

**UNITAR Peace and Security Series: Preventing Genocide
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by

David A. Hamburg, M.D.
DeWitt Wallace Distinguished Scholar
Department of Psychiatry
Weill Medical College, Cornell University

Thank you to the staff of UNITAR, the jewel of the crown of the UN. Connie Peck, who has done farsighted work on preventive diplomacy and sustainable peace, the staff of the New York UNITAR office, especially Collen Thouez, chief, and her collaborator, Sarah Rosengaertner. It took much careful thought and many dedicated efforts to make this meeting possible. Thank you also to the participants, especially the speakers. Almost all who were invited to this meeting accepted and I am hopeful that this signifies an increase in interest in the prevention of genocide, especially in and around the UN. There must be a willingness to face terribly difficult, distressing problems.

Over the past 15 years there has been a prevention movement building at the UN, heralded by several recent landmarks. A report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict was produced in 2001 and another report was produced in 2006. The Secretary-General's Mandate for the Prevention of Genocide was put into effect in 2004, including the appointment of a Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Prevention of Genocide. In October of 2006, the Advisory Committee to the Secretary-General on Prevention of Genocide produced its report. Since then there has been a transition toward building a stronger unit in 2007. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has made this endeavor a high priority.

Most of us have seen a documentary or an old newsreel portraying the incredible brutality of genocides ranging from the Holocaust to Darfur. If you cast your mind back to such pictures, you can grasp a little of the horror; but not the smells, the cries of anguish, and much else that reflects the mass slaughter of a people just because they were exactly that — a people cast in the role of inhuman scum, scapegoats, utterly vulnerable targets, putatively guilty of all sorts of crimes against the perpetrators, but in fact guilty of nothing except being alive — but not alive for long. The Nazi Holocaust killed six million Jews; the Rwanda Genocide killed one-third of Rwanda's citizens in a few months. Here I would like to give a special welcome to Senator Romeo Dallaire who played a valiant role in trying to end the Rwandan Genocide.

It is exceedingly hard to comprehend how supposedly decent human beings could commit such atrocities — over and over again from decade to decade, generation to generation, century to century. The spectacle has been so despicable that all sorts of efforts have been made to deny the existence of genocides, or to claim exaggeration, or to say it is simply a natural disaster like a tsunami, about which nothing can be done in the way of prevention. It is so hard to face these dreadful events, so hard to understand how they could happen, so hard to know what could possibly be done to prevent them. Hence, the scholarly literature on genocide has very little to say about prevention.

There are deeply moving accounts of the victims' sufferings, heart-rending expressions of their anguish and courage in the face of horrendous circumstances. Profoundly sensitive and thoughtful observers such as Elie

Wiesel have done a great service by helping us to remember — not only the Holocaust but other genocides as well — and to draw the world's attention to impending dangers of genocides to come. Such work gives a powerful stimulus to explore how such ultimate cruelty and brutality could in fact be prevented. In-depth efforts to do so have been very rare, because of the complexity of the problem and the exceedingly grim nature of the experiences. But we must try.

Horrible as genocide is, we need to recall other dreadful experiences that have been successfully brought to resolution, not perfectly but vastly improved. In my lifetime, we have seen the end of colonialism and imperialism; unprecedented advances in science and technology making possible great advances in health and the foreseeable end of abject poverty; the worldwide spread of human rights since the UN Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and the successful US civil rights movement of the 1960s, one century after Abraham Lincoln ended slavery in the US; the end of fascist and communist totalitarianism; the end of the Cold War — the most dangerous conflict in history; the end of apartheid and the emergence of democracy in South Africa — and indeed, the spread of democracy throughout most of the world. All of these have limitations and periodic setbacks, but they represent great advances bearing upon the worst problems of humanity. Let us therefore take hope.

The South African experience in overcoming apartheid shows how people suffering from terrible injustice, anger, and escalating violence were able to find their way out of an exceedingly dangerous predicament without falling into the hideous trap of genocide. Especially important here was the emergence of

extraordinary leadership characterized by commitment to democracy, with a concomitant commitment to non-violent conflict resolution – and the UN was helpful.

Indeed, leadership matters greatly in overcoming all of these severe problems, and humanity must learn to recognize and cultivate leaders of vision, courage, humane and democratic policies, and reinforce their commitment to non-violent problem solving.

A major focus of research has been on malevolent leadership. The more we can understand about the ideologies and actions of such leaders, the better our opportunity to foresee and prevent future genocidal episodes. Another focus of research is on the implementation of genocidal orders. Who does the killing and why?

