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## Preventing and addressing armed conflict: The role of women in the implementation of the Responsibility to Protect by Jelena Pia-Comella

The international community continues not only to be challenged by its failure to prevent armed conflicts before they occur, but also in addressing them in a timely and effective manner. The ongoing crises in Burundi, Syria and Yemen, to highlight a few, emphasize the need for renewed leadership and engagement in putting prevention up front.

A wide range of treaties and norms are available to address the root causes of armed conflict and prevent its recurrence. In 2015 the United Nations carried out high-level reviews of its Peacebuilding Architecture, UN Peace Operations and the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The subsequent synthesis of these three reports provides a basis for renewed efforts in preventing armed conflicts, including the prevention of mass atrocity crimes.

The reviews drew linkages between the implementation of the Responsibility to Protect norm, the inclusion of women in peacebuilding and peacekeeping, and the ratification and implementation of the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court as tools and mechanisms for the prevention of armed conflict and ensuring lasting peace.

They also underscored that systematic violations of human rights, in particular of women's rights, and prevailing impunity for mass atrocity crimes, are among the root causes of armed conflicts and their recurrence. Further, they reminded us that participation of women constitutes a crucial dimension of broadening inclusion for sustaining peace and that peace negotiations and accords that are truly locally owned and inclusive of civil society and women have at least a 50% greater chance to succeed than those that do not.

The Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) norm offers a range of measures to reinforce national sovereignty and prevent the commission of mass atrocity crimes. RtoP is now widely understood to include three pillars of responsibility: (1) the responsibility of states to protect populations from mass atrocity crimes (genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing); (2) the wider international community's responsibility to encourage and assist individual states in meeting that objective; and (3) If a state is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take appropriate collective action, in a timely and decisive manner and in accordance with the UN Charter.

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Implementing RtoP is needed now more than ever if the international community is determined to prevent mass atrocities once and for all. Ensuring that the scope of the Responsibility to Protect norm includes a gender and accountability lens will further address the root causes of mass atrocity crimes, hence enhancing the RtoP preventive efforts. Through preventing discrimination and the violation of women's rights, national stakeholders support the long-term prevention of atrocity crimes and their recurrence.

Furthermore, linking RtoP with the UN's Women, Peace and Security agenda reinforces the international community's ability to assist states to fulfill their responsibility to protect, under pillar two of the norm. United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325, which gave rise to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, was a landmark decision in addressing the gender gap in the peace and security arena. It recognized not only that women and girls are disproportionately affected by armed conflicts, but also that women are poorly represented in formal peacebuilding and peacemaking processes.

Safeguarding women's rights and their participation in peace and security is essential for the international community to effectively assist in promoting international human rights and humanitarian

law and to strengthen national legislation and institutions to prevent mass atrocities. Subsequent UNSC Resolutions 1820 and 1960 went further in recognizing sexual and gender-based violence as a weapon of war, and fighting impunity for these crimes as necessary in ensuring gender justice and long-lasting peace. These resolutions underscore a new standard in multilateralism by not only recognizing the crucial role of women in mass atrocity crimes prevention, but also by drawing the linkages between peace, security and accountability.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is the first and, so far, the only international treaty that criminalizes and explicitly defines sexual and genderbased violence as crimes against humanity (Article 7(1) g); as war crimes (Article 8 (2) a (xxii)) and, to a certain extent, as genocide (Article (6) d). In this way, the Rome Statute not only ensures access to justice for women who are victims of the gravest crimes under international law, but also sets new standards for national legal systems.

The Rome Statute recognizes rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, and enforced sterilization as crimes against humanity and war crimes. In so doing it offers three main improvements in the fight against impunity: (1) by codifying these crimes in law; (2) by ensuring victims' protection, participation and reparations in the Court's procedures; and (3) by affirming that sexual and gender-based mass atrocities are in fact war crimes and crimes against humanity -- and not collateral acts of war. With these groundbreaking provisions, there is further assurance that the voices of women, often overlooked in prosecutions, can finally be heard in courtrooms across the world.

The International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), a network of global civil society actors, works in partnership with governments, the United Nations and other networks to promote understanding and support of the RtoP norm. Additional measures advocated by the ICRtoP include:

- Coordinating and reinforcing support for universal ratification and implementation of the Rome Statute (in partnership with ICRtoP's sister coalition, the Coalition for the International Criminal Court);
- Ensuring that National Action Plans on UNSC 1325 holistically address the four pillars of Women, Peace and Security: prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery;
- Ensuring that early-warning mechanisms are locally owned and include women's views and rights;
- Coordinating and reinforcing support for universal ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- Carrying out awareness-raising campaigns on gender justice and recognizing that sexual and gender-based violence is not a collateral act of war but constitutes a crime of war;
- Strengthening the working methods of the UN Security Council to be more consistent and coherent in addressing and preventing mass atrocities;
- Mainstreaming the 1325 and RtoP agendas throughout all the decisions and resolutions of the UN Security Council.

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Documents, links, and other items referenced in the June 2017 issue of Mondial are available at <http://www.wfmcanada.org/mondial-links-june-2017/>