

POLICY *dialogue* BRIEF



Developing a Global Mechanism for Atrocity Forecasting and Prevention

Recommendations

Improve Early Warning and Assess the Efficacy of Early Action

- Researchers should continue to improve early warning to identify countries most at risk of atrocities, strengthen real-time monitoring, and account for nonstate perpetrators of atrocities.
- Governments, multilateral organizations, and civil society should assess and evaluate interventions to enhance understanding of successful approaches to atrocity prevention.

Initiate Early and Sustained Engagement in At-Risk Countries

- Governments and civil society should conduct actor and relationship mapping in countries with early signs of risk for mass atrocities far in advance of the outbreak of any violence, coordinating their efforts to avoid “mapping fatigue” in local communities. Funders should include resources for such mapping in funding packages.
- Government and civil society stakeholders engaged in prevention activities should work to build trust with local communities to strengthen information sharing in countries at risk of mass atrocities.
- The international community should continue to identify and implement creative engagement strategies that bridge the gap between doing all or nothing. To do so, governments, funders, and implementing organizations need to invest in effective, targeted evaluations of their work and place a priority on innovation.

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This brief summarizes the primary findings of the conference as interpreted by the rapporteur, Jai-Ayla Sutherland; the organizers, Keith Porter and Carrie DuLaney; and the co-chairs, James P. Finkel and Philipp Rotmann. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this brief. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

Target Advocacy Appropriately

- Advocates should continue to work within and across governmental agencies and international institutions to mainstream atrocity prevention.
- In early warning, advocates should consider targeting and informing elected members of the UN Security Council who may not have access to information and can be a conduit to the permanent members of the council.
- When pushing governments and regional organizations to take early action, advocates must provide the clearest possible assessments of the situation and targeted requests for action.

Strengthen Multilateral Capacity for Atrocity Prevention

- The United Nations should increase financial and personnel resources for the Office of the Special Advisers for the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect.
- The selection committee for the next UN secretary-general should choose a candidate who will advocate strongly for atrocity prevention and continue to support

the Office of the Special Advisers for the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect.

- The Peacebuilding Commission, which serves an important role in upstream prevention, should be better resourced.
- Regional organizations should continue to strengthen capacity for atrocity prevention and apply adequate political pressure on leaders to help mitigate atrocity risks as necessary.

Consider New Approaches for Monitoring At-Risk Countries and Coordinating Early Action

- An institution or set of institutions should conduct a feasibility study for the creation of a public-private consortium of civil society, government, and multilateral organizations to review early warning and coordinate strategies for early action in countries most at risk for mass atrocities.
- A consortium of civil society actors, including universities, should build a platform capable of tracking and curating early warning information, producing pertinent, country-specific, daily updates for decision makers and atrocity prevention practitioners.

The 47th UN Issues conference convened representatives from multilateral institutions, government, and civil society to reflect on strides the international community has made in strengthening tools and mechanisms to prevent atrocities and to explore how to improve the collective capacity for prevention. Conversation focused on translating early warning into early action and revealed that, while there has been more progress in gathering information and analyzing risk than in generating action, there is room for improvement across the entire atrocity prevention spectrum.

Lessons Learned From the Crisis in the Central African Republic (2012–2014)

To open the conference, participants reflected on the recent civil war in the Central African Republic (CAR) as a starting point to assess major obstacles in early warning and prevention of mass atrocities. The violence began in late 2012, when the Séléka rebel group headed toward the capital, Bangui, and escalated after it launched a coup against the government in March 2013. The international community was caught off guard by the rapid onset and deterioration of the crisis. Due to the minimal international presence in CAR, it was extremely difficult to get real-time information about the conflict, significantly impeding a timely and effective response. The lack of preparedness

for a crisis of this magnitude made it impossible to protect civilians from the unfolding atrocities. The conflict has ultimately torn the country apart, resulting in the deaths of thousands of civilians and the displacement of nearly the country's entire Muslim population.

To frame the case study, participants analyzed separate phases of the crisis in CAR. Beginning with the pre-2012 events, which participants referred to as Phase 0, they reviewed the systematic failures in monitoring by regional and international actors. Phase 1 was identified as the period from December 2012 to March 2013, the lead-up to the Séléka coup. Phase 2, from March 2013 to August 2013, was marked by growing violence, resulting in the formation of the *anti-balaka*, Christian militias that fought the Muslim Séléka. Phase 3, beginning in September 2013, saw the height of the crisis and the ratcheting up of international efforts to respond. The following sections reflect the major themes of the discussion.

