The Responsibility to Protect
Building Consensus in East and West AFRICA

Pictured above: Participants at the East Africa consultation on *The Responsibility to Protect,* the Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), held in Nairobi Kenya, March 3-4, 2004.

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The unfolding humanitarian crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan, where in the past year fighting has caused the death of 50,000 people and forced over a million to flee their homes, has once again brought to light the overwhelming challenge of ensuring the protection of vulnerable people and communities in Africa.

As horrific as the suffering of Darfur may be, perhaps the greatest tragedy is that it is not a unique or isolated situation. The Project Ploughshares *2004 Armed Conflicts Report* reveals that of the 36 armed conflicts ongoing in 2003, 15 or 42% were in Africa. Oxfam has calculated that in the past ten years, 77% of the world's deaths due to armed conflict occurred in Africa. In the past decade alone, communities in the southern region of Sudan as well as in Rwanda, Burundi, Northern Uganda, Liberia and Sierra Leone have found themselves in the same terrible circumstance as that which currently prevails in Darfur. All have faced immediate and extraordinary threats to their basic security or even their very existence. And in each case, the state concerned was unable or unwilling to provide protection, or was itself the perpetrator.

In this tenth anniversary year of the Rwandan genocide, it is abundantly clear that the response to such communities by both their neighbours and the world at large has, in many cases, been woefully inadequate. Despite years of commitment to tackle 'root causes', many of the underlying conditions leading to the resort to violence, including economic and political marginalization, poor governance, and the easy availability of arms, have not been fundamentally reversed. In addition, massive new challenges to security and development, like environmental degradation and the spread of communicable disease, threaten to further destabilize large parts of the continent. Organized efforts to prevent the escalation of nascent conflict, including crisis diplomacy and the imposition of sanctions, have often proven inadequate or ineffective. And once a crisis has escalated to the point of imminent or outright disaster, the impulse of many to intervene to stop the suffering has often been thwarted by the pre-eminent norm of 'non-interference' and a prevalent culture of indifference in both African and international political bodies.

How then are we, as concerned and engaged members of the international community, to respond to such horrific circumstances? Would forced intervention alleviate the suffering or make it worse? What are the responsibilities of other communities in the African region to respond to their neighbours in distress? Most importantly, how must we work

At the East Africa consultation, left to right: Amb. Ochieng Adala and Amb. Bethuel Kiplagat of Africa Peace Forum; High Commissioner Jim Wall, Canadian High Commission, Nairobi, Kenya; Ernie Regehr, Project Ploughshares; and Stein Villumstad, Norwegian Church Aid.

together for prevention to ensure that we are never again faced with such a tortuous predicament?

Since September of 2003, Project Ploughshares has teamed with the Nairobi-based *Africa Peace Forum* and the Mali-based *African Women's Development and Communication Network* (FEMNET) to help address all of these questions and develop a more effective African and international response to serious humanitarian crises in Africa. Supported by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs' Human Security Fund, our work in this field is based on the 2001 report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) entitled *The Responsibility to Protect*.

As reported in the September 2003 Project Ploughshares Special Update, the ICISS report, *The Responsibility to Protect*, stems from the UN Secretary General's appeal to the international community to end the deadlock between, on the one hand, the need to respect the sovereignty of states and, on the other hand, the need to offer aggressive support and protection to communities in crisis. It challenges states to accept the idea of sovereignty as responsibility, emphasizing the duty of states to ensure the safety and security of their citizens. When they fail or are unwilling to do so, and where communities are facing extraordinary threats to their safety or

survival, the report concludes that this responsibility falls to the broader international community. The international community not only has the responsibility to protect the vulnerable, it also has the responsibility to ensure that United Nations Security Council resolutions and international treaties and agreements are fulfilled and enforced.

But protection, said the Report, is first and foremost the product of prevention – of the effort to build the conditions conducive to safety and stability. The primary failure of both the international and African communities is their failure to become engaged in preventive action where political and social tensions are on the rise and the conditions of conflict are building.

Taking the central tenets of *The Responsibility to Protect* as a starting point, over the past year Project Ploughshares, Africa Peace Forum, and FEMNET organized a series of consultations with a broad range of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in East and West Africa.

The objectives of our project have included the following:

•   stimulate reflection on and interpretation of the *Responsibility to Protect* in a regional context by the most relevant local actors;

•   build a broader international base of support for both the values and norms embodied in the *Responsibility to*

Protect, with a view to potential African support of a United Nations General Assembly resolution on the issue;

•   explore, within the context of existing regional arrangements, the political, regional and procedural changes needed to enable the recommendations of the *Responsibility to Protect* to be implemented;

•   stimulate East and West African dialogue about the ways and means of implementing the potential mandate of the African Union to carry out interventions for human protection.

In order to accomplish these goals, the project has encompassed three basic elements:

•   Preparatory visits to selected capitals in each sub-region East and West Africa to carry out preliminary engagement with governments, academics and NGOs on the *Responsibility to Protect*, and to identify key issues;

•   A conference in each sub-region, incorporating governments, academics, faith-based and other civil society organizations, to encourage discussion of the *Responsibility to Protect* concept, its implementation in the African context, and ways of advancing discussion multilaterally and of moving toward international consensus;

•   A briefing session at the African Union (AU) in Addis Ababa to report on the results of the sub-regional consultations and to encourage attention to the issue in the context of the new security responsibilities and mechanisms of the African Union.

Planning is now underway for a similar series of consultations, followed by a conference, for the Southern African region.

Project Ploughshares' work to promote the implementation of *The Responsibility to Protect* on the African continent takes place at a historical moment when Africans are reforming their collective political institutions in order to better prevent and respond to crises on the continent. Just as with the ICISS, fundamental to this process has been recognition of how the relationship between states, and even the inter-state system itself, have hindered efforts to provide protection to communities in crisis.

