

## **The Responsibility to Protect**

Over the last few years, the safety of the individual has increasingly become both a new measure of global security and a new impetus for global action.

Recent human security debates have explored whether the international community has the right to intervene in a sovereign state's affairs for humanitarian purposes when the resident government or regime of that country is opposed to such actions.

In his Millennium Report to the United Nations, Secretary-General Kofi Annan challenged the international community to address the political, operational, legal, and ethical dilemmas posed by the issue of humanitarian intervention.

### **Canada and the responsibility to protect**

Since 1997, Canada has taken a lead role in advocating an international political agenda that includes the idea of human security — an approach to foreign policy that places strong emphasis on the safety of the individual as opposed to focusing exclusively on the security of territory or government.

In response to the Secretary-General's challenge, Canada established the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). The commission, a panel composed of international experts, was asked to find ways of reconciling the foundational norm of non-intervention with the humanitarian imperatives posed by genocide and other mass atrocities.

### **The ICISS report: *The Responsibility to Protect***

In 2001, Canada presented the commission's report, *The Responsibility to Protect*, to the Secretary-General and the UN community (online at [www.iciss-ciise.gc.ca](http://www.iciss-ciise.gc.ca)).

The report focuses on intervention of a humanitarian or protective nature and deals with collective action to protect people from genocide and ethnic cleansing when a government is unable to do so, or when a government is the perpetrator. The report describes the emergence of a new norm of international responsibility and suggests that human protection imperatives can, in extreme cases, take precedence over the principle of non-intervention.

#### **The report**

- lays out core principles on sovereignty and non-intervention, legal foundations for action, and international responsibilities to prevent, react and rebuild;