Plenty of Early Warning Failed to Spark Early (Preventive) Action

Although violence in CAR escalated more quickly than experts anticipated, CAR's eruption into crisis in 2013 was not unexpected. Participants mentioned examples of well-known risk factors for the current conflict from as far

back as 2003, the year that CAR's president, who had just led the overthrow of the previous government, began to consolidate power in the hands of his own ethnic group to the systematic exclusion and marginalization of communities outside of Bangui. In the intervening years of instability, CAR did not lack for international observers: The UN had a political mission in CAR from 2000 to 2010 and again between 2010 and 2014. The Economic Commission of Central African States troops had been in the country since 2008, the same year the UN Peacebuilding Commission put CAR on its agenda. CAR had been identified as a country at risk of atrocities and actively monitored for years. Though a number of actors, recognizing that CAR was on the brink, had appealed to regional and global institutions for action, these early warning efforts did not succeed in mobilizing sufficient early engagement, including diplomatic mediation and peacebuilding, to avert its swift descent into violence in 2012. When the crisis erupted, the international community initially expected France, CAR's former colonial power that had historically intervened to stabilize the country, to shoulder the response to the crisis—even when it became clear that the scale of need surpassed what one country could provide.

To make matters worse, at the onset of violence in CAR, the United States closed its embassy—one of the few in-country—and the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) evacuated all nonessential employees and restricted movement for those remaining in the country. Although it made sense to protect the safety of those individuals, the removal of professionals in charge of understanding and communicating events on the ground to key outside actors deprived the international community of a vital information base within CAR. Conference participants suggested that there should have been a mapping exercise at early signs of risk in CAR to better understand potential aggressors and victims, as well as existing civil society organizations and the reliable support networks, from youth groups to religious organizations, within communities. The international community could have used such a mapping to maintain lines of communication with local actors, even in the absence of a foreign diplomatic presence, as the crisis escalated. Local civil society should always play a fundamental role in these mapping exercises, making it an essential partner when the security situation in a country changes dramatically and access to information is restricted. Participants emphasized that mapping is but one part of a more structured and systematic approach to assessment and monitoring of at-risk countries that should be conducted on an ongoing basis rather than as a one-off.

The withdrawal of international infrastructure—BINUCA and embassies—may help explain why it took several months for international actors, and even civil society, to manage to put their own eyes and ears on the ground. Humanitarian and peacebuilding organizations that had long-term operations

on the ground warned of rising violence throughout the crisis. A couple of advocacy organizations went to the field in late spring and early summer 2013, weeks to months after the coup and well into the local escalatory dynamic, framed as Phase 2 by the conference participants. The international community missed an important opportunity for engagement during the period of flux right after the coup when preventive interventions would have been most effective. During this window, international actors could have supported more fine-grained early warning, actor mapping, and escalation monitoring and helped to increase the capacity of local communities to protect themselves; but there was little appetite for early engagement or experimentation. Wider attention did not turn to the crisis well into fall 2013 during Phase 3, when the conflict had escalated beyond the point of no return and atrocities had moved from risk to certainty.

Resource Challenges

In CAR, international actors agreed on the need for a peacekeeping mission, yet disagreements about the mandate and makeup of the force significantly delayed deployment. Debates about what institution should manage the force were partly related to strained financing for peacekeeping in general and to more specific questions over whether the African Union or United Nations should lead the CAR mission and what roles and responsibilities the countries involved in it should take on.

Beyond the peacekeeping missions, other efforts in CAR were significantly underresourced, including political and peacebuilding missions from regional organizations and the United Nations; bilateral initiatives; and local civil society efforts. Participants stressed the importance of adequate and flexible funding for all actors engaged in at-risk countries. One good example of such a funding source is the Complex Crises Fund (CCF), a mechanism appropriated by the US Congress that provides much-needed flexible money to the US Agency for International Development to prevent or respond to emerging crises. Though the CCF has not been sufficiently resourced, its purpose is to provide civilian agencies with the ability to react quickly to changing dynamics on the ground in a way that timebound projects cannot. The additional allocation of resources to important institutions and to flexible funding mechanisms, like the CCF, could moderate the inevitable scramble for resources when atrocities are imminent or ongoing.

Regional institutions are critical actors, with an added stake in conflicts within their areas of coverage. However, in CAR, participants noted that regional organizations lacked capacity in personnel, financial resources, and information. In turn, response efforts were left to better-equipped constituent member states and the rest of the international community. In the future, it is important that respective regional organizations have the capacity to respond as

collective institutions rather than be forced to defer to individual states within them. Participants agreed that such joint responses would have greater legitimacy and likely also be more effective.

