuatu Women Against Crime and Corruption (WACC), Dolasa Association, and the Vanuatu Young Women’s Association. An overview of atrocity prevention and the connections with gender-based violence was provided, followed by discussion of issues for women in Vanuatu, including violence, traditional gender roles and institutional / cultural discrimination against women, governance and accountability, the importance of civil spaces and legislative reform, and the role of police. Participants also highlighted issues affecting youth like substance abuse, crime, and suicide.

The gendered impacts of climate change were raised, such as increased domestic violence, and women bearing the brunt of blame for resource and food scarcity. Another issue that came up was the importance of political representation of women for allowing women’s voices to be heard. Participants agreed that a further, more in depth (and possibly regional) workshop on human rights, women’s rights, and atrocity prevention, would be valuable.

Other meetings

Finally, the APR2P Centre met with the Director of the Pacific Fusion Centre, James Movick, to discuss common priorities and strategies around regional security, conflict prevention, and risk assessment. The PFC is an important element of the Pacific regional security architecture.



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