

* *

Symposium of the World Council of Churches

The Responsibility to Protect

Ecogia Centre

Geneva, 22 April 2005

The Responsibility to Prevent

Address of Dr. Cornelio Sommaruga

President of Initiatives of Change International, Caux

President of the Geneva International Centre for
Humanitarian Demining

I shall draw from my participation in **two UN Panels** :

- The Panel on UN peace Operations (so called Brahimi Report), 2000;
- The ICISS (Intervention and State Sovereignty), that produced the report “the Responsibility to Protect”, 2001.

But I certainly will not neglect my experiences of almost 13 years **presidency of the ICRC**. And here arises the first question :

- Why from “**Humanitarian Intervention**” to the Responsibility to Protect ?

In the past I rejected and I am still **rejecting** the term Humanitarian Intervention, as well as the **right to intervene**, ou encore pire le droit d’ingérence humanitaire – s’il y a droit, il ne peut pas y avoir d’ingérence et s’il y a ingérence, il n’y a pas de droit ! Le droit d’ingérence humanitaire comporte donc une ***contradictio in adiecto*** !

Humanitarian Intervention has to be rejected – **as a term** – at least for **three reasons** :

- It necessarily **focuses** attention to the **claims**, rights and prerogatives of the **potentially intervening states**, much more than on the need of the potential beneficiaries.
- By focusing narrowly on the act of intervention, **the traditional language does not take into account the need for prior preventive effort** or subsequent follow up assistance, both of which are too often neglected in practice.
- The familiar (**traditional**) **language** does neglect **sovereignty, jumping** directly to **intervention**.

This brings me to **affirm** (with the ICISS) that the responsibility of a **sovereign state** is also and foremost to **protect its people** (its national citizens) from killing and other grave harm. It is the **most basic** and **fundamental** of all **responsibilities** that sovereignty imposes to its authorities. **If** a state cannot or will not protect its people from such harm, **then coercive intervention** for **human protection purposes**, including **ultimately military intervention**, by others in the international community, may be warranted in extreme cases.

Coming back to the **shift** on the **terms of the debate** from humanitarian intervention to the responsibility to protect, there is a **change of perspective**, reversing the perceptions inherent in the traditional language, namely :

- 1) The responsibility to protect **implies an evaluation of the issues from the point of view** of those **seeking or needing support**, rather than those who may be considering intervention. Responsibility to protect refocuses the attention **on the duty to protect** communities **from** mass killing, women from systematic rape and children from starvation.
- 2) The responsibility to protect underlines that the **primary responsibility rests with the state concerned** and that it is only – as already mentioned – if the state is unable or unwilling to fulfill this responsibility, or is itself the perpetrator, that it becomes the responsibility of the **international community to act in its place**. In the responsibility to protect language, you detect a linking concept that bridges the divide between intervention and sovereignty; whereas the right to intervene is confrontational.
- 3) Responsibility to protect also means **responsibility to prevent** and responsibility to rebuild, obviously in addition to the responsibility to react.

- **Prevention** and reconstruction (not simply material rebuilding, but reconstruction of the whole society and its functioning) have also been a preoccupation of the so-called **Brahimi Panel**, the panel on UN Peace Operations of 2000. The conclusions of both reports are not very different.
- They underline the needed involvement of **civil society** in both prevention of conflicts (**peace making**) and post-conflict rebuilding (peace building). There is a real need to close the gap between rhetoric and financial and political support for prevention. A major problem has been the limited commitment in real terms to development assistance. Particularly acute is now the situation as to the **mid term review of the Millennium UN goals**.

Human security comes in the centre of attention for **long term conflict prevention**. Our ICISS report is indeed underlying the need to address the root causes. The many **situations of insecurity** have to be overcome to avoid desperation that is so often cause of violence !

The world is indeed missing a clear commitment to **Human Security**. The security that encompasses not only the territorial state and the protection through arms, but the **security for the individual citizen**, that has to be protected in all aspects of his life, namely in his human dignity and in his worth as human being. These are the **most legitimate concerns of ordinary people** regarding security in their daily lives. Human security has also to address the enormous amounts of national wealth and human resources diverted into armaments and armed forces, while countries fail to protect their citizens from chronic insecurities of absolute poverty, hunger, thirst, disease, inadequate shelter, crime, unemployment, social conflict environmental hazard and their

symptoms as transfer of small arms and landmines. When rape is used as instrument of war and ethnic cleansing, when thousands are killed by floods resulting from a ravaged countryside and when citizens are killed by their own security forces, then **it is just insufficient to think of security in terms of national or territorial security alone.** The horrific **Tsunami disaster** has shown that millions of peoples of different races, cultures, clans, religions, nationalities, languages have been hit at the same time by an unbelievable act of nature.

Human security, embracing such diverse circumstances, calls for an **urgent and determined integrated approach** for coping with the real problems of today that I have just mentioned. All these problems are indeed creating **tremendous insecurities.** In such a situation violence is shaping up rapidly and the step to terrorism is light to be made. **Civil society** has to take the leadership for a responsible reaction.

Let me just recall some of the **insecurity factors** affecting the world population. There is a growing **insecurity of indigenous people** in all continents. For example, at the occasion of a journey to Australia, I have been particularly impressed by the aborigines question, that while well recognized, seems to be very slow in being globally approached. In all these situations people are not only affected by all sort of discriminations, but also by **government agricultural policies** pushing poor peasants out of business to become itinerant agricultural laborers. The very existence as distinct societies and cultures is often endangered.

Let me also mention **gender insecurity.** Gender violence on women and children, particularly by military peoples – including peace-keepers - and humanitarian

field personnel is a sad reality. The insecurity is for whole families. Also the expansion of the **global sex industry**, accompanied by the trafficking in industrialized countries of women and children from developing countries, constitutes violence against women and a double discrimination, gender-based and racial. This remains a preoccupying cause of insecurity in the world.