The media could have been better utilized as a source of information on the unfolding crisis in CAR. The international community should consider international journalists on the ground to be an important source of information, starting with their published reporting itself, which is often summarily distrusted by governments that rely excessively on internal classified sources of information and analysis. Governmental actors can be left paralyzed when such sources are not available as a result of movement restrictions or embassy closures. Several freelance journalists and international news agencies were present in CAR during the crisis, but the extent to which they were engaged is unclear. Though local media actors should always be engaged during crises, they proved to be difficult to access in CAR because of poor infrastructure and the environment of restricted press freedom. The international community failed to adequately engage the local media in CAR—or to even understand the entry points to do so—because it lacked on-the-ground contacts and knowledge of the precrisis terrain.

Problematic Framing of the Crisis

The crisis in CAR has also underscored the importance of understanding the root causes of conflict. Once it erupted in large-scale violence, the conflict was quickly framed and therefore widely understood as sectarian in nature: Muslim versus Christian. In contrast, the initial grievances grew out of internal tensions within the armed forces, a result of soldiers not being paid for years, and regional dynamics that contributed to distrust and anger toward foreigners, including the Séléka rebels, many of whom were from nomadic tribes in northern CAR, Chad, and Sudan. Taking up arms allowed populations that perceived themselves to be disenfranchised a chance to be included in the spoils of war and protect their territory; this motivation was a fundamental driver of the conflict in CAR that has been overlooked in analysis.

Early on, the crisis was framed by the international community as a failure of law and order, likely to soften expectations of an international response. When international actors did shift focus, they labeled the conflict as sectarian, a product of supposed age-old tensions between the Muslim and Christian populations. In response, the Séléka and *anti-balaka* adopted and played into that framework. Some participants also speculated that downplaying the capacity and political intelligence of both groups clouded analysis of their capabilities and strategy. The failure to accurately characterize the true drivers of and actors in the conflict limited the effective development of strategic options for early engagement and action.

Participants also contrasted the framing of the crisis in CAR against another regional intervention, namely the operation in Mali. That intervention may have been framed as a counterterrorism response due to backlash resulting from the contested Libya intervention. Yet framing crises according to the narrative that is most politically expedient will not yield effective, coherent atrocity prevention practices in the long term. This revealed gaps in understanding how to accurately assess, characterize, and respond to conflicts involving nonstate actors who perpetrate atrocity crimes but whose actions can also be classified as terrorism.

Additionally, the situation in CAR demonstrates the importance of broadening the international community's understanding of atrocity crimes beyond genocide. Participants emphasized that all atrocity crimes, including the ethnic cleansing in CAR, should be responded to with equal urgency. They posited that some of the reluctance to intervene may have stemmed from a lack of understanding of the severity of the crisis in CAR—the tendency to view it as another political skirmish in an unstable country rather than a serious crisis with ramifications for the region.

A Dose of Reality

The international community has long been overstretched, struggling with competing priorities. The crisis in CAR began to develop at the same time civil war raged in Syria, the Arab Spring unfolded more broadly across the Middle East and North Africa, and Boko Haram fighters indiscriminately attacked civilians in Nigeria. Participants soberly noted that situations of risk will always fall lower in priority than ongoing atrocities, especially when resources are stretched thin.

It did not help that most international advocacy organizations and governments were not active in CAR and, in fact, made strategic decisions to stay out of the country because of its extremely fragile governance environment, the complexity of the unfolding crisis, or, for some, a lack of strategic interest. Even after the coup in 2013, the UN Security Council relied on briefs from the few nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and humanitarian organizations that had programs in the country, as member states lacked the on-the-ground presence to provide sufficient information and updates.

To overcome these obstacles, participants emphasized the importance of all stakeholders—from embassies to political missions to advocacy groups—offering honest assessments of developing situations and avoiding the urge to inflate information or appeal to certain conflict characteristics, such as sectarian factors, that tend to generate more global attention. While it can be tempting to overstate a threat, thus misrepresenting conflict dynamics, it will likely have negative consequences, potentially leading to bad policymaking. Therefore, participants

highlighted the importance for advocates, within and outside of government, to focus on communicating to decision makers in a clear and compelling way. If advocates better understand decision makers and their capabilities, they can better target the what, where, and when in the commitments and actions they wish to see.

