

GENOCIDE PREVENTION PROJECT

Contact: Jill Savitt, 646-823-2419
Jill.Savitt@dreamfordarfur.org

OVERVIEW

As the slaughters in Darfur, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Cambodia prove, the international community's response to mass atrocity crimes is deeply flawed. While the United Nations was created in response to mass atrocities – the “barbarous acts” of the Holocaust that “outraged the conscience of mankind” – there has proven to be insufficient political will to protect civilians from atrocity crimes.

Although the early warning signs for genocide are well known, there is no system in place to predict and prevent mass atrocities.

We seek to build the public will to call on the international community to take meaningful actions when there are early warning signs of mass-scale atrocity crimes.

To do this, the Genocide Prevention Project has mapped out a public awareness, organizing, and advocacy strategy to galvanize a global constituency to reform the way the international community responds to systematic atrocity crimes against civilian populations, specifically genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity.

The heart of this effort is staging a **Genocide Prevention Month in April 2009**. Genocide Prevention Month will provide the public vehicle for advancing a genocide prevention agenda. We have selected April as the commemoration month because four previous genocides already have their official commemoration events in April (Rwanda, Cambodia, Armenia, and the Holocaust) and two other mass atrocities also have major anniversaries in April (the siege of Sarajevo began on April 6, 1992 and Darfurians started being displaced in April 2003).¹ We aim to make each set of commemoration events the focal point of world-wide attention – and utilize the event or series of events to call on the international community to institute an effective

¹ When we devised the “commemoration idea,” we went to map out anniversaries on a calendar. We were quite surprised to learn that four major anniversaries all take place in the month of April. We plan to encourage partner organizations to take on (and will assist where possible) the staging of additional commemoration events for previous mass atrocity crimes, not limiting our scope to any one ‘set’ of past crimes against humanity.

set of prevention strategies. The events will also play a central role in our strategy to organize survivors of previous mass atrocity crimes.

Survivor Network to Support Prevention. Survivors of genocide or other atrocity crimes, and their families, can testify with unmatched power to the horrors and the inhumanity of genocide – they can make the case to general audiences and policy makers in ways no other advocates can.

Leaders of genocide survivor organizations are interested in becoming part of the global anti-genocide movement.

Survivors will play a central role in Genocide Prevention Month and the Commemoration Days and will work with us to advocate our prevention agenda at the international level.

GENOCIDE PREVENTION MONTH: PUBLIC MOBILIZATION AND ADVOCACY

Our strategy for Genocide Prevention Month is to increase pressure at the international level for a meaningful and effective response to ongoing and potential mass atrocity crimes and genocides.

In part, we aim to reframe way people view mass atrocity crimes by stressing the need for prevention as a moral and legal imperative. During the month, we will convey that there continue to be ongoing human security crises in the world, where bad actors are permitted to systematically kill civilian populations. We will argue that many such crises can be predicted – and with meaningful diplomatic action can be halted or averted.

Our success will be measured by evidence of a growing political will to address civilian mass atrocities. That means media coverage of and constituency participation in Genocide Prevention Month – online or on the ground.

Genocide Prevention Month Commemoration Days.

The centerpiece of the month will be the global commemoration of six civilian mass atrocities that have occurred over the past century. We are currently working with survivor organizations in Bosnia, Rwanda, Armenia, and Cambodia; from the Holocaust; and within the Darfurian diaspora. We also hope to partner with organizations who work with additional survivor communities in order to commemorate and draw attention to other mass atrocity crimes that have taken place over the past century.

We have identified the commemoration events already being planned and have discussed each community's interest in linking their event to the others using a prevention message. The response so far has been overwhelmingly positive.

The following are the Commemoration Days:

Bosnia, April 6: On April 6, 1992, Serbian forces lay siege to the city of Sarajevo and began a campaign of ethnic cleansing in response to the Bosnian government declaring independence from Yugoslavia and creating a multi-ethnic state.

We are working with organizations in Bosnia, including the Society for Threatened Peoples, to stage an event on April 6 in Sarajevo to commemorate those lost and honor those who survived ethnic cleansing.

Rwanda, April 7: *Rwandan Genocide Commemoration Day.* On April 7, 1994, the Rwandan Armed Forces and Hutu militia (the Interahamwe) set up roadblocks and went from house to house killing Tutsis and moderate Hutu politicians.

We are surveying Rwandan organizations about all of the planned activities during the week of April 7. Next April will mark the 15th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide and there are a great many events currently being planned, as well as many opportunities to highlight the need for prevention.

Cambodia, April 17: *Cambodian Genocide Commemoration Day.* On April 17, 1975, Khmer Rouge forces entered Phnom Penh, defeated the ruling Lon Nol Army, and forced an evacuation of the city to forced labor camps.

We are working with Cambodian civil society organizations, particularly the Center for Social Development in Phnom Penh, to organize a commemoration event on April 17.

Holocaust, April 21: *Yom HaShoah.* In 1951, the Knesset declared the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as Holocaust commemoration day. (The anniversary is on the Hebrew calendar.)

Holocaust museums around the world, in particular Yad Vashem, commemorate Yom HaShoah with a range of activities, which our campaign will spotlight.

Armenia, April 24: *Armenian Genocide Commemoration Day.* On April 24, 1915, the Ottoman authorities arrested 250 Armenian intellectuals and community leaders in Istanbul and executed or deported them.

