



AP R2P

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United Nation's statistics show that East Asia has some of the lowest homicide rates globally.

But many key challenges remain and there is much to be done to make the responsibility to protect (R2P) and atrocity prevention a daily lived reality.

Five key challenges stand out:

1. Raising awareness about R2P and atrocity prevention

By far the foremost challenge, and the one that is always raised in dialogues across the region, is the need to build awareness of what R2P is and is not and what it requires of people. Even among governing elites, misconceptions remain about R2P, with many still seeing it as a veil for foreign intervention and imperialism rather than viewing it as an ally of sovereignty. We have found consistently that spreading the word about what R2P is – and the UN secretary-general's strategy for its implementation – is crucial for advancing support for the principle and laying the foundation for its implementation.

With our many friends and partners in the region we have taken a number of steps to meet this challenge, including helping to establish nationally led dialogue on R2P and atrocity prevention encompassing government and nongovernmental actors, translating key documents into national and local languages, providing training and training packages that can be delivered by others and doing what we can to support our local partners. Through this, we are seeing the emergence

SPOTLIGHT ON R2P GAAMAC II Preventing Atrocities

Professor Alex Bellamy, director of the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (AP R2P), gave an address at the Second International Meeting of the Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes (GAAMAC II), held in Manila, the Philippines, on 2-4 February 2016.

This year's meeting focused on identifying the challenges of developing state architectures in atrocity prevention. Professor Bellamy's presentation highlighted the lessons learned in the prevention of atrocities in the Asia Pacific region and the work that still needs to be done.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

The Asia Pacific has accomplished much in a short space of time. Most impressively, over the past four decades it has experienced a rapid and dramatic decline in the incidence of atrocity crimes. Over a short time, the so-called "East Asian Peace" has transformed the region from one of the world's deadliest to one of the world's most peaceful. Not only have dozens of armed conflicts come to an end, we have seen countless governments in the region turn their backs on tyranny. Individuals have also played their part – the



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of national constituencies inside and outside government that can take this agenda forward. But it is inevitably long term, complex and resource intensive, since each country's context, experience and needs are different and require approaches that are tailored to each.

2. Making sovereignty an ally of responsibility

The underlying logic of R2P is that sovereignty entails a responsibility to protect. The principle's ultimate vision is of a world of responsible sovereigns that protect their own populations from atrocity crimes. This is a vision that resonates well in the Asia Pacific since it has been precisely through state consolidation and strengthening – coupled with economic growth and regional cooperation – that the region has achieved its remarkable decline in the incidence of atrocity crimes. We have seen states in the region increasingly embrace their responsibility to protect as a core part of their sovereignty – a point that almost every ASEAN member has now made in the UN General Assembly. But we have also seen sovereignty stymie progress at times, especially when the ideas of more progressive states are held hostage by the more cautious. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that however exasperating sovereignty can be sometimes, there are no short cuts. Ultimately, R2P will succeed or fail based on the extent to which states incorporate protection responsibilities into their own conceptions of sovereignty.

3. Translating R2P into daily practice

By and large, states in the Asia Pacific region accept their R2P. Some, such as Cambodia, whose prime minister committed his country to furthering the implementation of R2P both at home and in the region; South Korea, which has



Professor Alex Bellamy at GAAMAC II.

appointed an R2P focal point; and Japan, which has done the same, have begun to take steps to translate this rhetorical commitment to R2P into daily practice. Having won the normative argument about R2P, the challenge we now face is one of how to translate the principle into a daily lived reality.

To do that, we first need to know what the expectations are. What ought states and their societies do to implement R2P? To help this conversation, my Centre is developing a Baseline Study on the implementation of R2P in the Asia Pacific that will use recommendations from the UN secretary-general to clarify the steps that states and societies ought to take. These include (but are not limited to):

- appointing an R2P Focal Point;
- signing, ratifying and implementing relevant aspects of international humanitarian law (IHL) and the Refugee Convention;
- conducting national assessments of risk and resilience;

- tackling hate speech and criminalizing incitement;
- building capacities to manage difference constructively – through a national architecture for atrocity prevention; and
- engaging with regional arrangements to promote the implementation of R2P.

Once expectations are established, we can begin national conversations about how best to make atrocity prevention a lived reality and cross-national and regional conversations about experiences and lessons learned. Then we can also push the international community to support states in this endeavor. Supporting states and societies in this process of identifying concrete national priorities and taking action to meet the challenge – a long-term and complex process that will need tailoring to each specific context – ought to be a key priority for R2P's second decade.

4. Incorporating R2P into regional deliberations

At track 2 and 2.5, the Asia Pacific region has been one of the most active in thinking about how to utilize regional arrangements to advance R2P. There seems to be consensus that the region has the institutions that it needs – in the form of ASEAN for Southeast Asia and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) for the wider region. The larger challenge is persuading the region’s governments to take the first step of introducing R2P and atrocity prevention into these frameworks.

Five years ago, I had the privilege of co-chairing a Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) Study Group on R2P with the Philippines, Indonesia and Canada. We employed an unusual approach in that group aimed at delivering a consensus final document – which we did and which was adopted by the whole of CSCAP.

That report set out a range of modest steps that could be taken to utilize the capacities that the ARF already has in order to advance R2P. It suggested a careful process for advancing this, starting with an expert-level meeting to discuss the CSCAP report. I think that this remains a valuable contribution and would implore government representatives here to consider whether they might want to initiate an expert-level meeting to discuss the implementation of R2P in the region.

More recently, I was fortunate to serve as secretary to Dr. Surin Pitsuwan and his high-level panel on R2P in Southeast Asia. After a series of regional consultations, they presented a report at the UN in 2014 which made a powerful case that R2P and the values of the ASEAN community were mutually reinforcing and identified a variety

of steps that ASEAN member states and the association as a whole could take to

strengthen the ASEAN community by implementing R2P. As I noted earlier, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen committed his country, in 2015, to leading regional initiatives in this area. Progress is being made in other areas too, for example, my Centre has agreed to provide the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) with training on atrocity risks and prevention.

One way in which ASEAN’s consideration of R2P might be advanced would be through a thematic study of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) on the implications of implementing R2P in ASEAN member states.



The AP R2P’s Professor Alex Bellamy meets with other GAAMAC II participants.

5. Dealing with imminent risk

The final challenge revolves around the practicalities of protection in the region's most difficult cases. In North Korea, a UN panel – whose findings have been backed by the UN General Assembly – has found that the government is likely committing systematic crimes against humanity. Having spent the last decade agreeing on the principle of R2P, we now need regional conversations about how best to protect the people of North Korea. There are no easy answers, but now that the issue of human rights in North Korea has been raised on the agenda of the UN Security Council, we need to find avenues for a regional conversation paving the way to a concerted effort to improve the lives of North Koreans.

Meanwhile, Myanmar has made remarkable progress, and I congratulate Thein Sein and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for their role in the country's transition. The challenges that Myanmar faces are many – but the progress made is a testament to what can be achieved through engagement. Again, as we move our conversation from the norm to practical action we need to think – in more tangible terms – about what might be done.

There are other practical challenges that the region faces: guaranteeing non-recurrence in the face of past crimes, protecting populations from non-state armed groups, and responding effectively to the rise of violent extremism. Many parts of the region have experienced atrocity crimes, so dealing with the past is also a big part of the equation here.



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