The case study of CAR also revealed the importance of defining clear objectives for interventions. Various stakeholders (e.g., ministries of foreign affairs, peacebuilding missions, humanitarian aid and development organizations) have different responsibilities and end objectives, and these distinctions should set expectations and guide preparations during times of crisis. In CAR, participants noted that a premature sentiment of “mission accomplished” undercut subsequent efforts to stabilize the country. Additionally, policymakers and leaders are sometimes willing, at least to an extent, to tolerate certain consequences of inaction, such as in CAR, where the overall death toll was comparatively low, despite the massive displacement from the crisis.

Better Late Than Never: Acknowledging Partial Success

Despite significant obstacles and failures in responding to violence in CAR, there were some important accomplishments. The French government maintained its foreign diplomatic and military presence during the worst of the violence. France ultimately sent 4,000 troops to CAR and provided important protection for civilians, particularly in and around Bangui. The African Union assembled the International Support Mission to the Central African Republic peacekeeping force, which was later replaced by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic peacekeeping mission of 1,700 troops. Even with the challenges each mission faced, the presence of peacekeepers helped to protect civilians in the country. Acting on pressure by the newly formed US Atrocities Prevention Board and domestic civil society, the United States mobilized significant financial aid, upwards of \$100 million, during the conflict and provided airlift assistance for peacekeepers. Some participants argued that conditions in CAR would have been devastatingly worse without these measures.

From Early Warning to Early Action: Challenges in Bridging the Divide

The discussion was then broadened to examine early warning and early action beyond the single-country case. Across the spectrum of prevention, participants underscored the importance of early and consistent engagement at the local level, especially because outside actors cannot and should not independently influence domestic outcomes. However, participants also reaffirmed that atrocity prevention is a global concern and responsibility, from the local to the international level and from the Global North to the Global South.

The State of Early Warning

Quantitative Forecasting and Qualitative Analysis. During the conference, participants acknowledged that the biggest challenges in atrocity prevention are in the realm of early engagement and early action rather than in early warning. In recent years, researchers have made significant improvements in quantitative tools to predict which countries are at the highest risk of atrocities. Whereas a growing number of governments use quantitative forecasting to create their lists of at-risk countries, most public domain watch lists are generated by a qualitative review of structural factors. Participants reaffirmed the importance of coupling statistical forecasting with qualitative analysis to improve knowledge of where and when to generate an alert.

They felt that country lists still yield too many at-risk countries to be continuously and meaningfully monitored. Some participants suggested that most governments can only manage to intensively track two to three countries at a time. Furthermore, many public domain watch lists are updated too infrequently, typically once per year, to account for dynamic political events. Some participants suggested that the community should continue to refine the processes for generating lists to improve their ability to rank countries most in danger of mass atrocities while recognizing that the relative rarity of cases limits the ability to make accurate predictions. Likewise, researchers should work to better understand how to identify triggers for atrocities and analyze when and why some cases escalate and others do not. Participants underscored that lists, and related research on inflection points, are only as strong as the ongoing monitoring and subsequent policy action they prompt.

An important point of conversation revolved around the use of big data to strengthen quantitative forecasting. Some participants suggested that new tools to analyze local media and other open source information—some of which have already been tested, with varying degrees of success—could improve early warning. Researchers may benefit from drawing from different fields to better detect where atrocities are likely to break out. For instance, epidemiological methods of tracing infectious diseases may offer a useful approach. Finally, participants pointed to the fact that current quantitative models focus exclusively on state perpetrators and cannot assess the risk of atrocities perpetrated by nonstate actors, leaving a significant knowledge gap that needs to be filled.

Monitoring. Participants affirmed that local civil society organizations and local media are particularly important resources for real-time monitoring. However, language barriers can make it difficult to access local reporting and information. More importantly, international NGOs are reluctant to share information that could put their in-country partners at risk. Local civil society organizations are similarly

hesitant to provide information to external actors for fear of harming their relationships with the communities they serve. As a result, international actors frequently find it difficult to build relationships of trust with local partners.

At the international level, coordinated and collaborative qualitative analysis and information sharing is rarely sufficient to strengthen early warning. Participants noted distrust among permanent members of the UN Security Council and struggles for some elected members of the Council to access information about countries where they do not have their own diplomatic presence. Beyond the Security Council, participants suggested there is a need to better understand how the African Union's Peace and Security Council and the UN Human Rights Council have tracked specific countries in the past, potentially revealing strategies to improve information sharing.

Messaging and Communication to Decision Makers

Acknowledging gains in early warning, participants discussed the importance of then getting the message, the messenger, and the audience right to translate early warning into early engagement and action. The difficulty in formulating and targeting effective messaging to influence policymakers to engage early in a crisis remains a significant obstacle.

