

International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty



Over the past decade, the world has witnessed the eruption, re-ignition or intensification of conflict on five continents. These wars, fought overwhelmingly within rather than between states, have a devastating impact on civilians. It is they, not soldiers, who are increasingly the targets and victims of modern conflict.

How should the international community react? How should it reconcile respect for the sovereign rights of states with the need to act in the face of massive violations of human rights and humanitarian law? UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan outlines the dilemma, and the challenge, in his Millennium Report to the United Nations General Assembly:

"...if humanitarian intervention is, indeed, an unacceptable assault on sovereignty, how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica—to gross and systematic violations of human rights that offend every precept of our common humanity?"

He makes it clear that respecting sovereignty is a critical concern, but that this cannot always be decisive:

"...surely no legal principle—not even sovereignty—can ever shield crimes against humanity. Where such crimes occur and peaceful attempts to halt them have been exhausted, the Security Council has a moral duty to act on behalf of the international community. The fact that we cannot protect people everywhere is no reason for doing nothing when we can. Armed intervention must always remain the option of last resort, but in the face of mass murder, it is an option that cannot be relinquished."

The challenge for the international community is to reach agreement on when intervention in various forms is justified, taking into account all the key issues—political, ethical, legal and operational.

Responding to the Secretary-General's challenge, the Government of Canada announced, during the Millennium General Assembly in September 2000, the establishment of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS).

Sierra Leonean men who have had ears or fingers chopped off by rebels, Freetown, May 1998
Photo: CP Picture Archive (David Guttenfelder)

Mandate and Time Frame

The essential purpose of ICISS is to build a broader understanding of the problem of reconciling intervention and sovereignty and to foster global political consensus on how to move from polemics, and often paralysis, towards action within the international system, particularly through the United Nations. ICISS will bring together the political commitment and interest of governments and the intellectual contribution of a wide range of international experts, scholars and civil society representatives.

Much as the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development in the 1980s took the seemingly irreconcilable issues of development and environmental protection and, through the process of an intense intellectual and political debate, emerged with the notion of "sustainable development", ICISS is designed to find new ways of reconciling the seemingly irreconcilable notions of intervention and state sovereignty.

ICISS intends to complete its work by Autumn 2001 for presentation to the UN Secretary-General during the 56th UN General Assembly.

The Commissioners

ICISS brings together a highly distinguished group of 12 individuals from diverse national and professional backgrounds around the globe. Leading the effort are the Co-Chairs—Gareth Evans, President of the International Crisis Group and former Australian Foreign Minister, and Mohamed Sahnoun, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General and formerly his Special Representative on Somalia and the Great Lakes of Africa. A full list of Commissioners is included in this pamphlet.

Advisory Board

The Commission has an international Advisory Board of eminent persons. Drawing on a diverse range of serving and former foreign ministers, political personalities and other distinguished individuals, the Board will serve as the political reference point for ICISS and will help build the political momentum and public engagement required to follow up on its recommendations. Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable John Manley, has invited his predecessor, the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, to act as the Chair of the Advisory Board. A full list of Board members is included in this pamphlet.

Research and Consultation

ICISS will not try to reinvent the wheel; it will build upon and complement the many efforts already undertaken on these issues by research institutes and individual governments like those of Denmark and the Netherlands. In working to achieve its objectives, Commissioners will draw upon: the record of debate and discussion generated at the UN and in regional and other forums; the vast body of research on this topic, including a number of important independent and nationally-sponsored studies; as well as a series of papers and studies that have been specially commissioned for ICISS.

To complement the Commission's research program and to stimulate the broadest possible debate, regional roundtables will be held in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, North America and Europe during the course of the Commission's mandate. These meetings will bring together representatives of civil society, non-governmental organizations, academics and officials for discussions with the Commissioners. Their purpose is to promote the fullest possible debate of these issues and transparency in the work of ICISS and to ensure that Commissioners are fully exposed to a wide range of perspectives on the key issues.

