



AP R2P

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SPOTLIGHT ON R2P

Promoting Responsibility to Protect in Cambodia:

What Role for Academia?

**PUBLIC LECTURE
AT PANNASASTRA
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBODIA
BY PROF. POU SOVACHANA
AND PROF. SAY PUTHY**

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is a principle that was adopted by member states of the United Nations following the World Summit of Leaders in New York in 2005. Specifically, Paragraphs 138 and 139 of the World Summit Outcome Document recognizes: 1) the primary responsibility of states to protect its populations against genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity; 2) the responsi-

bility of the international community to assist states in building their capacities to prevent these four crimes; and 3) the responsibility of the international community to respond "in a timely and decisive manner" if states manifestly fail in protecting their populations from mass atrocities. As a concept, R2P is anchored on various international laws and conventions on the prohibition and punishment of genocide, the protection of universal human rights, adherence to international humanitarian law, and the prohibition of torture and the use of child soldiers, among others.

It has been almost a decade now

since the R2P norm was adopted in the UN and, following the Libyan crisis in 2011 and amidst the ongoing conflict in Syria, it continues to generate controversies in light of some misconceptions and negative perceptions about its implementation. To some extent, the crisis in Libya and the continuing stalemate in Syria in the UN Security Council have overshadowed the most important aspect of the norm, which is the prevention of genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. In his 2013 Report on R2P to the UN General Assembly, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon underscored the importance of states paying attention to the risk factors that their societies face that could trigger crisis situations leading to mass atrocities. This includes among others: social, economic, and political inequalities; weak institutions that deal with the promotion of justice, rule of law, and protection of human rights; culture of impunity; and existing conflicts over identity,



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governance, and resources. The Secretary-General's Report also encouraged states to take steps to address the risk factors they are facing in order to avert future crisis situations by building structures to prevent mass atrocities; strengthening state institutions in promoting human rights protection, access to justice, and rule of law; ratifying international laws and conventions, as well as enacting domestic laws related to mass atrocities prevention.

Problem and Significance

The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle marks a transition in the conceptual understanding of sovereignty, with sovereignty no longer the right of a state to autonomy within its own territory, but the responsibility of a state to protect and preserve its citizenry. Due to its unfortunate past, Cambodia is now in a unique position to champion R2P norms in ASEAN by mainstreaming genocide and mass atrocities prevention as an important security agenda. However, one of the greatest barriers to Cambodia taking a leadership role in mass atrocities prevention is the lack of R2P awareness and understanding by local authorities and general population due to the relative newness of the concept. Furthermore, a key component of mass atrocities prevention involves the education of the general public on the new understanding of sovereignty as the state's responsibility to protect its population, and being aware of trigger signs of mass atrocities. A lack of awareness leaves Cambodia without any such tools to prevent mass atrocities in the future. The question now is how to raise awareness and educate not only high-level government officials, the military and police, and other academics, but also the general population in order to minimize the potential for mass atrocities.

It is here that academia can play a dominant role by playing upon its own experiences and achievements in dealing with past atrocities. One major role academia can play is



Students listen intently to Professors Pou Sovachana and Say Puthy at a public lecture on R2P held at the Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia (PUC).

by supporting transitional justice. Transitional justice involves the attempt to address mass atrocities as a society by ensuring that there is accountability and justice for the crimes in order to achieve closure. Transitional justice takes the form of war crime trials, lustration, and truth commissions. Academics can also provide genocide education in order to raise awareness of past atrocities and equip the general population with knowledge of trigger signs in order to avoid future mass atrocities. Furthermore, academics may also research and release publications; for example, the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) often hosts public lectures and have a tool kit to address genocide education.

Spreading greater awareness of R2P norms not only educates but empowers the local people as they become aware of the state's responsibility towards them, the citizens, in that the state may not abuse its citizens for gain, but must ensure their safety and well-being both in the present and future. Furthermore, providing genocide education familiarizes the people with common principles of human rights and encourages them to become champions of human rights themselves. Both of these factors has the potential

to change Cambodia's governance and reputation; first, the people will make different governance demands from its government and second, the international community will hold Cambodia in higher esteem once it witnesses the Cambodian people's dedication to upholding human rights. All this may begin with greater education on the Responsibility to Protect principle.

