



**The United Church  
of Canada  
General Council**

# **GCE Responsibility to Protect (2008-11-15-347)**

True Document Date: October 31, 2008

Whereas we have affirmed our desire and commitment to strive for just, peaceful, and sustainable communities in keeping with God's vision for wholeness of life;

Whereas we are all inextricably interconnected in the web of creation, and affected by actions that impact on the sustainability and well-being of all of creation;

Whereas scripture calls us to be peacemakers;

Whereas God would have the whole world turn swords into ploughshares, we know that in many places ploughshares are turned into swords;

Whereas we believe that any act of violence is an affront to God's shalom, we confess that, even though it is in conflict with the will of God that we live in peace, we support the United Nations Responsibility to Protect as a possibly necessary response to protect vulnerable people;

Whereas in its existing policy, The United Church of Canada has already endorsed two components of the Responsibility to Protect, namely the responsibility to prevent conflict and the responsibility to rebuild after conflict has ended;

Whereas in situations such as Burma (Myanmar), Sudan, and apartheid South Africa the United Church has called for a number of interventionary measures such as economic sanctions, boycotts, ethical investment, embargoes, and judicial action as advocated for in the Responsibility to React;

Whereas we must further acknowledge that these measures, in and of themselves, are not benign and that some can also have fatal consequences;

Whereas the perspectives of members of the United Church and partners have informed the shape of this policy;

Whereas the church must continue to discuss and discern the issue of military intervention with partners and through extensive theological reflection;

Whereas the voices of those sounding the early-warning signals of potential conflict in communities around the world have not been given due attention;

Whereas consultations with partners on the development of a policy on the responsibility to protect have repeatedly emphasized the singular importance of conflict prevention;

Whereas the United Church is concerned that the level of global overseas development assistance which promotes conflict prevention by building and supporting sustainable communities has been stagnant or declined over the years;

Whereas environmental degradation and climate change pose a serious threat to the well-being of all of creation, and constitute a root cause of global conflict;

Whereas in order to prevent violence from erupting, The United Church, in partnership with others around the world, must invest more time and resources in addressing the root causes of potential conflict using all available mechanisms to educate and advocate for peace including campaigns such as United for Peace; and

Whereas the Responsibility to Protect emphasizes that military intervention should only be used as a last resort, with limited force, and only in extreme cases where there are gross and egregious breaches of human rights involving the loss of life to the level amounting to crimes against humanity (such as genocide, or ethnic cleansing including the systematic killing of members of a particular group);

Be it therefore resolved that:

The Executive of the General Council receives the report, "The United Church of Canada's Policy on the Responsibility to Protect" and endorses:

1. The United Nation's *Responsibility to Protect* framework and criteria namely:

a. **Right authority:** United Nations Security Council authority must be sought prior to any military intervention action being carried out. Those calling for intervention must formally request such authorization. Should the Security Council fail to act, the Secretary- General can call a meeting of the Emergency Special Sessions of the General Assembly under the 1950 Uniting for Peace procedures to consider the request.

b. **Just cause:**

- large-scale loss of life, actual or apprehended, with genocidal intent or not, which is the product of either deliberate state action, or state neglect or inability to act, or a failed state situation, or
- large-scale ethnic cleansing actual or apprehended whether carried out by killing, forced expulsion, acts of terror or rape.

c. **Right intention:** The primary purpose of the intervention must be to halt or avert human suffering.

Any use of military force that aims from the outset, for example, for the alteration of borders or the advancement of a particular combatant group's claim to self-determination, cannot be justified. Overthrow of regimes is not, as such, a legitimate objective, although disabling that regime's capacity to harm its own people may be essential to discharging the mandate of protection and what is necessary to achieve that disabling will vary from case to case. Occupation of territory may not be able to be avoided, but it should not be an objective as such, and there should be a clear commitment from the outset to returning the territory to its sovereign owner at the conclusion of hostilities or, if that is not possible, administering it on an interim basis under UN auspices.

d. **Last resort:** Every diplomatic and non-military avenue for the prevention or peaceful resolution of the humanitarian crisis must have been explored. The responsibility to react with military coercion can only be justified when the responsibility to prevent has been fully discharged.

- e. **Proportional means:** The scale, duration, and intensity of the planned military intervention should be the minimum necessary to secure the humanitarian objective in question. The means have to be commensurate with the ends, and in line with the magnitude of the original provocation.
- f. **Reasonable prospects:** Military action can only be justified if it stands a reasonable chance of success, that is, halting or averting the atrocities or suffering that triggered the intervention in the first place. Military intervention is not justified if actual protection cannot be achieved, or if the consequences of embarking upon the intervention are likely to be worse than if there is no action at all. In particular, a military action for limited human protection purposes cannot be justified if in the process it triggers a larger conflict. It will be the case that some human beings simply cannot be rescued except at unacceptable cost perhaps of a larger regional conflagration, involving major military powers. In such cases, however painful the reality, coercive military action is no longer justified.

2. That, in circumstances when the Responsibility to Protect is being considered, The United Church of Canada's framework include:

- a. Consultation with affected partners and reliable independent sources provide verifiable evidence that the vulnerable communities affected are specifically requesting international military intervention authorized by the United Nations to halt the suffering;
- b. Extensive consultation be conducted with partners in the areas affected for advice and guidance on the appropriate action for the context **before** making a decision (this is already established United Church practice);
- c. Any call for international military intervention under the authority of the United Nations be determined on **a case-by-case basis**;
- d. Any international military intervention under the authority of the United Nations be in conformity with international law.

3. That given the rapidly changing global context and the concerns regarding military intervention as identified by partners, The United Church of Canada continues to work with partners to study and discuss the implications of the Responsibility to Protect.
4. That The United Church of Canada continues urging the Canadian Government to increase its level of official development assistance without the kinds of conditionalities that have exacerbated tensions between communities and weakened accountable, local governance.
5. That the General Secretary, General Council develop and implement a comprehensive communication and education plan.

The Executive of The General Council, Minutes, Nov. 15-17, 2008, pp. 353-354

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