Promises Under Pressure

Judging international responses to mass atrocities

SS24.WH.16a "Critique the response of the world community to mass atrocities and violations of human rights and civil liberties in various nations and regions."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB In each paragraph, underline one international response and circle a detail that shows its limits. Use your marks to judge how well the response protected people.

When the World Responded

1. In April 1994, extremist leaders in Rwanda organized attacks against Tutsi people and moderate Hutu people. Over roughly 100 days, about 800,000 people were killed. United Nations peacekeepers were already in Rwanda, but the Security Council cut the mission's size soon after the killing began. Later it approved more troops, yet most arrived too late to stop the massacres. In late 1994, the Security Council created a court to prosecute major suspects. The trials helped establish responsibility, but justice after the violence could not replace protection while people were under attack.

2. In 1993, the United Nations declared Srebrenica, a town in Bosnia, a "safe area" for civilians during the Bosnian war. Yet the peacekeepers there lacked the troops and equipment to hold it against a major assault. In July 1995, Bosnian Serb forces captured the town and killed more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys. NATO airstrikes later that summer helped push the warring sides toward peace talks. An international court prosecuted leaders involved in the killings. The safe-area promise offered hope, but it failed at the moment civilians needed protection most.

3. In 2017, Myanmar's military launched a violent campaign in Rakhine State after Rohingya militants attacked security posts. More than 700,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh, reporting killings and burned villages. International aid supplied food and shelter to refugees, but it could not make their homes safe. United Nations investigators documented abuses. In 2019, The Gambia brought a genocide case against Myanmar at the International Court of Justice, which ordered measures to prevent genocide in 2020. That order was not a criminal conviction. Across all three cases, judge responses by their timing, protection of people at risk, and pursuit of accountability.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How well did the United Nations protect people in Rwanda during the killings? Weigh its actions during the violence against its later action.

2. Did declaring Srebrenica a "safe area" effectively protect its civilians? Support your judgment with two details.

3. What did international aid accomplish for Rohingya refugees, and what important problem did it leave unsolved?

4. Identify one weakness shared by the international responses in at least two cases. Use a detail from each case to defend your judgment.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise an international coalition after credible reports warn of mass attacks on civilians in another country. In five sentences, propose two actions, explain one obstacle or risk, and state how you would judge whether the response protects people's rights.

ANSWER KEY

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

In each paragraph, underline one international response and circle a detail that shows its limits. Use your marks to judge how well the response protected people. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How well did the United Nations protect people in Rwanda during the killings? Weigh its actions during the violence against its later action.	**The UN did little to protect people during the killings: it cut the peacekeeping mission, and most additional troops arrived too late. Its later court pursued accountability but could not undo the lack of protection.**
2	Did declaring Srebrenica a "safe area" effectively protect its civilians? Support your judgment with two details.	**No. The peacekeepers lacked the troops and equipment to resist a major assault, and Bosnian Serb forces captured the town and killed more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys.**
3	What did international aid accomplish for Rohingya refugees, and what important problem did it leave unsolved?	**Aid provided food and shelter to refugees in Bangladesh, but it did not make their homes in Myanmar safe.**
4	Identify one weakness shared by the international responses in at least two cases. Use a detail from each case to defend your judgment.	**A shared weakness was failing to protect civilians when they faced attacks. Most additional UN troops reached Rwanda too late, while peacekeepers in Srebrenica lacked the strength to hold the town.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would ask neighboring countries to keep border crossings open and fund safe transport for families fleeing attacks. I would also send independent monitors, with the country's permission, to report threats quickly. Officials might refuse access, so the coalition would need to seek other ways to gather reliable reports. I would track whether attacks and forced displacement decline, not just count how many monitors arrive. If danger stays high, the coalition should change its plan rather than call the response successful.

Accept other evidence-based judgments that distinguish immediate protection from later aid or accountability. For Your Turn, look for two distinct actions, a plausible obstacle or risk, and a measure of civilian safety.