

**UNITAR Peace and Security Series: Preventing Genocide
Concluding Remarks of April 3, 2007**

by

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This has been a very rich meeting, made so by this remarkable group of individuals who contributed as speakers and participants. All of us are addressing some of the most critical issues in the world and it will be difficult to make a creative synthesis of everything that was discussed. This meeting has illuminated the necessity and feasibility of preventing mass violence, especially genocide. I sense a growing richness of experience and array of opportunities.

The UN alone cannot provide prevention; it must be facilitated by a wide array of institutions in the international community, its own member-states and excellent NGOs. At some points, the UN must take the lead; at others, regional or non-governmental groups must be out in front. Kofi Annan said that human rights are “at the core of our sacred bond with the peoples of the United Nations.” These rights give the individual universal and inalienable rights to speak, learn, grow and act according to his or her own conscience. We are presented with multiple arenas for the protection of human rights.

UN FOCUS ON PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE

The Secretary-General set two important precedents at once by appointing a Special Adviser for Prevention of Genocide. It was the first time any prevention professional had been appointed at such a high level, reporting directly to the Secretary-General. Moreover, it was the first time that a unit focusing specifically on genocide prevention had ever been created at the UN.

The UN can survey the world's experience, for better and worse, seek to extract the most promising actions and make them available to groups in distress, nation states, regional organizations, and nongovernmental organizations.

During this meeting we have seen a recurrent theme. A pivotal change has occurred in the international community's conception of national sovereignty. The conviction has grown that sovereignty is not and cannot be a shield behind which governments are free to engage in horrific acts with impunity; and that the international community has justifiable authority for intervening through the UN in "internal affairs" to prevent or resolve deadly conflict, render humanitarian assistance, aid transitions to more democratic systems of governance, and offer technical assistance to build the capacity for problem solving. Nevertheless, many countries — especially the autocratic and dictatorial ones — resist this change. The promising reformulation of this problem as a nation's responsibility to protect its own people from human rights abuses is helpful. Now we must find ways to operationalize it.

This vital international norm has been globally endorsed at the UN Summit. Such norms can gradually evolve into patterns of effective action. But in early 2007, neither the Security Council nor the General Assembly has made significant strides toward implementation.

Another recurrent theme has been preventive diplomacy, a distinctive achievement of the UN, now spreading. It is one of the most important legacies of that extraordinary Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold. Not only did Hammarskjold coin the term “preventive diplomacy,” he put it into action in the face of powerful constraints, achieved surprising successes, and paved the way for the much broader approach to preventive diplomacy that exists today. Since the end of the Cold War, his concepts of preventive diplomacy have been expanded, and now hold an important place in the policies of democratic governments and *international organizations*, including the UN and some regional organizations, especially the OSCE which has an exceptional track record.

Obstacles and Assets of the UN for Prevention of Genocide

1. With limited resources and a massive agenda, the Secretary-General and Security Council are overburdened, and forced to focus on crisis situations more than preventive strategies.
2. Although its Charter allows the UN to respond to threats or breaches of peace within or among states, it often has trouble dealing with conflicts involving

- non-official parties and internal disputes, and so far has had problems with very early prevention.
3. The UN is hindered in its security efforts by the threat of a veto in the Security Council. Though the Council varies in composition over time, it is generally not deeply committed to democratic, humane, compassionate values.
 4. The high stakes surrounding the UN's involvement in a conflict sometimes make states apprehensive about bringing their conflict to it. The Security Council may be inflexible or partisan, or pass resolutions that cannot be implemented, as it did in the former Yugoslavia.
 5. The UN struggles to be organizationally efficient but has the image of being wasteful, and is hampered in administrative reform by a variety of member states, especially autocratic ones.

Despite its shortcomings, the UN's considerable resources and opportunities make it an indispensable part of any regime of preventing genocide and war.

1. It has a worldwide organizational network, composed, to a large extent, of capable, dedicated professional people – agencies and departments of high quality and much knowledge relevant to the prevention of mass violence.
2. The Secretary-General's diplomatic resources, strengthened by his moral authority, enable him to bring disputing parties together in a constructive atmosphere.

3. The UN can bring issues to the attention of the international community, and put moral and other pressure on disputing parties to work toward resolution.
4. The UN can employ the resources of experienced diplomats.
5. It can assemble the political and economic power of problem-solving governments to create a package of preventive action.
6. It can make available to any troubled country or region the entire world's experience, knowledge, and skills pertinent to building durable mechanisms for conflict resolution and peaceful inter-group relations.
7. as the only organization universal in scope, it has a distinctive, worldwide legitimacy.

The UN can be strengthened in ways that would permit it to use its unique scope and legitimacy to foster political, social, and economic conditions in which a civil and just international society might evolve.¹ Enhancing the UN's ability to respond rapidly to prevent large-scale violence should receive high priority.

The Secretary-General needs high-level Special Representatives available either in his own Secretariat or through a collaborative relationship with non-governmental organizations. In either case, the special representatives of the Secretary-General and the senior staff collaborators should combine expertise in two bodies of knowledge: the principles and techniques of conflict resolution,

and in-depth knowledge of a particular region, including the main historical and cultural factors bearing on a specific conflict.

There are ways in which regional programs for assistance in dispute settlement could reduce tension between groups, whether within or between states, both in near-term and long-term accomplishments. As the concepts and techniques of violence prevention are more widely understood, such UN-RO-NGO activities could become a potent force for preventive diplomacy in the short run and also for democratic socioeconomic development in the long term.