ICISS's international research team is led jointly by Thomas Weiss of the United States, Presidential Professor at The Graduate Center of The City University of New York (CUNY) where he is also co-director of the UN Intellectual History Project, and Stanlake J.T.M. Samkange, a lawyer from Zimbabwe and former UN staff member. The research directorate is based at The Graduate Center of CUNY.

Report

The Commissioner's Report will pull together the work of ICISS in a concise document encapsulating the Commissioners' views on intervention and state sovereignty and their recommendations for practical action. A supplementary volume accompanying the Report will contain specially commissioned research papers addressing all the issues in a comprehensive, balanced and up-to-date way, as well as an annotated bibliography of the best past writings in the field.

Funding

ICISS is being funded by the Canadian Government together with major international foundations including the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Simons Foundation. Financial contributions to the work of the Commission have also been received from the Governments of the United Kingdom and Switzerland.

Exhumation of a mass grave near Vukovar, Croatia, April 1998
Photo: CP Picture Archive (Gemunu Amarasinghe)



ICISS Commissioners



Gareth Evans (Co-Chair) (Australia)
President of the International Crisis Group, Brussels. Former Australian Foreign Minister (1988-1996).

Mohamed Sahnoun (Co-Chair) (Algeria)
Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General. Former Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Somalia and the Great Lakes of Africa.



Gisèle Côté-Harper (Canada) – Professor of Law at Laval University, Quebec City. Former Chair of the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development and Member of the UN Human Rights Committee.

Lee Hamilton (USA) – Director of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington. Former US Member of Congress (1965-1999), where he served as Chairman of the Committee on International Relations.

Michael Ignatieff (Canada) – Visiting Carr Professor of Human Rights Practice at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. Journalist and historian.

Vladimir Lukin (Russia) – Deputy head of the Yabloko faction and former Chair of the International Affairs Committee in the Russian Duma. Russian Ambassador to the USA (1992-1994).

Klaus Naumann (Germany) – Former Chair of NATO's Military Committee (1996-1999). Chief of Staff of the German Armed Forces (1991-1996).

Cyril Ramaphosa (South Africa) – Executive Chairman of the Molo Group and Member of the Board of Directors of the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa. Former Secretary-General of the African National Congress and Member of the South African Parliament.

Fidel Ramos (Philippines) – President of the Ramos Peace and Development Foundation. Former President of the Philippines (1992-1998).

Cornelio Sommaruga (Switzerland) – President of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. Former President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (1987-1999) and Switzerland's State Secretary for External Economic Affairs.

Eduardo Stein (Guatemala) – International consultant with UNDP Panama. Former Foreign Minister of Guatemala (1996-2000), Executive Secretary of the Action Committee for Support to the Economic and Social Development of Central America and Head of the OAS Observer Mission to Peru's May 2000 general election.

Ramesh Thakur (India) – Vice-Rector of the UN University, Tokyo. Former head of the Peace Research Centre at the Australian National University, Canberra.

Advisory Board Members

The Honourable Lloyd Axworthy (Chair) – Director and CEO of the Liu Centre for the Study of Global Issues at the University of British Columbia

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His Excellency Adalberto Rodríguez Giavarini – Minister for Foreign Relations, International Trade and Worship of the Argentine Republic

How should we respond to gross and systematic violations of human rights?



Young refugees behind barbed wire near Vavuniya, Sri Lanka, November 1999



Crosses marking mass burial site of genocide victims, Rwanda 1994
Photo: CP Picture Archive (Paul Chiasson)

The Secretariat

The Commission is supported by a small secretariat housed within the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade in Ottawa.

Contacting ICISS

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Further information may be found at the ICISS website at <http://www.iciss-ciise.gc.ca>

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Commission internationale de l'intervention et de la souveraineté des États



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Civilians are increasingly the victims — and often the targets — of modern conflict