Methodology

The public lecture was held at Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia (PUC), led by two knowledgeable Prof. Pou Sovachana and Prof. Say Puthy in the R2P concept, to more than 50 students and four university lecturers. The purpose of the public lecture is as follows:

1. To raise awareness, understanding and students' knowledge about the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm.
2. To support efforts to strengthen national and regional capacities to prevent and halt genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing.
3. To promote human rights protection and advance the norms and principles of atrocities prevention

4. To stimulate interest among university students on research and publication on the following areas of study:

- Peace and Conflict Resolution
- Genocide Studies
- International Relations
- International Law
- Transitional Justice
- Peacekeeping and Peace-building
- Women, Peace, and Security (WPS)

The public lecture also impressed upon the students with the various roles academia had taken in the past in promoting mass atrocities prevention and suggested possible ways by which students themselves could be involved in the work towards prevention.

Q&A Session

A Question and Answer session followed the lecture. Due to time constraints,

only two questions were answered. They are as follows:

Question:

There are internal and external factors that can lead to mass atrocities. For example, in the 1970s, Cambodia had major external pressures from both Vietnam and United States. What can a small and weak state do to prevent genocide and atrocities when there are aggressive external factors?

Answer:

- Cambodia must strengthen capacity building, especially human capacity. Cambodia must not rely on international aid, but be self-sufficient.
- Government needs to ensure its policies are neutral, e.g. a lot of Cambodia's aid comes from China.
- Cambodia needs to join ASEAN to develop regional security by encouraging various governments to join together, which is difficult as ASEAN has problems

of its own, e.g. South China Sea disputes.

Question:

Humanitarian intervention has to be taken under UN Security Council's authority. What if the Security Council does not agree?

Answer:

The challenge of R2P is getting consensus from the UN Security Council and must be worked through.

Results and Discussion

Following the Q&A session, students split into four groups with each group assigned to discuss a different question:

- How do you prevent mass atrocities?
- What three human rights targets do you want from the government?



Students break into four groups for discussion following the Q & A sessions. After discussion, representatives from each group presented their results.

- What are the lessons learned from Cambodia to prevent mass atrocities?
- Do conflicts affect men and women differently? If so, how?

Impacts

The students responded positively to the presentation, paying close attention during the lecture and enthusiastically participating in the discussion. The students seemed to be learning about both world and Cambodian history, gaining an understanding about the specifics of genocide and other classifications of atrocities, and were introduced to the concept of R2P, which is not well-known in Cambodia. The questions raised after the public lecture made it clear that the students had been receptive to the introduction to R2P despite this unfamiliarity. Many students also stayed after the session and expressed interest in gaining further information and resources, and in becoming further involved. The overall reception to the public lecture was excellent, but the students' lack of awareness of mass atrocities prevention and the concept of R2P makes it obvious that greater effort must be made provide greater education in these areas.

Recommendations

University students should be introduced to more opportunities to discuss the idea, perhaps through consistent follow-up lectures and discussions. The plan of action to successfully instill the R2P norm could be to:

- Every 1-2 months: Workshop about mass atrocities prevention and R2P awareness, complete with a lecture and a student-facilitated discussion with guided questions afterwards. The lectures could be led by professors of the university who are knowledgeable about R2P norms and have been trained in giving seminars in genocide education and mass atrocities prevention.
- Every 6 months: Large-scale lecture led by guest speaker, who is an expert in the field of R2P, who could present any new information about R2P and its applications, and inform students about the current progress of the norm within the international community.
- There is also a need to promote and build awareness R2P norms to the provincial universities and local community via conducting workshop about mass atrocities prevention.



Students responded positively to the presentation, and it was recommended that they be held regularly.



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