

## ***WILPF STATEMENT ON THE SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1973 AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT.***

*"The thesis that wars are inevitable, is both, the denial of the sovereignty of the intellect, as well a betrayal of the deepest instincts of the human being"(International Women's Peace Conference 1915)*

The world continues to demonstrate the truth in that statement but how we have still failed to act upon it There was a moment when it all seemed possible. The protests sparked by poverty and lack of economic security, metamorphosed into revolutions, hundreds of thousand of courageous individuals took to the streets to demand the overthrow of dictators who had violated their rights for decades, and asserted the need for democracy and an end to corruption. And, importantly, those who had kept the dictators in power did not rush to keep them there and instead, regime changes in Tunisia and then Egypt were achieved by the people themselves.

How have we got from that moment, to a war in Libya, the violent suppression in Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria and the early crushing of any potential movement in Saudi Arabia? The hypocrisy of the mainly Western governments and their policies has indeed been exposed but there is more to the picture than the just that. The multilateral systems that are supposed to ensure that international law is upheld, that human rights are protected and that there is accountability for violations, failed and failed well before the UN Security Council Resolution 1973.

The international systems that were created to uphold international law and secure human rights were subordinated to the desire of governments, to safeguard their interests, their trade and to protect capitalism. In doing so, they absolutely failed to uphold human rights and their international obligations. There are strong arguments that certain states could be accused of complicity in the violations that resulted. During the time of friendship with Gaddafi, the UK, Italy, France, Portugal, Belgium and Russia with a healthy contribution from General Dynamics, ensured that Gaddafi had sufficient arms, bullets, tanks and aircraft to control his population. The same had been sold or given to Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, and of course, Saudi Arabia and Israel.

SCR 1970 ordered a complete arms embargo on Libya and while such resolutions are to be welcomed, they always arrive too late, when the violations of human rights have already taken place. Why has consideration not been given arms embargoes for the other states that are similarly governed and have used the same methods as Gaddafi to oppress?

The simple answer is that the **responsibility to protect** has been invoked at the last possible moment when the crisis was already there and the initial response was predictable. In the first resolution, the members of the Security Council called on the Government of Libya to meet its responsibility to protect its population, to act with restraint, to respect human rights and international humanitarian law, and to allow immediate access for international human rights monitors and humanitarian agencies. When this failed, in SCR 1973 they authorized States to “to take all necessary

measures, to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, including Benghazi”, the less predictable outcome.

This is the operational paragraph now relied upon to enforce the no fly zone. The resolution also demands the immediate establishment of a ceasefire and a complete end to violence and all attacks against, and abuses of, civilians and stresses the need to intensify efforts to find a solution to the crisis, but this does not make it to the headlines in our media.

How is the responsibility to protect to be implemented when war has already started? Who should enforce the laws of war and international humanitarian law and who can protect the people of Libya? When armed force is used, the system has failed and the doctrine breaks down.

The concept of the **responsibility to protect**, in the best of interpretations, reasserts our common humanity and the need for the international community to take seriously and to respond when states violate international law and murder, terrorize and persecute civilians. The doctrine is a good one, but thus far, the way that it has been interpreted is the antithesis.

Protection, real protection, can only be realized through prevention. This is the essence of **responsibility to protect** and the essence of all the Security Council Resolutions on women, peace, and security. The doctrine is there to prevent: it has failed and will continue to be demeaned, if it is used as a means to legitimize armed intervention.

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