Accurate early warning information is not useful if it is not communicated effectively and persuasively to individuals and entities capable of taking action. Getting the message right is extremely challenging, as it depends on reliable information and a well-constructed understanding of the recipient of that information, the request, and the end goal. It is incredibly important for all actors to offer clear assessments of the situation on the ground and, as mentioned previously, to avoid inflating the case or unduly politicizing information to generate more interest from bureaucracies that tend to be driven by crisis.

Within foreign ministries, the relationship between functional and regional bureaus, which manage in-country relations, must be carefully managed. Sounding the alarm for risks of mass atrocities can threaten diplomacy and efforts to engage in crises early. Sensitive information sharing about a potential or unfolding crisis and political pressure to address it need not generate much publicity, and quiet efforts may lead to more effective prevention.

According to participants, it is also critical to build trust between civil society advocates and policymakers, which clear assessments from both sides help to reinforce. Policymakers face competing priorities, and mass atrocity situations present extremely difficult cases for decision makers. Policymakers must have confidence in the information they receive, and advocates must trust

the information they provide is not misused. A stronger process for communicating important information between policymakers and civil society would help reduce the gap between early warning and engagement.

Many participants discussed the need to reach the right leaders and decision makers within national governments and regional and international institutions. They pointed to a need to understand which actor is capable of influencing what type of action and, often, how these individuals are personally motivated. For instance, the UN secretary-general plays an influential role in signaling the need for engagement in atrocity situations, particularly when they have received little attention from the major powers. Understanding who should be engaged, both internationally and within the country in question, can help determine how best to target communications and messaging around a particular situation.

Finally, media can be leveraged to generate early engagement and action. Participants continuously mentioned the need for open and accessible media, a vital resource for gathering and distributing information to policymakers, NGOs, and the public. New media tools—the monitoring of hate speech online, for example—may contribute to raising the profile of impending atrocities that are developing under the radar.

Competing Agendas

Conversation also addressed the variety of ways policymakers, international organizations, and even departments within the same institution contend with competing priorities. Participants agreed that mainstreaming atrocity prevention into the agendas of other sectors (e.g., development, peacekeeping, and human rights) can lead to an overall improvement in understanding warning signs and, ultimately, taking upstream preventive action. Many participants and their organizations are currently attempting to mainstream atrocity prevention at the national, regional, and international levels. Although mainstreaming requires a cultural shift that takes time, it will ultimately offer a more holistic approach to atrocity prevention.

Additionally, the stakeholders in contexts of ongoing atrocities often have competing agendas. In development, humanitarian assistance, and diplomatic efforts, stakeholders need to protect their relationships and defend their agendas, many of which—from securing political agreements to maintaining open humanitarian corridors—depend on the perception of neutrality, careful mediation, or established networks of trust. As such, these actors may be inclined to restrict the access of atrocity prevention experts whose agenda they view as at cross-purposes to their own. Though the atrocity prevention lens may be perceived as threatening, it is critical to bringing in actors who understand how the international community should approach prevention in a given context. To overcome tension between stakeholders,

the atrocity prevention community should be sensitive and work to build trust at all levels, especially during the Phase 0 period before a crisis breaks out.

Civil society organizations often find themselves navigating between protecting information they receive from the local level about potential and ongoing atrocities and providing information to international actors actively forming policies to engage and respond to the situation. While this information can greatly aid response efforts, sharing it can jeopardize relationships with local communities and restrict access to actors responsible for protecting civilians and providing humanitarian aid.

Given the reality of these competing agendas on all levels, participants mentioned the importance of ensuring that there are practitioners in at-risk countries who focus specifically on atrocity prevention. Such a practitioner, or ideally a team of practitioners, could identify warning signs and opportunities for collaboration and action that actors with other agendas might miss.

Resource Issues

When there are so many (potential) fires, where do you point the hose? As previously discussed, resources are constantly stressed and rarely sufficient for efforts to prevent and halt mass atrocities. It is true, however, that the scarcity of resources does not always indicate a lack of political will but the reality of many competing priorities, particularly when there are multiple ongoing, large-scale conflicts. Participants repeated the importance of early engagement as a more cost-effective approach to atrocity prevention. As mentioned earlier, the deployment of flexible, rapid response funds at strategic points during a crisis could help reduce long-term costs. Participants also expressed the need for resources to support aid and development organizations in building resilient societies that can withstand stress, a mandate that extends beyond periods of acute risk or conflict.

