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***Mass Atrocities from Rwanda to Libya: A Sea Change in
Response to Protecting Civilians?***

Tuesday, July 12, 2011, 3:30- 5:00pm

Session Organizer:

Michelle Farley, Wellspring Advisors; Jill Savitt, Public Interest Projects

Facilitator:

Michelle Farley, Program Officer, International Emergencies and Crises, Wellspring Advisors

Panelists:

Michael Abramowitz, Director, Committee on Conscience, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
Andrew Loomis, Senior Conflict Prevention Advisor, Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, U.S. Department of State

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Michelle Farley introduced the discussion by explaining the set of principles and norms that were unanimously adopted at the United Nations in 2005 known as the responsibility to protect (R2P). R2P is based on the idea that sovereignty is not a privilege, but a responsibility. The three pillars of R2P are: (1) the state has primary responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, (2) the international community has the responsibility to assist the state in fulfilling this responsibility, and (3) if the state is unwilling or unable to fulfill this responsibility, the international community has the responsibility to intervene, with military force as the last resort, after all other diplomatic means are exhausted.

Funders have played a role in R2P norm building since its beginning. However, it remains a young movement that faces lots of challenges. There is a need to structure institutions so that international organizations can better support civilian safety in areas experiencing mass atrocities. One of the first examples of R2P principles in practice was the response to atrocities in Darfur. The atrocities in both Rwanda and Srebrenica scarred policymakers and ushered in a new effort for 'never again', involving many core funders in the crisis in Darfur.

Michael Abramowitz spoke about the progress of this movement in the last ten years. In the past ten years we have seen the first war crimes tribunal since Nuremberg and the indictment of three heads of state. The idea that heads of state are not above accountability is now well established. The level of involvement by international actors with Libya is also a great indication

of progress. The speed at which broad range international actors mobilized is a change from the past. The UN Security Council 10-0 vote on authorizing military action in Libya on March 17th, 2011 was able to pass quickly because the Arab League supported calls for intervention and the US decided to officially support efforts. The NATO airstrikes prevented a feared bloodbath. However, three months later, the picture is murky with a rough military stalemate that, if turns out badly, can negatively affect R2P. These quick reactions and involvement against mass atrocities indicates a change in attitude towards civil responsibility of mass atrocities. The protection of civilians looms larger with the international community than ever before.

Michael also touched on the issue of harboring support for preventing potential crises. With the prevalence of crisis in the world, convincing politicians to focus on something that hasn't yet happened but might is a challenge. It is even difficult to effect mass mobilization in immediate response to a crisis. It took several years to bring attention to atrocities in Darfur. Even though most of the atrocities took place in 2003 -2004, international attention did not focus on the situation until 2006. However, there are specific tools that can be utilized to increase the chance for a more successful response. With more effective early warning systems and the appointment of a role in government in all countries who will focus bureaucratic and public attention on these crises, mobilization can be quicker. President Obama appointed David Pressman, whose supervisor is Samantha Power, to fulfill this role in the United States.

Andrew Loomis spoke about determining the need to intervene in times of mass atrocities. National interests, feasibility, and international and regional support are considered when determining the possibility of intervention. R2P and the effect on satiability and human rights is increasingly becoming a factor in that conversation as well.

Open source and top secret early warning models of mass atrocities line up pretty closely. The real problem isn't detection, it is response. An appearance of a crisis on the list will not make it priority for the policy making community. A helpful improvement would be to review and mandate the development of tools and special training for those deployed to high risk countries.

There are a number of people in this Administration that are very concerned about mass atrocities. However, this is not helpful unless there are more calls from the advocacy community saying where to focus. There is a great need for knowledge content material: in-depth case studies about what has worked and what has failed, what the policy and tactical gaps in the US government response are and where there is room for collaboration and contact between government and civil society groups. The advocacy community plays a crucial role in pricking people within government to focus on the issues that they care about.

How can funders help build organizations and networks that can expand as needed to take on new crises without neglecting the core work they engage in? Michael recommended that:

- Funders not only focus on government leaders, but also unofficial champions with governments. One of the major reasons why President Obama is attuned to mass atrocity issues is because of Susan Rice and Samantha Power.
- Funders also need to collaborate and work more with partners in the global south.
- Funder support for building a greater capacity within governments to do more is very important and could potentially lead to great strides forward.

Question and Answer

Q: The Libyan case study for R2P established that Gaddafi would be removed. Was R2P used as justification for regime change? Where do we stop protecting civilians and start pursuing other political motives?

A: This is main reason why many countries around the world are skeptical of R2P. People tend to focus on third pillar of R2P, which establishes that when all other diplomatic means are exhausted, then it is the responsibility of the international community to intervene militarily. It is essential to focus on the first two pillars. R2P shouldn't be interpreted as involving military response. There needs to be focus on nonmilitary responses. It is very difficult to carefully calibrate the exact right thing to do. In the case with Libya, as long as Qaddafi is in power, civilians are at risk.

Q: We realize that R2P shouldn't be interpreted as involving military response. What are the nonmilitary responses and how are they implemented? Even with military response, there a number of options. What type of consideration is given to other types of military action?

A: There is a range of military tactics beyond invasion and bombing:

- Civilian response core
- Economic strategies, from sanctions to debt relief
- Conflict assessments. Drawing on conflict assessments to understand key concerns of local populations to see what would drive them to join militia movements is a step towards prevention.

Too often the government is left reacting, prevention is key.

Q: We tend to know where these problems of mass atrocities are going to arise. What all of us do essentially is prevention – promoting HR, anti-discrimination. Countries on the lowest end of the freedom spectrum have the greatest potential for mass atrocities. What do you do about big countries with these problems? China and Tibet? Russia and Chechnya? In 2009 40,000 people were killed by the Sri Lankan government at the end of a civil war. Why did this not generate any policy response from US?

A: Governing is unfortunately about a series of tradeoffs. Some issues garner more attention than others, that it is why it is essential for funders and advocates to lead the discussion on these issues that are pushed under the carpet. China commands our long term attention, we have less leverage with China than with smaller countries, but we cannot let this stop us.

Q: How do we get Libya to be a clear win for R2P? What role can funders play in the next 6 months?

A: Libya can be a great win for R2P if resolved favorably on side of human rights. If Qaddafi stays behind and this turns into a bloody, long conflict it will most certainly reflect poorly on R2P. There is a huge role for the advocacy community to help to elevate moral principles to national interests. Funders have a fundamental role to increase the costs of not responding. Funders must work collectively to push civilian protection in Libya. Saving lives is the best strategy.