

DFAT UN Security Council-Civil Society Consultations  
16 July 2014

ACHRE participated in the third and final DFAT UN Security Council-Civil Society Consultations on issues arising at the Security Council in the course of Australia's two year membership (2012 – 14) took that place in Canberra on 16 July 2014. The meeting opened with a brief address by the Foreign Minister Julie Bishop and was closed by Australia's Ambassador to the United Nations and Australian representative on the Security Council, Gary Quinlan.

To summarize the main themes that emerged from the consultations:

- The Liberal Democratic Order that created the UN is under increasing threat.....support for democracy is in decline as authoritarian governments are on the ascendant, issues of Human Rights, Governance and Rule of Law have to be defended vigorously.
- There are more simultaneous conflicts taking place in the world today, mostly within states, than at any time since WW2.
- Terrorism is more widespread, though not as dramatic as in 2001. It is increasingly prevalent in Africa, Middle East and South Asia where the age of recruits is ever younger and therefore inclined to be more violent.
- Counter-terrorism is becoming a major pre-occupation....very few countries are equipped to deal with it.
- The nature of conflict is changing: there has been an increase in violence against civilians.
- There are estimated to be 51 million displaced people in the world, including refugees. The average time that a person spends in a refugee camp is 17 years.

In contrast to the consultations held last year, when the Central African Republic dominated the agenda, this time it was Syria and related Middle East issues because of the dire humanitarian situations there which are becoming more enmeshed. There are now estimated to be three million displaced persons inside Syria and one million outside. It was much to Australia's credit, with the support of Luxembourg and Jordan, that a resolution had been adopted by the Security Council (Res 2165) on Monday 14 July to enable humanitarian access into Syria without the consent of the Syrian Government. It was hoped that this would set a precedent with respect to other intra-state conflict situations, including in Africa. The legal implications of a state's arbitrary denial of consent for humanitarian access were considered, including the use of starvation as a weapon, which is a war crime.

The relevance of the work that Australia has done to promote the new international norm of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) was considered. While it was acknowledged that events in Libya last year and the deteriorating situations in Iraq, Syria, Gaza, East Ukraine, Afghanistan and

North Korea called into question the validity of the norm – what was described as ‘normative fatigue’ - Australian diplomats in New York maintained a positive view for the long term.

One of the related questions was the effectiveness of imposing sanctions on countries like North Korea with a view to improving the humanitarian situation. In this case, a pariah state had emerged and so it was questioned whether the time had come to lift sanctions.

Issues arising in Africa continue to dominate the attention of the Security Council, with something like 78 per cent of peace keeping activity taking place in this continent. Pressures on the UN's peace-keeping capabilities are greater than ever. While most of the recruits have come from African countries, there has been a down turn in African applicants. At the same time most Western Governments are refusing to increase their funding support, when there are ever increasing demands for peace-keeping services.

The transition from peace-keeping to peace-building has not been successful. Most states fall back within 7 years - e.g. there have been 6 million deaths in the Central African Republic, which is now back on the UNSC peace-keeping agenda. Accordingly the Secretary-General has called for a review of what peace-keeping is all about...essentially he is calling for a more robust approach to peace-keeping.

Australia has played an active and successful role on the Council with the notable achievement of the Arms Trade Treaty (Resolution 2117) on the illicit trade in small arms, increasingly relevant in a world in which conflict now so often involves non-state actors. It is expected that the Arms Trade Treaty will enter into force by the end of this year – which will be the shortest time for a disarmament treaty to enter into force.

Australia is the ‘pen-holder’ on Afghanistan. Much of Australia’s legacy will be evident in the work that has been done on Afghanistan, including the emphasis on the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan. A conference in London 23-24 November will set the agenda for ongoing activities.

Reform of the UN Security Council continues to be a concern of many participants and observers. The French have initiated a conversation about the need for a voluntary code on the non-use of the Veto by the P5.

There was a sense at the consultations that the UN is at a turning point in a world which has never been confronted by so many crises and conflicts, nor had to deal with a humanitarian crisis on the scale it is today. Resources are obviously an issue, as is the need for more robust mandates for UN peacekeepers.

That DFAT takes its commitment to consultation with civil society seriously Briefings, under Chatham House Rules, were frank and forthright and there appeared to be a real interest in engaging with the concerns and perspectives of all representatives present.

Report prepared by Pera Wells, Vice President, ACHRE and June Verrier, Honorary Consultant.

---