Political leaders make genocide possible by lighting the fires of hatred, but they do not act alone. They are supported by machinery of the state, the dominant political party, the police forces, paramilitary and military forces as well as professionals such as lawyers, professors, doctors, and engineers. This time interval to build the machinery of genocide can be utilized for prevention.

Effective prevention is facilitated by ample warning time. Warning time is typically not weeks or even months, but actually years. Genocide is not like a tsunami that bursts upon humanity with hardly any warning.

Incitement is a hallmark, and probably a prerequisite, of genocide. Every modern case of genocide has been preceded by a mass media propaganda campaign directed by political leaders.

Altogether, the international community stands warned. Ignorance is no longer a viable excuse for inaction. The years required to go from the initial jeopardy to full genocide offer an interval for the international community — if it is alert, well informed, morally committed, and organizationally prepared knowledge and skill— to take preventive actions.

Finding effective ways both to identify and to check violent, hate-mongering, extremist leaders and the conditions that nurture them before they take root demands international cooperation (over years, before the carnage) to use the knowledge of preventing deadly conflict, for meeting basic human needs, and building decent inter-group relations. Governments, intergovernmental organizations, and nongovernmental organizations must establish permanent mechanisms for settling conflicts peacefully before they become explosive, and collaborate in offering ongoing programs of international help that build the capacity of groups to resolve grievances without violence. Fortunately, momentum has grown toward using techniques of active, non-violent problem solving and sharing of experience across national boundaries, to profit from the world's experience in different local conflicts. Tackling serious grievances as early as possible denies political demagogues and hateful fanatics the long-rankling discontent that makes incitement to violence easier.

Thus, efforts to prevent mass violence encounter this central problem: countries, regions, or groups in trouble are in need of international help. The trouble, which may combine political, social, psychological, and economic ills, can easily exacerbate inter-group or international tensions that are then readily

exploited by ambitious, aggressive, ruthless leaders who gain support and consolidate power through incitement to violence against vulnerable scapegoats.

Today the capacity for mass destruction is at an all-time high; so too is the capacity for incitement to violence. In the interest of adversarial parties, their neighbors, and ultimately all humanity, therefore, the international community must join in a common effort to learn to live together, diminish tension and the causes of tension between in-groups and out-groups, and engage in early, ongoing conflict resolution. Early, sustained efforts to prevent genocide and other mass violence are likely to have multiple benefits — usually achieved without military action. Paths to ongoing conflict resolution and lasting peaceful relations are mapped out best through **early, strongly preventive diplomacy and worldwide education for learning to live together in a framework of democratic socioeconomic development**. These approaches are fundamental to preventing all forms of mass killing, whether interstate war, civil war, or genocide. So too the precursors of mass killing: egregious, systematic violation of human rights such as torture and “ethnic cleansing.” The path to prevention of mass violence and establishment of decent human relations is usually long and difficult, but increasingly feasible.

The UN’s worldwide departments, agencies, and programs, in cooperation with regional organizations, for example the European Union, OSCE and the African Union, and excellent NGOs such as the International Crisis Group and the Carter Center, can contribute not only to early warning but also to response options, contingency plans, and ongoing help to countries in trouble.

There are a number of practical steps that can identify areas at serious risk of genocide-related mass violence and offer help to the troubled country or region from the international community.

1. Establish an ongoing process, drawing on readily available information from all sources, to identify vulnerable targets, scapegoats, and depreciated out-groups.
2. Monitor trends of hatred and dehumanization toward the groups that are identified in such a vulnerable position.
3. Offer help in conflict resolution and prevention of mass violence in situations of this kind. What kind of help?
 - a. Early, strong mediation
 - b. Help to build internal capacity of member states for early ongoing conflict resolution, including essential concepts, techniques (e.g., negotiation) and institutions (e.g., an independent judiciary).
 - c. Help leaders and the public understand the merits of these enterprises, showing how a country caught up in deep antagonism will find such measures to serve its own interests, as well as earning respect and economic as well as political benefits in the international community.
4. Identify predisposing factors, for example, economic deterioration, social disorganization, and alienated position with prospects of war and/ or revolution in the background. The earlier such problems are identified and the better they are understood, the greater the opportunity for international help.

5. Enlist the help of key member states of international organizations who are strongly interested in the genocide problem and how to overcome it. Persuade them to commit intellectual, technical, financial, and moral resources.

Close cooperation between the EU and the UN has much potential for carrying out this genocide-prevention mission for the first time in history. Over the years, it is entirely possible that a network of cooperating organizations covering the world could be built for the purpose of preventing mass violence, especially genocide – most of these topics will be illuminated over the next two days.