

Create a United Nations Genocide Prevention Focal Point and Genocide Prevention Center

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Background:

Genocide is not conflict. It is one-sided mass murder. Jews had no conflict with Nazis. Armenians posed no threat to Turks. Ukrainian farmers did not fight Stalin's communist cadres. Bengalis did not try to massacre Pakistanis. Hutu intellectuals did not rise up against the Tutsi army in Burundi in 1972, nor did Tutsis advocate mass murder of Hutus in Rwanda in 1994. Yet all of these groups were victims of genocide. Conflict resolution is not genocide prevention.

Politicides, political mass murders, are also not the result of conflict. Nor are they the result of "state failure." Instead, they result from state success, from too much state power, from state-ism. The mass murders of the Soviet gulags could not have been prevented by conflict resolution. The man-made famines in China, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Sudan, and North Korea could not have been prevented by diplomacy or humanitarian relief.

Since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, there have been at least 55 genocides and politicides. Over seventy million people have died, most murdered by their own governments, more than in all the wars combined. Genocide, unlike other human rights violations, can almost never be prevented or punished unless the government that perpetrates the crime is forcefully restrained or overthrown.

That is why the United Nations has been ineffective in preventing genocide. The U.N. is an association of states, represented by governments that wave the flag of national sovereignty whenever anyone challenges their "domestic jurisdiction," which many of them believe includes what Leo Kuper called the "sovereign right to commit genocide." [1] Many reports (Whitaker, 1985; Carlsson, 1999; Brahimi, 2000) have recommended creating U.N. early warning and response institutions to prevent genocide. None have been implemented. At first paralyzed by the great power veto during the Cold War, the U.N. is now paralyzed by unwillingness of great powers to subject their policies to criticism and fear among illegitimate governments that scrutiny of their human rights violations might invite intervention by international forces.

Nevertheless, the United Nations remains the best hope to overcome the idolatry of national sovereignty, in favor of the popular sovereignty advocated by Locke, Rousseau, and Jefferson. An underlying premise of the Genocide Convention is that any regime that commits genocide forfeits its legitimacy, and should be subject to the authority of international law and international intervention. The U.N. Security Council has the

responsibility to protect against threats to international peace and security. Rwanda and Bosnia should teach the world that genocide is never simply an “internal matter.” Genocidal regimes never stop their predatory murders at their own borders and always bleed refugees. As Lemkin emphasized, genocide is a crime against all of humanity because it permanently reduces the cultural diversity that is humanity’s heritage.[2]

Genocides and politicides are political processes. Early warning theory has made progress in identifying factors that lead to genocide. Some models are multi-factorial and statistical. They provide support for general policies like democracy building. However, such models usually do not prescribe specific tactics to stop genocides. Genocide Watch has developed a processual model that can be logically understood by policy makers and is more specific about warning signs and tactics to stop each stage of the genocidal process. “[The Eight Stages of Genocide](#)” are Classification, Symbolization, Dehumanization, Organization, Polarization, Preparation, Extermination, and Denial.

What structures exist in the U.N. now for early warning and early response to genocide?

The Department of Political Affairs (DPA) Prevention Team works with regional divisions and desk officers to study cases likely to become emergencies requiring U.N. intervention. The most serious, including potential genocides, are referred to the Interdepartmental Framework for Coordination Team, which now has members from thirteen departments and agencies including DPA, DPKO, OCHA, UNDP, UNHCHR, FAO, UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, DESA, DDA, ILO, World Bank and IMF. Since 1998, monthly meetings in New York have focused on early warning and prevention. All members of the Framework Team can bring situations that may result in conflict or other emergencies to the attention of the Team. The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva has a representative in New York, but no staff members in Geneva focus solely on genocide prevention.

What problems are there with the current system?

-The Secretary-General and Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs are rarely informed of strategies recommended by the Framework for Coordination Team. Most follow-up is handled at a lower level, without reaching the Executive Committee on Peace and Security, where the Under-Secretaries-General could give them political clout.

-No Assistant-Secretary-General is a designated Focal Point for Genocide Prevention.

-The Department of Political Affairs lacks sufficient personnel who are experts in genocide early warning. Budget constraints make hiring additional U.N. staff unlikely.

