

Human Security and the R2P

Speech by Mohamed Sahnoun, Chair, Caux Forum for Human Security,
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What was hailed as the “Arab Spring” should instead be called the “Arab Youth Spring.” It is indeed the youth, in the Middle East and North Africa, that initiated this great move and helped rally all social classes. It was a large and comprehensive outcry claiming freedom and dignity for all, strongly condemning corruption and authoritarian rule, and, expressing a formidable adherence to a true democratic aspiration. This was a strident appeal for human security!

We heard the youth saying, “Enough is enough” and calling on the rulers to “leave”—in Arabic “Arhol” and in French “dégage.”

The repressive powers in place were totally surprised and disoriented both by the dimensions of these demonstrations and by the new instruments used. The dimensions were large and inclusive. They included students, workers, artists, teachers, young businessmen and women, and government employees. The instruments were very modern—mobile phones, Internet, blogs, and other efficient communication mechanisms rarely seen before in such political and social upheavals.

These demonstrations were organised by spontaneous, original networking, without the traditional political leaders. These youth engines were motivated by the search for human security... They were indeed saying, we are not going to submit to authoritarian rule anymore. Whatever the political ideology these authoritarian rulers advocate, religious or otherwise, we are not going to be fooled by their treacherous arguments.

And two authoritarian rulers finally gave up in two countries, Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt.

In other countries, Yemen, Syria and Libya, the ruling powers openly exploited tribal and clan differences to postpone their defeat. But the youth was not easy prey of this strategy and continue to resist. These rulers might be able to delay the end of their rule but they will clearly remain from now on in confrontation with these youth engines of social revolution.

We must underline here unfortunately that the international community and, particularly, international and regional organisations concerned, did not involve themselves enough to help the people sort out the necessary agreements towards democratic rule and human security.

This led many of us to ask about the international implementation of the principle of the Responsibility to Protect.

It will be indeed a terrible tragedy if nothing is done to protect what has been achieved by this modern historic revolution in the developing world. We can imagine the frustration of these young people and the masses who have become fed up by the corruption and the repression they witnessed throughout their lives.

They found the will and the courage to attempt to put an end to this; yet they run the risk of becoming victims of repression and massacres. Ultimately, and very sadly they might see the results of their historic manifestation becoming hostage of diplomatic manoeuvring with the complicity of big power interests.

So what do we do? This time around, the international community, including the civil society, must indeed make its contribution. And we are gathered here in Caux to do our share.

The debate about intervention for human protection purposes has not gone away. And it will not go away so long as human nature remains as fallible as it is and internal conflict and state failures stay as prevalent as they are. This is, I believe, our appeal to deal better with human security in the future!

The Forum offers a distinctive understanding of the challenge by emphasising the interconnection between 5 broad categories:

1. Healing memory,
2. Just Governance,
3. Living Sustainably,
4. Inclusive Economics, and
5. Intercultural Dialogue.

It is therefore vital to work out the potential appropriate strategy in dealing with this great challenge. It is vital to look extensively at various studies of past experiences on the sensitive and crucial step of preventive intervention and come up with recommendations and criteria, which provide for a responsible decision-making process.