

**International Ecumenical Consultation
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**World Council of Churches
Council of Christian Churches in Germany
Evangelische Akademie Arnoldshain**

**“Political Challenges”
Working Group Report**

Introduction

The Working Group noted that the Statement on the Responsibility to Protect at the 9th Assembly (2006) included a request to the Central Committee “to consider a study process engaging all member churches and ecumenical organizations in order to develop an extensive ecumenical declaration on peace, firmly rooted in an articulated theology.” The Assembly’s request specifically called for the declaration to include the issue of the Responsibility to Protect and the Working Group affirmed that R2P should be a significant element of the proposed Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace to be presented to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in May 2011.

The Working Group focused on identifying the “political challenges” to the effective and timely implementation of the international community’s obligation to undertake timely and effective action to protect people in extreme peril. The discussions did not propose solutions to these challenges but identified them for further attention and analysis and suggested ways in which the ecumenical community could or should respond. The Group understood its objective to be the identification of key issues as well as some church responses so as to help set the basis for a comprehensive ecumenical approach to R2P and its implementation – with a view to having that comprehensive approach included in the proposed 2011 Declaration.

Governance Challenges

Multilateralism was judged by the Working Group to be foundational to any effective or equitable implementation of R2P. To over-ride the sovereignty of any particular state is a grave and consequential action that must not become the prerogative of individual states or even regions, but must follow the collective judgment and authorization of the international community. That raised the central question of effective governance linked to international intervention in the affairs of a state, namely that of **right authority**, and led to a discussion of the Security Council and doubts that it can realistically be relied on to objectively initiate timely responses to people in peril. Participants argued in fact that reliable implementation of R2P for purely humanitarian reasons will be difficult until the problem of appropriate multilateral authority is dealt with. This in turn led to discussions of the role of **regional organizations** in initiating and authorizing remedial action in the face of extreme suffering.

The definition of **sovereignty** was the subject of considerable discussion, with some participants highlighting the importance of understanding sovereignty as responsibility – in other words, for a state’s sovereignty to be respected that state must show itself to be committed to exercising the responsibilities that attend statehood, especially providing for the safety and security of its citizens. The group cited **human security** as the most fundamental measure of state security – that is, a state’s security is evidenced in the extent to which its citizens live in safety with their most basic needs met.

Conceptual Challenges

The Working Group discussed prevailing or expected political challenges to the concept of R2P – addressing separately the issues of prevention, reaction, and rebuilding.

Under **prevention** the Group noted the critical importance of distinguishing prevention from pre-emption. Prevention obviously requires significant action before a crisis and it was broadly understood that unless such early action is taken with the full consent of the state in question it becomes pre-emption. Early intervention against the wishes of the host state constitutes a pre-emptive strike, although it was agreed that prevention requires such early engagement. **Preventive diplomacy** does not raise these same issues of forced pre-emption and the Group identified **early warning** as an essential tool for facilitating early diplomatic attention to emerging conflict or crisis zones. **Gender, disarmament, and peace education** were all identified as key elements of prevention. The role of women in preventing conflict was a prominent theme and participants agreed that there needs to be further exploration of ways of ensuring, or institutionalizing, the active engagement of women in collective efforts to avert crisis.

The Working Group emphasized that **reaction** must include the effective resort to **non-lethal means of coercion** in instances where prevention fails. The Group appreciated the exploration of **policing** as a model for coercive action in response to intense crisis and people in extreme peril. Much more attention should be paid to the **ethical** dimensions and **criteria** for any intervention that potentially involves **lethal force**. Intervention criteria inevitably involve political judgments, much more so than they do juridical judgments. Issues of right authority are obviously paramount in any reaction that engages lethal force and the Group emphasized the need for broad ecumenical reflection on questions of governance linked to the resort to force. The Group also noted the importance of further reflection on the nature of force that is authorized, a concern that links to the policing discussion.

The discussion of **rebuilding** engaged a range of issues that are central to peacebuilding. Participants encouraged greater attention to **reconciliation, trauma healing, and DDR programs** (demobilization, disarmament, and rehabilitation) for former combatants, and **peace education**.

The Role of the Churches

The Working Group emphasized the **unique role** of the churches in responding to situations of current or imminent peril. Churches are deeply engaged in **local communities**

and at the same time have **communications links** beyond those communities to international networks and institutions capable of acting. That makes churches uniquely equipped to contribute to early warning mechanisms that can lead to early action. **Reporting** and **monitoring** are therefore key tasks that the churches should consider. The Christian ecumenical community is a worldwide community linked by common values and concerns, as well as by functioning communications mechanisms, and the North-South character of this community is especially relevant to prevention and rebuilding elements of the responsibility to protect.

Churches were also seen to have a special role in **engaging governments**. Most, or at least many, churches have constructive relations with governments and are in a position to engage in **locally appropriate** actions that also involve **advocacy** on behalf of the vulnerable. Similarly, churches are in a position to **engage economic actors** in ways that help societies to understand and address the **roots of conflict**. In all of this, engagement with other elements of **civil society** is an important function of the church as well.

Conclusion

A common theme in the Working Group was the recognition that the international church has an important role to play in improving the international community's responses to the suffering of people in extraordinary peril. The churches' commitment to solidarity with the most vulnerable is longstanding and the Ecumenical Community is in a position to propose and support responses to extreme human suffering in ways that keep the well-being of people at the fore and that at the same time guard against national and international actions that are designed to pursue special interests under the guise of attending to the needs of the vulnerable.