

# Opening Speech by President of the Republic Tarja Halonen at Hanaforum on “Responsibility to Protect”, 28 August 2009

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It is a great pleasure to open the Hanaforum of 2009. Its theme this year is the responsibility to protect, which is a very topical issue.

We all agree that victims of conflicts need protection. But whose responsibility are we talking about and how could these people be protected?

Fifteen years ago, almost 900 000 people were killed in the Ruanda genocide. The international community was unable to intervene effectively and protect the victims. Tragic events have also taken place Bosnia, Kosovo, Somalia, Sudan and elsewhere.

At the United Nations World Summit in 2005, the heads of state and government pledged to prevent genocides and to protect civilians in conflict situations. Finland strongly supported the inclusion of the responsibility to protect in the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document.

At the UN World Summit, the responsibility to protect was accepted as a general principle and it was defined to apply to genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and war crimes. The aim of the responsibility to protect was set to prevent the most flagrant human rights abuses. The acts were defined almost in the same way as when the International Criminal Court was established – the crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court are the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression.

The responsibility to protect is based on three points of departure: 1) States have the primary responsibility to protect their citizens. 2) The international community has a duty to help and support states to protect their citizens. 3) The international community has the ultimate responsibility for intervention.

The responsibility to protect is a programmatic, rather than a clearly a legal concept. From the legal point of view, it is a question of already existing mandates and responsibilities. The implementation of the responsibility to protect is measured by how well it guides the international community and particularly the UN Security Council to timely action in order to prevent catastrophes.

The international community relies on the work of United Nations. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has emphasised the role of the UN and appointed a special adviser on the responsibility to protect.

For us northern people, it is a good challenge to note that the possibility of military intervention in the case of a serious attack against civilian population was first incorporated into the

Constitutive Act of the African Union in 2000. In this light, the question of intervention does not seem to fall on the north-south axis, even though many developing countries have criticized the idea of military intervention.

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Conflict situations are often hardest for women and girls – their human rights are at a particular risk and many of them become subject to the worst violence.

The UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security was adopted in 2000. The implementation of the Resolution requires national action plans. The Norwegian action plan from 2006 was an encouragement for us. Finland's plan was completed a year ago. Now we are working on an action plan together with Kenya. In 2008, the UN Security Council adopted UN Resolution 1820, which condemns rape and sexual violence. We must do our utmost to put these resolutions into action. I have proposed that systematic rape in armed conflict should be classified as a forbidden weapon of war.

Last March, we organised together with Liberia an international colloquium in Monrovia on women's empowerment. The Colloquium sent out a strong message about the need to fully implement Resolution 1325. Women's key role in climate issues was also discussed. We will organize a new meeting on these topics next month in New York in conjunction with the UN General Assembly.

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We also have to work so that we do not need to apply the responsibility to protect. It is best to prevent conflicts. At the same time, we must prepare for future conflicts. Natural catastrophes are not included in the responsibility to protect. In the future, competition for natural resources may be more and more often the cause of conflicts. The consequences of climate change may also increase the risks of conflicts. Conflict prevention in accordance with the principles of the responsibility to protect is central also in these situations.

We must support the possibilities of people for decent life and work in the changing environmental circumstances. Work for fairer globalization is also effective long-term work to prevent conflicts.

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The devastating effects of the current economic crisis are particularly felt in the developing countries. We must remain strong with our efforts for eradication of the poverty in accordance with the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. Finland and the other EU countries have committed themselves to the UN development aid goal of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product by the year 2015. We must retain this goal also in the current economic situation.