



The notion of protecting human lives and preventing large scale massacres goes back a long way. In 1864 the International Red Cross was established and through the years many other organizations have been established to help the downtrodden and people being abused. After World War II the UN resolution 260 of 9 December 1948 adopted the convention on the *Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* as a direct response to the horror of the Holocaust. The Wars in Indochina in the 1960s and 70s was also a turning point in many ways. Young people all over the world witnessed on their TV screen the atrocities that happen during a war, and the first televised famine in Biafra help spur further commitment to humanitarian work.

The modern turning point for the notion of “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) came out of the Rwanda experience. “Rwanda in 1994, the genocide, was a very important piece of this,” Edward Luck, the special advisor to the UN Secretary General on R2P told UN News Centre recently. He traces the story back to World War II: “Before that, there were the killing fields in Cambodia, after Rwanda there was the slaughter in the forests of Srebrenica. There was a whole series of such scars on the 20th century, going really all the way back to the Holocaust, which created a terrible stain on human history: mass violence targeted against one part of the population or another,” Luck explained.

Speaking at a seminar in Brussels recently, Kiyoo Akasaka, the UN Secretary General for Communication and Public Information, said that the idea of R2P is not new with respect to states securing their people, but new in that the international community can intervene to protect civilians.

After the NATO intervention in the former Yugoslavia in 1999 there was a lot of debate on the legality of the intervention and so two years after, in 2001, the idea of R2P was first voiced, as a reaction to former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's initiative. In late 2001 the Canadian government created the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), that released its report *Responsibility to Protect* which advocated that state sovereignty is a responsibility, and that the international community could, as a last resort use military intervention to prevent "mass atrocities". The African Union (AU) later endorsed the idea and put in its founding charter of 2005 that the "protection of human and peoples rights" would be a principle objective of the AU and that the Union had the right "to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity."

At the World Summit in 2005 the member states included R2P in the Outcome Document. The next year, in April 2006, the UN Security Council formalized their support of the R2P by reaffirming the provisions of the paragraphs from the World Summit document. Finally the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon released a report the same year, *Implementing the Responsibility to Protect*, which argued for the implementation for R2P and its arguments were subsequently discussed at the 2009 UN General Assembly, resulting in Resolution (A/RES/63/308) which acknowledges the debate and Ban Ki-moon's report and proposes the General Assembly to continue its consideration of R2P.

The international community now has a tool that could prevent further mass atrocities, as Edward Luck puts it: "Breaking that cycle of violence is something that everyone has talked about for years and years, but now it's an effort to have a comprehensive systematic program to try to do something about it. It's not easy, but it's well worth trying."