

Opening Speech - Richard Cooper

THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT: ENGAGING AMERICA

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Chicago, Illinois

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY RICHARD H. COOPER,

CONVENOR, R2P COALITION, 15 NOVEMBER 2006

Good evening Gareth, Marshall, and distinguished guests,

It is a great honor to welcome all of you to this opening dinner of our conference on "The responsibility to protect: Engaging America". I find myself addressing the finest minds one could possibly bring together to tackle the incredibly inspiring challenge that lies ahead of us. We have gathered in Chicago with a clear purpose: to craft, together, a strategy for engaging the public and our leadership on the responsibility to protect. This is a historical opportunity for us to build the path that will not only bring this revolutionary principle to the knowledge of the public, but that will ensure that our country truly embraces its responsibility to protect and commits to its implementation. Only then can this ethical imperative have the impact we are all hoping for.

The responsibility to protect is deeply embedded in the noblest values we all share. It is the founding principle of a new global moral compact that unites every country and every human being. R2P promises that humanity will turn "never again" into reality. R2P gives me hope that our country's leadership will — tomorrow — be responsible for a better world. R2P calls on us the American People to commit to the protection of our brothers and sisters around the world. Let us embrace our responsibility to protect and let us start at home.

And this is why the R2P Coalition was born, this is what it is all about: we are engaging citizens and various leaders, starting in our own community, and bringing the R2P principle to life. The R2P Coalition is very privileged to have exceptional individuals serve on its Steering Committee and Advisory Board. Some of these leading personalities are with us tonight. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the excellence of Cherif Bassiouni, Marshall Bouton, Gareth Evans, Bill Pace, Mary Page, Paul Rutgers, David Scheffer and Adele Simmons, and a special thank you to Juliette Voinov Kohler my R2P partner. Thanks to all of you for working along with me to bring R2P alive. And I am pleased to share with you tonight the progress we have made over the last couple months. We have engaged the political leadership of the City of Chicago. On the first anniversary of the adoption of the World Summit Outcome, the City Council adopted a resolution embracing R2P and urging our federal leadership to implement the World Summit Outcome. Our Mayor said he would introduce this resolution to the next US Conference of Mayors. A similar resolution has been introduced in the Illinois General Assembly and should be adopted at the end of the month. We have also engaged our faith and religious communities. On September 18th, the Council of religious leaders of Metropolitan Chicago adopted a resolution embracing R2P and we are further working with faith and religious communities to bring R2P to their respective constituencies as well as to their leadership across the nation. The R2P Coalition is also raising the awareness of our student community. We are currently sponsoring an essay contest on R2P open to Illinois University students. And, along with our Steering Committee and Advisory board members, we are working on the publication of a book on R2P with Cambridge University Press. Through the R2P Coalition, the Midwest — the heart beat of America — is taking leadership on R2P, and our hope is that this spark will spread across our nation and reach our national leadership in time for the 2008 election.

R2P needs to be carefully nurtured. And like every vision of a better world - perhaps all too easy to embrace - the grand R2P principle needs to be turned into deeds. How can we, how should we protect populations from the most egregious behaviors wrecking human lives and shattering whole societies? I believe that the past several years - and also last week's elections - teach us a few lessons. Because the world community, through the United Nations, owns R2P, we need to give the world community, acting as a whole and with legitimacy, the tools to implement R2P. Because atrocity crimes are recurrent, we should establish rules and capacities that are sustainable. Because "sticks" are a necessary component of the toolbox to prevent and stop atrocity crimes, we cannot afford to neglect the elaboration of legitimate intervention mechanisms. Because the war in Iraq tells us that our nation's military interventions will remain a largely unacceptable course of action for the years to come, we need to look at intervention through other lenses. Just as R2P looked at the issue of humanitarian intervention from the perspective of the responsibilities of States towards victims, rather than that of the rights of States, so must we move away from "military intervention" to a more acceptable intervention mechanism. And because genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes are international crimes, and that those responsible for these crimes need to be held accountable for hell they have brought on earth, the new lenses for looking at intervention may well be those of a judicial approach: we should consider empowering the nascent international criminal justice system with the means to effectively intervene and arrest those indicted for the commission of atrocity crimes. Such a mechanism, legitimized by the independence and the impartiality of the justice system, could take the form of a standing global police force, an International Marshals Service that would constitute the deterrent and enforcement arm of the international criminal justice system.

History is awaiting our outcome, the Chicago Conference follows Illinois great legacy of human rights achievements, which included the first State to pass the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. To paraphrase balladeer Bernie Taupin's song "History", "I can feel the time closing in, I can feel the years crawling through my skin, and if I doubt myself, I can count on the rain to cover the tears of this aging game. But, I can count on you to play your part. I don't miss a beat of your animal heart. And when you push from behind, I know I can cover a mountain with the palm of my hand. You can make history young again, you could rewrite it, you could decide the things that should or shouldn't have been. You could make history young again."

Dear guests, I started my remarks acknowledging the fine quality of our conferees. I am confident that our endeavors will be guided both by lofty ideals and ethical realism that is needed to help change the history of the 21st century. Thank you for being here.

And now, I have the immense privilege tonight, to introduce Gareth Evans and his long list of outstanding achievements. Gareth holds first class honors degrees in Law from Melbourne University and in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from Oxford University. Between 1988 and 1996, that is during 8 years, Gareth was Australia's foreign Minister, a position in which he acquired international renown. Gareth has won numerous prestigious awards. In 2000-2001, he was co-chair of the International Commission and Intervention and State Sovereignty that brought to life what causes us to be here tonight: the "responsibility to protect". For the last six years, Gareth has been the President of the International Crisis Group and his commitment to preventing and stopping atrocity crimes has continued to be at the forefront of his engagement. Last May, Gareth was appointed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the new UN Advisory Committee on Genocide Prevention.

Gareth, once again, welcome to Chicago, and thank you for taking the time to inspire our efforts to build America's engagement for R2P.