

The Responsibility to Protect

■ The horrors of genocide in Rwanda and the mass killings in Srebrenica resulted in increasing calls for international intervention, with military force if necessary, to protect civilian populations at risk. The Kosovo crisis in 1999 gave rise to a highly controversial and divisive debate over when humanitarian intervention is warranted, and how to authorize and conduct it. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for a new international consensus to reconcile the sovereignty of states with the fundamental imperative to protect civilians from massive abuse and suffering.

■ In response to this challenge, Canada launched the independent International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) in September 2000. It was designed to begin building a new global consensus on a human protection role for the international community. The Commission's final report, *The Responsibility to Protect* (on-line at www.iciss-ciise.gc.ca), offers a constructive new approach based on the fundamental responsibilities of sovereign states to protect their own populations. Where states are unable or unwilling to ensure such protection, this responsibility falls on the international community. In extreme cases, the exercise of that responsibility may require external military intervention. The report argues that the responsibility to protect has three dimensions: to prevent, to react and to rebuild. It stresses that military intervention should be considered only when preventive options have been exhausted, and that intervention should be authorized by the UN Security Council.

■ Since the Kosovo crisis, a series of governmental and NGO initiatives have focussed on finding common ground on the issue of military intervention for the protection of civilians. Evidence suggests that while the issue is still contentious, the gap between countries is narrowing. Canada is committed to promoting follow-up efforts based on the "responsibility to protect" within the UN and at a regional level. These efforts will also include close collaboration with like-minded governments, as well as with NGOs and civil society groups engaged in ensuring greater protection for civilians in situations of armed conflict.

human security Protection of civilians

CP/AP (Kathy Willens)



Members of the United Nations Security Council vote June 10, 1999 authorizing an international force to move into Kosovo to ensure the safe return of ethnic Albanian refugees.

Parliamentarians for Global Action conference

As part of a broad-based strategy to build greater global consensus on the protection of civilians, Canada's Human Security Program provided support for a November 2002 conference of international parliamentarians to explore the specific role of elected officials in implementing the "responsibility to protect." Organized by Parliamentarians for Global Action, the conference brought together legislators to consider their role both in mobilizing political will to respond to major humanitarian crises and in mediating between the executive branch of government, advocacy NGOs and public opinion.