The African inter-governmental body set in the wake of colonial

Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General and Co-Chair of the (ICISS) Commission, addresses the participants at the East Africa consultation.

Ernie Regehr greets the Hon. Stephen Kalonzo Musoyoka, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kenya, at the East Africa consultation.

independence, The Organization of African Unity (OAU), was frequently criticized as a 'Heads of State Club', focused more on protecting Africa's leaders from its citizens than the much more pressing task of protecting its citizens. The Organization's adherence to the cardinal principle of 'non-interference in internal affairs' led to a failure to act aggressively in the face of egregious violations within states, most famously in the cases of Uganda, Equatorial Guinea and the Central African Republic.

The new African Union, inaugurated to replace the OAU in 2001, was designed to explicitly confront both the central weaknesses of the OAU and the need for a reinvigorated African 'ownership' of the challenges facing the continent. Importantly, the first objective of the Union is to 'achieve greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and the *peoples* of Africa'. This recognition of the fundamental importance of *peoples,* rather than just states, in continental affairs is indicative of the drafters' determination to replace the OAU's 'Heads of State Club' with an institution aimed at overcoming the challenges faced by people and their communities.

Encouragingly, the new African Union has put in place a number of important mechanisms to support its bold new mandate to confront the continent's serious peace and security problems. These include a standing African Peace and Security Council, an advisory 'Panel of the Wise' made up of eminent former statespersons, a Continental Early Warning System, an African Standby Force to provide for quick and effective 'humanitarian intervention' in extreme circumstances.

The establishment of these new African means of preventing and responding to crises on the continent represent a bold step forward and offer the hope of a new era of collective African responsibility to the most vulnerable. Encouragingly, Western governments and other donors have recognized this potential and have taken some preliminary steps towards providing the financial and other support necessary for them to succeed. However, seasoned observers of African affairs know that, on both fronts, the gap between rhetoric and action can often be overwhelming.

Accordingly, the Project Ploughshares, APFO and FEMNET project on *The Responsibility to Protect* will continue to focus on the practical steps necessary to provide real, tangible improvements in the lives of vulnerable people and their communities. Our final briefing before the African Union in late 2004 will carry the weight of consultation and input from the most relevant sectors of all of the regions in Sub-Saharan Africa. It will help to encourage the international community, in Africa and beyond, to respond to the most vulnerable communities with the empathy and urgency that they deserve.

See our website www.ploughshares.ca for comprehensive and accurate information on peace and security issues.

The 2004 Armed Conflicts Report

Full descriptions of all armed conflicts of 2003, as well as those recently ended, are available in the *2004 Armed Conflicts Report* section of the Project Ploughshares website. Project Ploughshares has reported annually on armed conflicts since 1987.

With a gift of $75 or more to Project ploughshares, you will receive a copy of the *2004 Armed Conflicts Report* poster.

In 2003 the number of armed conflicts* totalled 36 in 28 countries, a slight decline from 2002 and involving the fewest number of states hosting wars since 1987.

The geographic regions of Africa and Asia hosted most wars – together accounting for more than four-fifths (84 per cent) of the total – but other regions were also affected (see the accompanying table). Based on the proportion of countries experiencing conflict, the Middle East in particular was a significantly affected region. Europe and the Americas were again the regions least affected by war.

Five states experienced more than one conflict in 2003, with four armed conflicts in each of India and Indonesia, and two wars in each of Sudan, the Philippines, and Iraq. The Israel-Palestine conflict is reported as a single conflict taking place on the territory of two states, Israel and Lebanon.

The Iraq invasion was the sole international war in 2003. While it was fought on the territory of a single state, it was nevertheless a war between states – Iraq against the United States and its coalition partners. All other armed conflicts in 2003 were internal wars.

All but five of the 36 armed conflicts are more than two years old, almost two-thirds (23) have been fought for more than 10 years, and eight of the current armed conflicts have endured for over 25 years.

Five new armed conflicts began during the year and six others ended. In the states of Iraq and Angola in particular, 2003 saw both the end of one armed conflict and the beginning of another. Elsewhere, conflicts ended in Guinea and Rwanda, and in Indonesia the number of conflicts within the country declined from five to four. In Iran, the conflict ended when US forces disarmed Mujahedeen Khalq rebels based in Iraq that were opposed to the Iranian government.

Africa experienced the beginnings of three additional conflicts in 2003. In Côte d'Ivoire, an outbreak of armed violence in 2002 resulted in over one thousand deaths by early 2003. In Ethiopia ethnic groups fought each other in the Gambella region. Also in the Horn of Africa, a major humanitarian crisis emerged as a result of the war in the Darfur region of Sudan where attacks by Janjaweed militias, armed and supported by the Sudanese military, caused several thousand civilian deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

UN peacekeeping soldier accompanied by a group of local children in East Timor.

UN/DPI Photo #203225C

Geographic distributions of armed conflicts in 2003

Region	Number of countries in region	Number of conflicts in region	Number of countries hosting conflicts	Percent of countries in region hosting conflicts	Percent of world conflicts
Africa	50	15	14	28	42
Asia	42	15	8	19	42
Europe	42	2	2	5	5
The Americas	44	1	1	2	3
Middle East	14	3	3	21	8
World Totals	**192**	**36**	**28**	**15**	**100**

*__Defining armed conflict__: For the purposes of the annual *Armed Conflicts Report* an armed conflict is defined as a political conflict in which armed combat involves the armed forces of at least one state (or one or more armed factions seeking to gain control of all or part of the state), and in which at least 1,000 people have been killed by the fighting during the course of the conflict. An armed conflict is added to the annual list of current armed conflicts in the year in which the death toll reaches the threshold of 1,000.