

PREVENTING GENOCIDE AND MASS ATROCITIES

Goals and Challenges of International Cooperation

Key findings of a symposium convened by
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Mémorial de la Shoah
November 15, 2010
Paris, France

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Two institutions dedicated to memorializing the Holocaust—the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Mémorial de la Shoah—convened government officials and leading experts from more than 20 countries to face the challenge of preventing and responding to threats of genocide today.

Held in Paris on November 15, 2010, the symposium provoked discussions that illustrated areas of common ground and differences in emphasis and approach between and among governments. Participants highlighted the need for greater collective action.

KEY THEMES EMERGED FROM THE DISCUSSION:

- I. **The definitional quandaries and challenges of developing common principles that dominated discourse on the topic of genocide and humanitarian intervention in the 1990s and earlier are no longer the central stumbling block for international discussions.**

The issue now is not the lack of the generalized normative consensus, but rather effective implementation.

—Gareth Evans, Chancellor, Australian National University

- Adding additional nuance and substance to the core concepts remains an unfinished task. For instance, **Jacques Semelin**, Professor of Political Science, Paris, argued that there has been insufficient attention to understanding specific past cases. **Louise Arbour**, President and CEO, International Crisis Group, differentiated between different scenarios in which atrocities can occur: slow-burn conflicts, explosive violence, and frozen conflicts. **Gareth Evans**, Chancellor, Australian National University, also pointed to the need to understand different phases of conflict, and develop tools to match each phase: long-term risk reduction, short-term crisis prevention, and halting ongoing violence.

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II. There was widespread agreement on the importance of accountability in the aftermath of atrocities.

It is critical that we take, collectively, the responsibility to punish very much as a form of prevention.

—Louise Arbour, President and CEO of the International Crisis Group

- Several speakers took the U.S. to task for America's absence from International Criminal Court (ICC) membership.
- In response, U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes, **Stephen Rapp**, pointed to the diversity of justice mechanisms that have been implemented over recent years around the world and the U.S. support for them.

III. The greatest challenge today lies in moving from general political support for the idea of mass atrocity prevention to more effective response.

On President Obama's instruction, we are preparing to build lasting systems that will not disappear in 2012, 2016, or beyond. Governments can improve their ownership and responsiveness to mass killing, but it requires a level of governmental organization that matches the methodical organization characteristic of mass-killings.

—Samantha Power, Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs
at the U.S. National Security Council

- There was considerable divergence of opinion about how to approach this challenge. Keynote presenter **Samantha Power** focused on work of the U.S. government to implement bureaucratic and systematic changes that would institutionalize a priority on atrocity prevention. **Michael Abramowitz**, director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's genocide prevention program, provided a broad overview of how the U.S. government and civil society have responded to the recommendations of the Genocide Prevention Task Force, which the Museum cosponsored. The limits of approaching the problem through internal U.S. reforms was commented on several times, particularly by Germany's Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Aid, **Markus Löning**, who mentioned weakened U.S. credibility on human rights issues.

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- Several speakers, including **Alexandre Fasel**, Ambassador in the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasized the need for greater engagement with the global south and emerging global leaders, such as Brazil and South Africa.

IV. There is a need to expand the diplomatic toolbox for preventing mass atrocities.

No self-respecting government can quarrel with a vision of how you accommodate the diversities of your country and work towards a unity of equality, unity in diversity, where everybody has a place of dignity and respectability.

– Francis Deng, Special Advisor to the Secretary General
on the Prevention of Genocide, United Nations

- Several speakers argued for increased engagement with governments of countries that could be vulnerable to mass atrocities. **Antoine Garapon**, Secretary General of the Institut des Hautes Études sur la Justice, referred to the model the European Union pursued upon the fall of the Soviet Union as an example of how integration can contribute to a human rights and atrocities prevention agenda. European Special Envoy for Burma/Myanmar, **Piero Fassino** argued for a commitment to universal human rights while engaging abusers of rights: “Exclusion weakens the forces fighting for human rights, and inclusion gives them more strength.”
- **Francis Deng**, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, argued that more states should be drawn into the discussion of early prevention of genocide by focusing on that issue as a struggle many states face—that of managing diversity—as opposed to a rare problem only a few might encounter.
- **Salih Mahmoud Osman**, a human rights activist and lawyer from Darfur, Sudan, challenged the proposal that change can come through engagement. He spoke of fears harbored by Sudanese civilians, particularly from Darfur, that no one would stand up against the Khartoum government to protect them.

For more information or to read the full transcript of the symposium, visit ushmm.org/paris_symposium.