In the Western communities the unanimous feeling that prevailed after the collapse of the communist regimes, namely the one of moral superiority towards the non-West has greatly suffered. Let us think of the **many and persistent violations of International Humanitarian Law** in the conflict situations of Iraq and Afghanistan and in the Middle-East.

Let me also speak in this context of the **repeated corporate management scandals**, including the huge compensating amounts managers have accorded themselves despite poor or negative results of their firms!

May I, at this juncture, interject that **spiritual and human values** have not always been given even consideration. Human values should be maintained in the centre of preoccupations recalling that politics also implies ethics. **Political systems give moral instructions indirectly through legislation and via civil instructions.** A nation's law reflect its underlying moral norms; a nation's civics reflects its constitutional mores. It is therefore for civil society fundamental to recall the **essential role of education** that should insist on **human values** and the **individual responsibility** as well as on the constant need to scrutinize the credibility of the mass of information.

Permit me to give you a quote of a **political reaction** after the criminal attacks of the **11th of September 2001**, that were attacks on all of humanity : “These terrorist attacks are a further, horrifying indication of the pervasiveness of threats to people’s safety, rights and lives. As the international community faces the implications of these tragic events, we must recognize that innovative approaches are needed to address growing sources of global insecurity, remedy its symptoms and prevent the recurrence of threats that affect the daily lives of millions of people”. This statement – that did put the threat to people, the risk to individuals, as the central issue – was issued by the **Human Security Network**, an association of some twenty like minded countries **founded in 1999** on the initiative of Norway and Canada. This statement was not a call to arms, neither a call for retaliation or revenge, it was much more: **a call for responsibility ! Yes, the responsibility to prevent.**

Let me now try to see with you in which direction **human security action** should engage ourselves; I say **ourselves** because I consider that it is the responsibility of **every citizen in the world** to be engaged in the dynamics of human security, both as **part of civil society** and as participant, by voting and electing. This participation to the political life of our countries, aimed at giving a solid contribution to the clarification and development of norms and to embark in integrated activities, is essential.

The best seems to me to recall in this context the **policy conclusions drawn up in 2003 by the UN Commission on Human Security** co-chaired by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen. These are ten areas:

1. **Protecting people in violent conflict.** This recalls the fundamental norms of International Humanitarian Law, with the appeal to do more for disseminating the basic principles contained in the Geneva Conventions.
2. **Protecting people from the proliferation of arms.** This doesn't only refer to weapons of mass destruction – of strategic and tactical nature – but certainly very much also to small and light arms, including landmines, and their transfer.
3. **Supporting the security of people on the move.** This shows the weakness of international legal instruments in the field of migrant population, and I do not here think only on the severe question of the Romas.
4. **Establishing human security transition funds** for post conflict situations. Here the Ogata/Sen Commission joins the Brahimi Panel and the ICISS in underlying the importance of rebuilding war torn societies in order to consolidate peace. The signature of peace agreements is not enough: **peace has to be entering in the spirit and hearts of people**, through a dynamic of reconciliation, forgiveness and justice; the availability of financial means is an indispensable tool for the political and physical reconstruction.
5. **Encouraging fair trade and markets to benefit the extreme poor.** We are here in the questions largely discussed in Davos and Porto Alegre/Mumbai. The whole problematic of the **International Trading System** is here addressed with the many crucial questions at present at the agenda of the

Bretton Woods Institutions and of the WTO, after the missed opportunity of Cancun.

6. **Working to provide minimum living standards** everywhere. We are here in a very crucial field: the fight against poverty, widespread acute poverty, that leaves so many people in desperation. Working has here to be understood as a strong appeal to global communication, with honest dialogue, with wide participation to bring about multilateral solutions. **No single country can act as the policeman or the benefactor of the entire world.**

7. **According higher priority to ensuring universal access to basic health care.** It is important to notice the spreading in our planet of pandemic diseases that one thought to be overcome as tuberculosis and poliomyelitis, to which the HIV/AIDS has to be added as absolute priority.

8. **Developing an efficient and equitable global system for patent rights.** The emphasis must here be put on the word “equitable”, that reminds of the question of the TRIP’s in the WTO.

9. **Empowering all people with universal basic education.** A fundamental human right, that is so obvious that it doesn’t request any comment. Let me simply here recall the importance of history for correcting the errors of the past. In order to appraise history, you need a basic education that allows you to enter into dialogue. Two thousands yeas ago **Cicero** recognized the importance of history with those words: “Not to know what has be transacted in former times is to be always a child. If no use is made of the labors of past

ages, the world must remain always in the infancy of knowledge”.

10. **Clarifying the need for a global human identity** while respecting the freedom of individuals to have diverse identities and affiliations. Human security becomes here **human solidarity**; be aware of *humanitas*, human values, enhancing our partnership in our common humanity. In this connection, I should mention the shortly published study of the UK Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit, under the title “Investing in Prevention” with 40 recommendations. An excellent paper !

Let me conclude by saying that the Responsibility to Prevent asks us to respond to the recent statement of **Robert Mc Namara**, “We human beings killed 160 million other human beings in the 20th century. Is that what we want in this century ?”. Let us steady fight in order to have a society without corruption, with authorities not ignoring their duty of accountability and with a transparent civil society respectful of democratic rules governing our states.

In a Theatre Play of 1985 of Prugh & England, under the title **Solferino**, you find an affirmation of Henry Dunant – the founder of the Red Cross - saying : “ **One man can make a difference!** / One man whose cause is just/ Reason calls me to do it/ **Humanity says I must!** ” This is the Responsibility – to prevent.

* * * * *