Decision makers continue to be too risk averse, fearing a slippery slope of commitment should they choose to intervene. Involvement and intervention require coordinating and managing personnel, institutions, resources, and information—a resource-intensive undertaking. As learned in CAR, it can be difficult to galvanize sufficient resources, particularly for peacekeeping missions, quickly enough to prevent or halt the outbreak of atrocities. Yet peacekeepers are critical responders to mass atrocities, and civil elements within a peacekeeping mission can also help strengthen relationships with local communities to improve information sharing and provide better protection.

There are important international institutions with resources dedicated to preventing mass atrocities, particularly the UN Office of the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide

and the Responsibility to Protect. Though the office plays a crucial role in early warning and engagement, it is underresourced. In light of the selection of a new secretary-general in 2016, participants emphasized the importance of maintaining and increasing support for the office through the transition and beyond. They also suggested that a well-resourced Peacebuilding Commission could be more active in working toward the structural prevention of mass atrocities in at-risk countries.

Although increased resources are essential, participants recognized that more resources, whether financial or human capital, cannot by themselves solve problems in translating warning to action. In certain conflicts where there are considerable resources, the multiplicity of actors and projects can increase the difficulty of setting an atrocity prevention agenda. In the case of South Sudan, for example, the provision of comparatively abundant resources from international actors has not led to better prevention and protection.

What Works?

This Much Is True. Participants consistently pointed to insufficient understanding of what policies and interventions are successful in preventing or stopping mass atrocities. Although it is difficult to determine what constitutes success, participants discussed some best practices for early engagement and reviewed the capacities of different institutions dedicated fully or in part to preventing mass atrocities.

Participants underscored the importance of engagement before early warning signs emerge and identified opportunities for upstream prevention. For example, training programs, particularly within national governments, can strengthen institutional preparedness to prevent atrocity violence. Transitional justice—coming to terms with the truth and memory of past atrocities—is also a crucial factor in strengthening resilience to future mass atrocities and reducing recidivism.

All participants agreed that local engagement, both buy-in and participation in atrocity prevention, is critical and that early engagement, when risk is comparatively low, is the best moment to act—but also, unfortunately, the most difficult moment to persuade decision makers to act. The burden for sustainable prevention rests with local actors who are often underequipped to achieve this mandate but should be key partners to external stakeholders who, in turn, should offer them consistent and ongoing support and technical assistance.

Proper actor and relationship mapping at the earliest signs of risk can offer insights for international actors as to who on the ground is best positioned to contribute to and partner for atrocity prevention efforts. However, participants

also cautioned against performing mapping exercises and research without following through on promises for assistance and giving local communities a level of ownership in the process and its outcomes.

In order for early engagement to be effective, strategies must be multistakeholder and sustainable—coordinated across local, national, regional, and international levels. Likewise, there should be a clear understanding of who is responsible for such coordination efforts. Participants recommended increasing collaboration at all levels around long-term planning, emphasizing community buy-in and sustainability, for upstream prevention. For models of multistakeholder cooperation, the atrocity prevention community may look to other fields, such as the humanitarian aid system, for guidance.

Participants identified a number of institutions and mechanisms that already support atrocity prevention, examining how they can be better leveraged. In addition to the Office of the Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect and the Peacebuilding Commission, the UN's Human Rights Up Front campaign has called attention to the human rights violations that precede atrocities, and special rapporteurs offer more in-depth analysis on specific country or issue-specific cases.

Regional organizations, as previously stated, also play an essential role in early engagement and response to mass atrocities. Latin America has a number of organizations with human rights agendas, including the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, the Organization of American States, the Union of South American Nations, and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. In each institution, there are opportunities to mainstream atrocity prevention, some of which have already been pursued. Seventeen countries in Latin America have formed the Latin America Network for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention, a focal points network that operates at the national and regional levels to train government officials and to develop atrocity prevention policy.

In Africa, although not an exhaustive list, the African Union's Peace and Security Council, the Economic Community of West African States and its Early Warning and Response Network, the Economic Community of Central African States, and the International Council of the Great Lakes Region were all mentioned as important contributors and stakeholders in atrocity prevention.

Similarly, the Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights, the Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, and the Institute for Peace and Reconciliation—all within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—provide important platforms for atrocity prevention in Asia. ASEAN has used the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes to evaluate

risk for atrocities in the region. And the European Union's External Action Service was mentioned as an important institution for prevention.

A number of national governments are working on developing their own mechanisms for early warning and engagement, the US Atrocities Prevention Board being a prime example. Many countries have also appointed focal points who work within such mechanisms on the national level to participate in the Global Network of the R2P Focal Points, a global initiative focused on intergovernmental learning and cooperation for atrocity prevention. Parliamentarians are crucial for building momentum and allocating resources for atrocity prevention. Civil society continues to play an important role in leading and strengthening efforts to prevent mass atrocities at the national level.

