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R2P Debate Information

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Moot: This House believes the United Nations has a responsibility to protect.

The United Nations has a responsibility to prevent genocide and mass atrocities.

PRO Point:

Citizens should be protected by individual governments, however if governments are either partaking in or failing to prevent genocide and mass atrocities, then another global actor needs to take action. The United Nations should take on this responsibility to protect people when their governments are unable or unwilling to do so, in order to prevent mass killings, genocide and other atrocities. If we believe human rights have any meaning at all, then they must be universal and therefore our obligation to protect citizens from such horrors must apply regardless of state boundaries. Moving from a situation where the UN placed the rights of states above those of their people, to one where individual rights are given the greater priority is surely morally essential.

CON Point:

There is a procedural contradiction in the Proposition's position. If there is a universal responsibility to protect, why must this only be exercised through the United Nations, dependent upon Security Council recognition of a crisis and support for action? The United States believes that in some cases it would be right for individual states, or coalitions of the willing to take action to protect innocent life elsewhere in the world, even if the Security Council refused to deliver on its promises. Under the proposition, NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1998/99 was wrong, and so was Vietnam's in Cambodia against the Khmer Rouge, Tanzania's in Uganda to stop Idi Amin's bloodshed, etc. - none of these had Security Council support.

A strong United Nations commitment to the Right to Protect will create an effective deterrent to future atrocities.

PRO Point:

Governments and leaders who are considering attacks on their own people, or who are wavering in their commitment to defend them from harm, will be aware that ignoring their own obligations could bring swift action from the international community. Only once their ability to hide behind claims to absolute sovereignty has been removed will human rights have to be taken seriously by dictators and extremist regimes. Thus by adopting a strong UN position on the Responsibility to



Protect, we can hope to make states take their own responsibilities more seriously and make the need for any actual intervention rare. For example, Omar Al-Bashir of the Sudan has committed horrible atrocities against his own people. He is complicit in committing genocide against Darfur populations, yet remains in power. There is a warrant for his arrest from the International Criminal Court, but they have little ability to act upon their threats. A strong commitment to the responsibility to protect would ensure leaders like Bashir think twice before permitting such atrocities to take place, through fear for their own grip on power.

CON Point:

An apparently strong UN obligation to intervene in order to protect innocents will not necessarily provide a positive, deterrent effect. Rather, it could merely serve as an incentive for dictators and generals to commit their atrocities quicker. For example, when the United Nations first considered intervention in Libya, Colonel Qaddafi responded by strengthening the crackdown on protestors and preparing for an all-out assault on the Eastern town of Benghazi. The intent to protect civilians in this case served only to increase the will of the leader to harm them. Furthermore, many of the nasty or failing regimes who might be fearful of intervention have a Security Council patron whom they can rely upon to prevent any action being taken against them. If the UN has an obligation to act to prevent atrocities such as genocide, then vetoes will be used to prevent the Security Council recognizing that such a situation exists in the first place. Though it has recently joined UN resolutions on Sudan, China blocked moves to impose sanctions on Sudan before 2007, largely due to favorable economic ties with the state. Finally, this proposal may make atrocities more likely, by encouraging rebel groups to provoke ill-disciplined government forces into committing gross human rights violations, such as massacres, in the hope that such a response will draw in international forces on their own side.

It is better to save lives than stand idly by.

PRO Point:

It is immoral to let people die when something can be done about it. It inherently values the lives of victims of genocide and civil war less than other lives. The world and the United Nations have for too long stood by and watched atrocities unfold. Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur are all horrible examples where genocide and other appalling violations of human rights were inflicted upon civilian populations while the UN failed to act. Clearly in all the past cases where action might have saved lives and delivered hundreds of thousands of people from evil, no action was taken by the Security Council. Therefore those who argue that future challenges should be considered purely on a case-by-case basis must accept that this is likely to mean yet more refusals to act decisively and so more needless suffering. We must place an obligation to act on the Security Council so that they are predisposed to respond seriously and swiftly in future. If there is a known atrocity going on in the international community, the Security Council should no longer be allowed to ignore it based on their individual ties. For example China could not defend the Sudan even though they have close financial ties when intervention for human rights abuses is the norm. The world responded to the holocaust saying 'never again', yet similar ethnic



cleansing has happened over and over again, and in defense of human rights the UN needs to adopt a no tolerance policy. Countries who are not prepared for this obligation should step down from the Security Council.

CON Point:

Not all crises can be dealt with militarily. Often an invasion only creates more problems. Further is the UN ready to take on the underlying problems in cases of genocide and civil war. Those rifts may take decades to heal and is the UN truly invested because simply providing aid and military support will not solve the deep seated tensions in countries like the Sudan and Somalia. Talk of prevention and of using non-military means to ensure states protect their own people properly is little different from existing UN commitments. The UN has failed in the past to head off humanitarian crises and there is nothing in the new Declarations to make it more likely to be successful in future. If the responsibility to protect means anything, it is to weaken the concept of sovereignty and make military intervention more likely.

Actions to intervene in internal situations need to be determined on a case by case basis.

CON Point:

We all have a moral duty to protect human rights and prevent atrocities, but we do not need to make a vague and open-ended commitment. In particular there is a big difference between a genocide pursued by a strong, centralized state victimizing its own people, and the inability of a failing state to protect its civilians in a time of civil war or ethnic unrest. For example the genocide in Sudan is inflicted by the government, yet the situation in Somalia is entirely different since they lack a government and violence stems from rebel groups in the country. Making decisions on a case-by-case basis recognizes that every crisis is different in character and requires a different and proportionate response be it military or humanitarian.

PRO Point:

Acting on a case-by-case basis does not establish an effective deterrent. If a leader does not know for certain that their action is going to lead to an intervention, they can't be deterred. In order for them to be deterred, they need to know by which standards their actions will be assessed and acted upon. On a case-by-case basis, there is no such consistency established.

The UN needs to adopt an equal treatment of every country and situation under a responsibility to protect clause so that the least powerful in this world do not go unprotected.