

THE UN'S POTENTIAL FOR PREVENTING GENOCIDE

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Introduction

This Committee was appointed a few months ago and will submit its report to the Secretary/General shortly after our next meeting, October 19-20. We are in mid-passage, and so I cannot state what conclusions will be reached. My remarks are based partly on my forthcoming book, *Never Again: Practical Steps Toward Prevention of Genocide*.

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL'S LEADERSHIP: NOW AND FUTURE

"One of my constant concerns ...has been to move the [UN] from a culture of reaction to one of prevention - in particular, prevention of armed conflict... [I]t is in the course of armed conflicts that most genocides ... have been carried out. (Italic ours.)

"We must attack the roots of violence and genocide: intolerance, racism, tyranny, and the dehumanizing public discourse that denies whole

groups of people their dignity and rights. We must protect especially the rights of minorities, ... genocide's most frequent targets."

These are the word of the Secretary-General.

Unprecedented in the 60-year history of the UN, the Secretary-General has put a sharp focus on preventing genocide with high-level people to work closely with him to find means of implementation. Kofi Annan's entire tenure focuses on preventing deadly conflict, relative to human rights, democracy, and equitable development to be sought by cooperative efforts within and beyond the United Nations.

Far-reaching, long-term, highly cooperative measures will be essential to prevent genocide. However, that does not mean the UN can do all that is necessary. We have explored what the UN can do now (or soon) and how it can be strengthened in the long term, not least by eliciting the cooperation of other institutions and organizations for the prevention of genocide. All this depends on the Secretary-General's leadership, working closely with the Special Advisor, now and in the future.

There is a widely accepted (though vaguely formulated) belief among political leaders that one cannot know about the occurrence of genocide until the last minute, and the only recourse then would be a large-scale military response that no one wants to undertake. Thus, there is hardly any useful action that can be done. But research shows there is always ample warning time of great danger (whether or not it fits the classic definition of genocide). This provides time to prepare constructive response options and contingency plans, provided there is a critical mass of knowledge and skill to do so.

The UN's far-flung departments and agencies, in cooperation with regional organizations such as the European Union, and NGOs such as the International Crisis Group, can contribute not only to early warning

but also to response options, contingency plans, and ongoing help to countries in trouble. But this goes far beyond present capacities of the Special Advisor's small unit. Still, the Secretary-General's leadership can facilitate these relationships over the years.

The Special Advisor's function during his initial two years has necessarily been a modest beginning in an unprecedented situation. Not only is this the most explicit focus on preventing genocide that the UN has ever undertaken, it is also the first time that there has been a high-level prevention position in the Secretary-General's office. It will be a great opportunity for the next Secretary-General to work closely with his Special Advisor.

This Advisory Committee considered the comparative advantages of the UN for preventing genocide and the assets of other institutions and organizations, taking note of ways in which inter-institutional cooperation could be helpful. One important example here is the European Union which is now seriously considering a center for prevention of genocide. Close cooperation between the UN and EU has much potential for carrying out this mission. Over the years, it is possible to foresee a network of cooperating institutions on a worldwide basis. But this will take time.

There is a wealth of information available to the Special Advisor. In addition to the worldwide UN units, there are regional organizations, human rights groups, humanitarian relief, academic, faith based and other civil society organizations that can provide valuable input to the Special Advisor and his staff. They can provide field resources and so too can the UN staff around the world. These are dedicated people who have much knowledge and can provide early warnings of genocide-prone behavior.

Genocide prevention always faces challenges as many and varied as the conflicts it addresses, a flexible range of policy options must be

assembled in advance to meet them. The need for prepared responses to imminent danger is of utmost importance in preventing mass violence in all its forms. The lack of emphasis on prepared response options and contingency plans is a striking feature of genocide prevention everywhere and has much to do with the failures in this field. If not military, what?

The Special Advisor could help the UN at large to move toward an anticipatory, proactive and preventive approach - along with strong moral authority on the need to act wisely before it is too late and thus to avoid immense human suffering.

It was in reaction to the failures of both the remote and recent past that the Secretary-General announced the creation of the office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide in Geneva, during a ceremony at the UN Commission on Human Rights commemorating the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide, in April 2004. This announcement was part of a broader Action Plan to Prevent Genocide involving the whole United Nations system that the Secretary-General summarized under five headings: (1) preventing armed conflict, (2) protection of civilians in armed conflict, (3) ending impunity, (4) early and clear warning, and (5) swift and decisive action.