Looking for Answers. The conference dialogue identified a number of questions that remain unanswered. What are the true costs of failing to prevent mass atrocities? What types of action, during those early stages of risk, are most effective at preventing atrocities and protecting people?

Informed Decision Making. Participants suggested that doctoral dissertations are an excellent untapped resource for new research around the political context in specific countries and preventive interventions more broadly. There should be a concerted effort to connect scholars to policymakers who can benefit from their expertise. Additionally, a wealth of publicly available information on at-risk countries is created and distributed by NGOs. However, until there is a way to collate and track these resources, much of it will be missed in policy analysis.

Robust assessments and evaluations are needed to analyze what precrisis interventions succeed or fail in preventing atrocities and the best practices for sustaining peace brought by successful interventions. But participants cautioned against overgeneralizing lessons from past interventions. While many factors may overlap from crisis to crisis, opportunities and tools to prevent should be evaluated on a case-specific basis.

Furthermore, to be most effective, assessments should be developed alongside interventions. Do early interventions—from peacebuilding efforts to the analysis of hate speech and lines of command and control, for example—yield positive prevention results? Evaluations in this field are extremely costly, but there are ways to minimize the expense, such as building benefits for researchers into the project at the outset. For instance, evaluations may cost less if they are completed as part of fellowships that allow researchers autonomy in designing studies and publishing assessment results.

Tools for Early Action. Participants noted the importance of creative tools for engagement, mentioning, for example,

training on civilian self-protection strategies that can fill the gap between doing nothing and a full-scale intervention. They pointed to key actors who can spearhead action, such as youth and religious communities, and strengthen protection, such as military and police. Likewise, they emphasized the role of local and international civil society actors in supporting and training communities at risk and the need for legislators, in particular, to allocate resources and support atrocity prevention measures at home and abroad. Again, participants emphasized that assessment should be conducted to help identify the most effective tools and the actors best suited to use and implement them for successful prevention.

The Role of Regional Institutions. Despite the number of regional institutions discussed in the roundtable, questions remain about how to properly engage those entities in atrocity prevention. Regional organizations and actors offer unique opportunities to leverage and put pressure on political elites to change behavior. But how and when regional organizations should take the lead is not completely understood. Regional organizations often face political obstacles or are constrained by capacity limitations that prevent them from taking a strong stance. It was suggested that special reports from regional organizations can make headway in bringing international attention to potential atrocities and that field offices for regional organizations can be important sources of information for warning as well.

State as Perpetrator. Finally, one of the most critical obstacles for engagement is when the national government itself is the perpetrator of atrocity crimes. Local actors have few options when their own government is their biggest adversary, and the full suite of response tools for these scenarios has yet to be fully developed and understood.

Toward Strengthened Global Capacity for Prevention

Participants aimed to translate the discussion into tangible recommendations to enhance the collective ability to prevent future mass atrocities. Three main ideas developed over the course of the conference, each addressing different stages along the early warning and early action spectrum.

Enhanced Early Warning

Participants were energized by ideas about how to leverage technological advancements and big data to improve monitoring of countries at risk for mass atrocities, particularly if doing so reduces the level of effort required to monitor more locations effectively. The hope is that real-time monitoring can supplement current watch lists, which are generally updated annually, with real-time information and alerts based on better-understood triggers for escalation. It is possible that an epidemiological

approach to better distinguish random acts of violence from systematic campaigns of expulsion or extermination could also enhance early warning and monitoring. As previously discussed, participants recommended improving early warning by generating more robust analysis—particularly around threats from nonstate actors—that could help raise red flags. Depending on its data sources, its organization, and the presentation of its findings, such a data-driven mechanism could also help dispel the widespread global distrust of qualitatively based atrocity warnings from Western governments, which are too easily dismissed as misinformation at the service of an interventionist agenda.

Assessing What Works

Participants urged scholars and practitioners to prioritize assessments of interventions to improve understanding of what works and to generate a deeper understanding of what types of early action prevent mass atrocities.

Decision makers often treat engagement as an all-or-nothing choice. Assessments and evaluations can help experts in atrocity prevention understand the creative options that are available within that spectrum and which actors are best placed to engage at certain points in time. Awareness of reasonable policy options can strengthen the interface between advocates, practitioners, and decision makers, improving the collective ability to prevent and protect.

