

# Protection Approaches

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19 August 2015

## **Dear Labour leadership candidates,**

It is a grim fact that mass atrocity crimes - genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity - continue to blight our world. Despite promises of “Never Again” the international community has repeatedly failed people who faced the threat of, and ultimately became victims of, these crimes.

Protection Approaches is a civil society organisation that works to prevent all identity-based mass violence. On behalf of our supporters, I write to ask you to make a clear commitment to preventing atrocity crimes before the leadership campaign closes on 10 September.

Our supporters believe that we all share a responsibility to protect people facing the threat of violence because of an aspect of their identity, whether they are attacked on the streets of Birmingham for being gay, in Paris for being Jewish, or in Homs for living in a rebel stronghold.

The principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) was unanimously endorsed in 2005 at the United Nations World Summit, in part as a response to the world’s failure to prevent or halt genocide and other mass atrocities in Rwanda and Bosnia during the 1990s. R2P refers to the obligation states have towards all populations at risk of mass atrocity crimes by placing the safety of the many above the sovereignty of the few. The three pillars of R2P provide a flexible, globally endorsed framework with which to respond to these crimes. In its first ten years, the principle has shaped responses to numerous crises, such as on-the-ground mediation in Kenya following the disputed 2013 elections and halting violence in Cote d’Ivoire in 2010.

Many of today’s most urgent policy challenges are R2P issues and impact not only the affected regions but Britain’s own security and stability. The international failure to prevent or bring a halt to mass atrocities in Syria has resulted in the greatest humanitarian disaster of our age. Nearly a quarter of a million people have been killed and over four million have become refugees. Many of the migrants seeking refuge in the UK and Europe have fled the violence in Syria. According to the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, over 60 percent of those taking the perilous journey across the Mediterranean come from Syria, Somalia, and Afghanistan, countries torn apart by war and political violence.

Despite the determined efforts of many, commitments to combat mass atrocities through the United Nations have been stymied time and again by the employment of, or threat to employ, veto powers by some P5 members. The repeated use by Russia and China of their veto to block resolutions relating to Syria is an unprecedented attempt to prevent the international community from upholding its responsibility towards the many millions of Syrians who continue to suffer so appallingly. The UK, on the other hand, has not employed its veto since 1989.

Current proposals for a “code of conduct” for use of the veto in the Security Council in situations of mass atrocity, though perhaps imperfect, could increase the legitimacy of the Council, rebuild some of its lost credibility, restore the power of constructive negotiation, and convey the will of the international community to take a stand against these dreadful crimes. Supporting the proposals and urging the UK government to suspend its veto power in these contexts would send a powerful message to both the electorate and the international community that the Labour party is committed to the prevention of mass atrocities through international means and in keeping with international law.

The prevention of mass atrocities should be an issue of party and cross-party consensus: prioritising the prevention of atrocity crimes should not be a political issue. During these latter stages of the Labour leadership campaign I hope you will pledge your commitment to the principles of R2P and commit to a foreign policy guided the responsibility to protect civilians at risk of mass atrocity crimes.

I look forward to hearing from you with your thoughts on these issues.

Yours Sincerely,



Kate Ferguson

Managing Director  
Protection Approaches