-The significant differences between genocide and other threats to peace and security are not generally recognized in the U.N. or by member states.

-Recommendations of the Framework Team lack adequate follow-up. U.N. departments lack adequate human resources and budgets to implement long-term strategies.

-Responding to genocide requires great political will by U.N. staff and by member states. Those who push for action may risk their U.N. careers. Inaction has few career costs.

What are solutions to the problems with this system?

-The Secretary-General should name a Special Representative for Genocide Prevention in the Department of Political Affairs and make that person the Genocide Prevention Focal Point in the United Nations system. The Special Representative would have responsibility for warning the Interdepartmental Framework for Coordination Team of potentially genocidal situations, developing options for responses, and following up on decisions.

-The Special Representative will have to be a skilled diplomat with considerable U.N. experience, yet one willing to challenge U.N. bureaucratic conservatism. He or she will need courage, and both expertise in and commitment to genocide prevention.

-The Special Representative should be located in New York and report directly to the Secretary-General and to the Security Council, where political decisions are made.

-A Genocide Prevention Center to support the work of the Special Representative for Genocide Prevention should be established. The Center would communicate with a global network of governments, international organizations, and NGO's dedicated to early warning and effective response. It would be located near the U.N. and have a professional staff. It would be funded by voluntary contributions of governments and foundations.

What obstacles might these solutions face?

-New York U.N. Secretariat staff may see this new position as a threat to their comfortable relationships with member states' representatives and an admission of the U.N.'s failures to prevent genocide. They may try to get the Special Representative (SRSG) position relegated to Geneva under the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, several steps removed from political decision-making.

-U.N. member states that repress minorities and defend unlimited national sovereignty will strongly resist creation of this position, and may refuse to cooperate with the SRSG.

-The G-77 majority in the General Assembly may refuse to appropriate the budget needed to hire the SRSG. This doomed the Office for Research and Collection of Information, closed by Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali just before the 1990's genocides.

-Reports of the Genocide Prevention Center might be blocked if they criticize member states. Resistance to “intelligence gathering” by the U.N. has blocked the Brahimi Report’s recommended Information and Strategic Analysis Secretariat (EISAS). Opponents seem to prefer the current situation where only a few rich nations can afford to maintain international intelligence organizations, leaving the rest of the world in the dark about clandestine plans for genocide. (Rwanda in 1994 was a case in point.)

How can these obstacles be overcome?

-A global public campaign may be necessary to get the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative for Genocide Prevention. The world’s political leaders must be made to understand that “we, the peoples of the United Nations,” will no longer accept the excuse that our governments and the U.N. “didn’t know.” To prevent genocide, the most racist of crimes, the United Nations must enlist the whole human race. We will need an international movement to end genocide that has the size and moral force of the anti-slavery movement.

-This international campaign will need to engage every government, international organization, church, mosque, temple, and synagogue, every jurists’ association, conflict transformation organization, and women’s group, and all of civil society. The campaign cannot succeed without the leadership and the legitimacy of the United Nations.

-The Genocide Prevention Center should be independent, but with a special relationship to the SRSG. It could then provide the political advocacy that would be outside the role of the U.N. Secretariat. Such independence is vital to effective early warning and response.

-Regional organizations, human rights groups, humanitarian relief, academic, faith based, and civil society organizations could provide valuable assistance to the Special Representative, his or her staff, and to the Genocide Prevention Center. They could provide field resources and a network with U.N. staff around the world to provide early warnings of genocide.

-The position of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Genocide Prevention should be created by the Secretary-General under his Article 99 power to report to the Security Council any threats to international peace and security. It need not be authorized by either the Security Council or the General Assembly. However, a resolution by the Security Council would help pave the way for its creation.

-The budgets for the SRSG for Genocide Prevention and for the Genocide Prevention Center could be raised from contributions by U.N. member states and foundations, including the Trust Fund for Preventive Action and the United Nations Foundation. The Special Representative and Genocide Prevention Center staff could be seconded by member governments and other organizations.

[1] Leo Kuper, *Genocide*, Yale University Press, 1980.

[2] Raphael Lemkin, "Genocide," *American Scholar*, volume 15, no. 2 (April 1946), p. 228.