Multistakeholder Partnerships for Prevention

An Alert Consortium. Participants emphasized throughout the conference that in order to bridge the warning-to-action divide, it is important to increase the capacity of the policy community to monitor escalatory dynamics in specific countries and to generate appropriate options for action. They were most enthusiastic about a consortium approach to early warning and action that coordinates the strengths of civil society stakeholders working on atrocity prevention from the local to the international level. Such a consortium would have the power to convene and coordinate actors to consolidate knowledge of resources, institutional activity, and information around specific at-risk country cases. Some participants were interested in involving universities in such a consortium—perhaps designating one as a leader—because of their potential to pull in a greater pool of actors with more varied expertise than a typical government, thus potentially increasing the group’s credibility.

Multidisciplinary task forces could be formed around each country situation to provide an assessment of risk and local political dynamics. Local actors, including civil society organizations, which may need to serve as confidential sources for their own protection, and academic institutions, would be active members of these smaller groupings. A consortium could combine existing information from NGOs, governments, and the United Nations with findings

from its own ongoing monitoring and in-depth analysis. It could also develop policy recommendations—focusing on intermediate actions between all or nothing, with clear steps for their achievement—for international, regional, and national policymakers. Despite the interest around the consortium proposal, participants cautioned that it would need to be carefully developed and pursued to ensure that it extended upon rather than duplicated current efforts. Some argued, however, that such a consortium’s model of combining its robust monitoring capacity with its policy recommendation function—ensuring that the people who best understand the problem work closely with those who are trying to articulate an approach aimed at prevention—could distinguish it from existing institutions and, ultimately, make it more effective.

An Information Curator. Participants also discussed the need for curated updates on at-risk countries. The updates should take stock of stakeholders already engaged in those countries and their respective activities, collate news reports and publications by advocacy organizations and scholars, and amplify local-level voices. Some proposed that a partnership of universities might be best equipped to handle the curation because of academic institutions’ robust research capacity and access to local sources of information, including media. Ideally, curated reports would consist of regular, consolidated updates on at-risk countries and be distributed to key stakeholders, especially members of a consortium like the one described above. Many media outlets provide similar curated reports for their readers that might serve as useful resources for understanding how to best consolidate and share open source information.

Unanswered Questions. These proposals—the alert consortium and the information curator—require further exploration. How would these two efforts interface? Should they be combined into one coordinated partnership, or is there good reason to keep them separate? How should such a partnership be funded? Who should be involved in the consortium? How would countries be selected for monitoring? What governance structure would be best for the consortium? Who should be responsible for organizing stakeholders, sustaining momentum, and delivering information, and how could these efforts be achieved in a timely manner? How would the consortium—and its recommendations—develop and maintain legitimacy with national governments and regional and international organizations? How could balanced representation of stakeholders from the Global North and Global South be achieved? How would all actors maintain relationships with and protect their sources while contributing to these efforts? And, most importantly, how could the involved stakeholders assess upfront if either of these entities is likely to meaningfully contribute to earlier engagement?

Next Steps

The conference provided an opportunity to begin the discussion for strengthening collective action for atrocity prevention. Participants identified a number of important next steps for continuing the conversation:

- Future discussions to explore the various challenges of translating early warning into action should include government representatives, organizations, and individuals who were not part of the initial discussion but are key stakeholders in atrocity prevention.
- The concept of a multistakeholder consortium for early warning and engagement should be further developed and shared with possible stakeholders in such an initiative. The involved stakeholders need to determine whether a consortium is the right solution to the current challenges and if it can be realistically established. The audience and objectives for the consortium must be further defined.
- Funders, governments, and multilateral institutions should invest in assessments to test preventive interventions, emphasizing the importance of developing the two in tandem whenever possible.

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Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only. Participants attended as individuals rather than as representatives of their governments or organizations.

The Stanley Foundation

The Stanley Foundation advances multilateral action to create fair, just, and lasting solutions to critical issues of peace and security. Our work is built on the belief that greater international cooperation will enhance global governance and spur global citizenship. The foundation frequently collaborates with a wide range of organizations using different forums, formats, and venues to engage policy communities. We do not make grants.

Our programming addresses profound threats to human survival where improved multilateral governance and cooperation are fundamental to transforming real-world policy. Current efforts focus on policy improvement to prevent genocide and mass atrocities, eliminate the threat of nuclear terrorism, and drive collective and long-term action on climate change. The foundation also works to promote global education in our hometown of Muscatine, Iowa, and nearby.

A private operating foundation established in 1956, the Stanley Foundation maintains a long-term, independent, and nonpartisan perspective. Our publications, multimedia resources, and a wealth of other information about programming are available at www.stanleyfoundation.org.

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