



Mission and Ministry Board

The Responsibility to Protect

October 20, 2008

The following resolution is brought to the Mission and Ministry Board of the Church of the Brethren by the General Secretary's Office, in response to an action by the National Council of Churches. The NCC Governing Board in 2007 adopted a "Resolution on the Responsibility to Protect," which closes with a call for support from member communions. The NCC resolution "calls upon its member churches to affirm the principle of the responsibility to protect, to support efforts that lead to the implementation of the international commitment to this principle, to join together with other Americans in efforts, such as those of the R2P Coalition, to promote a US government commitment to uphold the responsibility to protect both domestically and globally, and to educate our collective constituencies on the religious and moral imperatives inherent in this principle."

Introduction

The doctrine of "non-intervention in the internal affairs of any nation," established in 1648 in the Peace of Westphalia, has been removed. The United Nations member countries in 2005 unanimously adopted "The Responsibility to Protect" as the obligation of every nation to protect its own citizens. Responding to the global increase of catastrophic atrocities of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, the "Responsibility to Protect" holds the leaders of any nation accountable for these atrocities.

The United Nations has the authority to intervene in any country where the government engages in persecuting and eliminating its own people. Using all of its diplomatic, economic, and political resources, the United Nations can under this doctrine use military force as a last resort to halt atrocities.

Am I my brother's keeper?

The Church of the Brethren and other Christian communities affirm that, in response to the question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9), we are indeed the protectors of one another. This affirmation is grounded in the prophetic biblical calls to protect others—the stranger, the weak, the poor, and the dispossessed.

Jesus Christ exemplified the urgency of caring for the wellbeing of others, and he enjoined that people will be judged by whether or not they feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the imprisoned (Matthew 25:31-46).

The Church of the Brethren and other Christian communities also believe that God hears the cry of the oppressed, and even the cry of the very blood spilled through injustice (Genesis 4:10). The "Responsibility to Protect," as outlined by the United Nations, correlates with our understanding of the responsibilities of any nation.

Resolved: *As Christians, we urge our nation and all nations to actively support the "Responsibility to Protect" as a priority for international policy, in order to respect and protect the populations and cultures of the world.*

A Response to International Atrocities

The Church of the Brethren witnesses to a heritage of peaceful, nonviolent response to war and conflict, and our faith tradition emphasizes peacemaking over “peace keeping.” Jesus taught that not only should we love one another (John 13:34), we should love our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

We in the Church of the Brethren are painfully aware of increasing international atrocities in many nations, in which persecution, suffering, and even death are inflicted on people by their own governments. When the leaders of a nation—unable or unwilling to protect the rights of their own citizens—commit atrocities against their own citizens by genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing, the United Nations may legitimately assume the responsibility to protect those people. The United Nations may act for the prevention or cessation of violence, restoration and rebuilding the populations and cultures, and establishment of a legitimate government process to restore and maintain the peace.

***Resolved:** We join with the World Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, and many other religious and advocacy communities who have endorsed the vision, aims, and principles of the “Responsibility to Protect.” We dissent from the use of military force to support this humanitarian intervention. However, we join other people of faith in advocating for the proactive steps of early detection and prevention of atrocities, using international diplomacy and international law, rebuilding and reestablishing governments that are responsible to their people, and any other nonviolent means to bring an end to the injustice.*

A Call to the Church of the Brethren

We in the Church of the Brethren are baptized into Christ’s message and ministry of reconciliation, which has been entrusted to us in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 5:18).

***Resolved:** We call on all members of the Church of the Brethren to respond with prayer to the realities of a broken world in need of transformation. We exhort the church to put on the shoes of peace (Eph. 6:15), and, in obedience to Christ, act with compassion, offer humanitarian assistance in response to international atrocities, and join in the nonviolent healing of wounds endured by all people who have been persecuted and oppressed by their own nations. We strive to faithfully serve in Christ’s name in these times.*

Adopted by the Mission and Ministry Board, October 20, 2008