The purpose of the Special Advisor is not to determine whether genocide has occurred or is occurring, but to propose ways to prevent it. The mandate states clearly that “The Special Advisor would not make a determination on whether genocide within the meaning of the convention had occurred.” This is a practical requirement derived from the preventive nature of the mandate. His role is to provide early warning before all the elements that constitute the definition of genocide under the convention are present and to suggest appropriate actions before events degenerate into a situation that is likely to become genocide, i.e., path toward mass violence.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

Despite its limitations, the UN's considerable resources and opportunities and ideals make it an indispensable part of any regime of preventing genocide and other crimes against humanity.

1. It has a worldwide organizational network of competent and dedicated people in many fields.
2. The Secretary-General's influence and diplomatic resources enable him to bring disputing parties together in a constructive atmosphere. His moral authority can influence international norms.
3. The UN can bring issues to the attention of the international community and put constructive pressures on disputing parties.
4. The UN can employ the resources of experienced diplomats, e.g., in the capacity of Special Representative of the Secretary-General.
5. It can assemble the political and economic power of problem-solving governments to create a package of preventive action. It can mobilize intellectual, technical, financial and moral resources.
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 in a viable state.
7. As the only organization universal in scope, it has distinctive, worldwide legitimacy.

Moreover, there are UN agencies that clearly do much good in the world and are so recognized. One example is the World Health Organization with its rapid and effective actions to stave off a catastrophic worldwide epidemic of SARS, and the earlier (1980) eradication of smallpox, a terrible disease. Another well-known

example is UNICEF, which probably does more for the education, health and well being of children in poor countries than any other entity in the world. The World Food Program can be highly effective in providing food in humanitarian disasters. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees has vast, capable experience in coping with refugee problems. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights serves highly valuable functions.

In socioeconomic development, which is so important in building competent, democratic and ultimately prosperous nations, the World Bank and the United Nations Development program have great capacities. They have major resources, and they cover the world. All this provides powerful incentives, skills, and hope to move poor countries away from poverty, tyranny, repression, epidemic diseases, and breeding grounds for terrorism. Department of Political Affairs is a valuable focal point for preventing deadly conflict in the UN; it has sophisticated knowledge and skill. Many member states have serious interest and capacity in this subject.

These few examples of valuable UN elements illustrate that the UN is worldwide network of competence, skills, and dedicated people making the world better than it has been before, including readiness to help in preventing genocide.

All these entities get assistance from UN country teams, which include UN agencies in the field. They have the capacity to bring in useful information about emerging risks of violent conflict and some insight into causes to the danger.

The UN is developing a strong preventive orientation, with an 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.

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. Over time, the UN can develop a comprehensive program of prevention, a basic prescription for long-term prevention of genocide and war, with mechanisms for ongoing conflict resolution below the threshold of mass violence, capacity for solving inter-group problems, and models for assisting democratic socioeconomic development that meets basic human needs.

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 targets, scapegoats and out-groups.
2. Monitor trends of hatred and dehumanization toward the groups that are identified in such a vulnerable position.
3. Offer help in a conflict resolution and prevention of mass violence in situations of this kind - e.g., by early strong mediation
 - a. Help to build internal capacity of member states (as requested) for early, ongoing conflict resolution, including essential concepts, techniques (e.g., negotiation) and institutions (e.g., an independent judiciary).
 - b. 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, an 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 organizations to help.
5. Enlist the help of key member states who are strongly interested in the genocide problem and how to overcome it. Persuade them to commit intellectual, technical, financial and moral resources.

The Special Advisor on Prevention on Genocide cannot provide leadership on all of these fundamental, long-term activities. But he can give stimulation and encouragement to those in the UN System who have such opportunities; and he can help the Secretary-General to strengthen them by fostering cooperation among various departments and agencies, as well as other international organizations.

These are no easy tasks and rapid transformation of the genocide problem is unlikely. Yet the stakes are so high, the human suffering so great, the promise of better human relationships so valuable, that the UN must do everything in its power to prevent genocide and other crimes against humanity.