In the area of education, the UN might sponsor world leadership seminars, in cooperation with universities and research institutes. These leadership seminars might include new heads of state, new foreign ministers, new defense ministers, and new development ministers. Ongoing leadership seminars could clarify how the UN and other institutions and organizations can help states avoid violent conflict and, most important, deal with problems of nationalism, ethnocentrism, prejudice, hatred, and violence. Through leadership seminars, a wide array of publications, and the Internet, the UN can make available to the world experience bearing on conflicts in general and on particular conflicts; the responsible handling of weapons by governmental leaders and policy makers; the likely consequences of weapons build-up, especially weapons of mass destruction; the skills, knowledge base, and prestige properly associated with successful conflict resolution; economic development, including the new uses of

science and technology for development; and cooperative behavior in the world community, including the handling of grievances. Prevention of genocide should be high on this agenda.

International policy-makers must make sustained efforts to identify and promote those factors that foster the emergence of viable political processes in violence-prone societies.

Negotiated settlements based on short-term compromises are more likely to endure if they include strategies and actions that move toward the gradual elimination of the prejudices, misperceptions, insecurity, exclusion, and animosity that poisoned intergroup relations in the first place.

Because the opposing parties cannot be expected to introduce such strategies spontaneously, and the urgency typical of negotiated settlements may prevent international mediators from doing so, agreements should be followed up with systematic problem-solving and monitoring to facilitate improved intergroup relations over the long term, and to strengthen the capacity for building fair, resilient, problem-solving political processes. All concerned are helped by clear, well-documented practical information about best practices in various forms of violence prevention, including mediation and economic factors.

The UN is becoming increasingly helpful in providing what is needed for a useful “tool box” available to many players in the international community.

Secretary-General Annan identified six categories of core prevention activities in a detailed review of the United Nations system: (1) early warning, information, and analysis; (2) good offices and mediation; (3) democracy, good governance, and a culture of prevention; (4) disarmament and arms control; (5) equitable socioeconomic development; and (6) human rights, humanitarian law, and international justice. If future leaders of the UN carry this agenda forward, the UN's contributions could become very important globally. These considerations apply to genocide as well as to other mass violence.

This high-level, worldwide endorsement of prevention aspirations now needs stronger implementation. The Secretary-General set two important precedents at once by appointing a Special Adviser for Prevention of Genocide in 2004. It was the first time any prevention professional had been appointed at such a high level, reporting directly to the Secretary-General. Moreover, it was the first time that a unit focusing specifically on genocide prevention had ever been created at the UN. In 2006, he strengthened this effort by appointing a distinguished, world-wide committee to advise him on ways of strengthening genocide prevention in the future, with particular attention to the Special Adviser for Prevention of Genocide.

The UN is developing a preventive orientation, with a growing emphasis on primary prevention — i.e., prior to any killing; an approach that considers major risk factors for the entire population and ways to buffer them before serious

damage is done. There are a number of practical steps that can identify areas at serious risk of genocide and other mass violence and offer help to the troubled country or region from the international community. These are spelled out in the final section of this chapter.

The Special Adviser on Prevention of Genocide cannot provide detailed leadership on all of the fundamental, long-term activities inherent in the pillars of prevention. But he can give stimulation and encouragement to those in the UN system who have such responsibilities; and he can help the Secretary-General to strengthen them by identifying opportunities for cooperation among various departments and agencies throughout the world, as well as other international organizations, such as the EU.

These are not easy tasks, and rapid transformation of the problem of genocide is unlikely. Yet the stakes are so high, the human suffering so great, the promise of better human relations so valuable, that the UN must do everything in its power to prevent genocide and other crimes against humanity.

The need for prepared responses to imminent danger is of utmost importance in preventing mass violence in all its forms. The lack of prepared response options and contingency plans is a striking feature of failure in genocide prevention.

Heidi Hulan spoke this morning on the responsibility to protect and talked about the length of time needed for norms to be transformed into social action.

Perhaps it is fitting to close with a comment on slavery. This was a plague through much of history. Now at last it has essentially come to an end in most of the world. I quote the distinguished scholar, Professor David Brion Davis of Yale University, whose lifelong work has illuminated the rise and fall of slavery in the Western hemisphere.

“In 1770, on the eve of the American Revolution, African American slavery was legal and almost unquestioned throughout the New World. The ghastly slave trade from Africa was still expanding and for many decades had been shipping five Africans across the Atlantic for every European immigrant to the Americas. An imaginary “hemispheric traveler” would have seen black slaves in every colony from Canada and New England all the way south to Spanish Peru and Chile. In the incomparably rich colonies of the Caribbean, they often constituted population majorities of 90 percent or more. But in 1888, one hundred and eighteen years later, when Brazil finally freed all its slaves, the institution had been outlawed throughout the Western hemisphere....”

Davis concludes:

“We can thus end on a positive note of *willed* achievement, a century’s moral achievement that may have no parallel. It is an

achievement, despite its many limitations, that should help inspire some confidence in other movements for social change, for not being condemned to fully accept the world into which we are born. But since we have devoted special attention to the origins and damage of antiblack racism, it is also crucial to add that we still face the heavy legacies of historical slavery throughout the Western Hemisphere, as well as in the still devastated continent of Africa.”

Thus we see in the history of slavery a strong expression of emerging human decency, despite great travail; and also a need for constant vigilance to mobilize human capacities for fully learning to live together in personal dignity and shared humanity at last.

I want to express heartfelt thanks to all of you for coming together to consider the opportunities that may emerge. I fervently hope that you will pursue these lines of inquiry and innovation in the years ahead.

¹ Kofi Annan, *We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the twenty-first Century* (New York: United Nations, 2000).