The Armenian Genocide Memorial stages an extensive set of commemoration activities at the end of April, including on April 24 at the Armenian Genocide Museum and Memorial in Yerevan and in New York and Los Angeles.

Darfur: In April 2003, large numbers of civilians became internally displaced within Darfur and refugees from Darfur began arriving in eastern Chad to escape attacks by government forces and the Janjaweed militia.

Addressing the Darfur crisis will be a major theme of the entire month. The Save Darfur Coalition is staging a major rally in Washington in April 2009. We will focus on that event as a commemoration for all those who have died in Darfur.

Our aspiration is to make Genocide Prevention Month a major international event – and to have the entire global community remember each of these mass slaughters as a way to redouble the political will to make the never-again promise real. Therefore the events, and materials we produce, will focus on genocide prevention.

Internationally, we will develop an action agenda for advocates to use before and during Genocide Prevention Month in April 2009. The substance of this agenda is addressed below.

In the US, we will use all aspects of Genocide Prevention Month to advance recommendations of the Genocide Prevention Task Force, the group led by former US Secretaries of State Madeleine Albright and William Cohen (organized by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the United States Institute for Peace, and others). The task force will release its findings – a blueprint on genocide prevention for a new US Administration – in December 2008. We will devise an “advocates’ action plan” to support those recommendations, in particular during Genocide Prevention Month.

Additional national public awareness efforts: we seek to enlist a broadcast partner (for example the History Channel or a similar venue) to show a feature film about each genocide on the date of its commemoration – for example, *Hotel Rwanda*, *the Killing Fields*, *Schindler’s List*, etc., and a range of documentaries – and then host a town hall meeting or online event afterward. We also seek to have movie-theater chains participate in the month by showing the films, as a series, during April 2009. Survivors of genocide could be present to talk about their experiences, as could the actors in the film or experts on genocide and Darfur. We would provide intensive organizing resources and assistance on this project. Finally, we are also considering a book club initiative – providing a recommended reading list and discussion guide for books about genocide and atrocity crimes. We are reaching out to book store chains and libraries in an effort to have these institutions adopt Genocide Prevention Month with displays in April.

As part of our survivor organization, we will arrange a tour of survivors – a series of advocacy meetings and media appearances – during the month to visit UN member state capitals.

We are inclined to produce a Genocide Prevention month again in 2010 and possibly thereafter, but we cannot determine our future plan until we organize the month next year. We will evaluate the success of Genocide Prevention Month 2009 to determine its value as an awareness-raising strategy, organizing vehicle, and advocacy tool. Ideally, Genocide Prevention Month will provide the broad anti-genocide community with a jumping off point from which to continue to grow the movement year round, with an annual spotlight on the need for prevention each April.

Grassroots Movement / Constituency Building.

While Genocide Prevention Month is itself important, it is also an organizing tactic. Planning a month-long series of events dedicated to the prevention agenda provides the opportunity for mass outreach and organizing.

In addition to reaching to organizations and advocates in the Darfur, anti-genocide and human rights communities, we will also reach out to schools, libraries, houses of worship, book stores and video stores, urging all them to use Genocide Prevention Month to advance their own programs.

We will offer “how to” information for grassroots advocates who want to organize intensively during the month (these might be local events in solidarity with the global commemorations, film series, and/or Darfur advocacy). And our website will provide information about genocide prevention and “30 days of action in April” (which could also be done throughout the year) to advance the prevention agenda.

The most important aspect of our website is that we will use it to spotlight the work of other organizations; that is, we will not create a great deal of content ourselves, but rather rely on the excellent information and websites of other organizations.

WHAT WILL WE CALL FOR DURING GENOCIDE PREVENTION MONTH?

We are proceeding with caution about what specific policy recommendations we will feature during Genocide Prevention Month. We may decide not to advance any specific recommendations, but rather use Genocide Prevention Month to raise awareness about the need for action in cases of mass atrocities and as a way to develop a survivor and activist network.

We recognize, however, that creating Genocide Prevention Month could provide an opportunity to advance a specific policy objective or objectives. To further inform our thinking in this area, we will produce an internal report that:

1. **Identifies a list of countries where the civilian population is experiencing mass atrocities or where there is the potential for such crimes.** To compile this list, we will survey all the indices related to preventing conflict and then identify the group of countries that are on most of the lists. We intend to use the findings of the Political Instability Task Force, the Minority Rights Group, the US Fund for Peace, and others to compile this list, which will have a clear and credible methodology.
2. **Outlines the expert research on each situation makes recommendations for ways to address these crises.** This part of our report will compile expert information from the International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, other leading research and advocacy organizations, and experts on diplomacy and peace building. We will prepare a short summary of the recommendations currently proposed for each of these countries, and then gather a small group of experts to discuss the country and make recommendations for either private or public advocacy. We anticipate that the preventive diplomacy recommendations developed from these advisors could include senior-level private negotiations, sanctions, criminal investigations, suspension of aid and trade, and the like.
3. **Outlines prevention approaches for each case.** At the same time that the diplomatic and political experts are deliberating, a group of experts on civilian protection would also study each situation for security needs – and make recommendations. The goal of this group would be to produce, for each crisis, a results-based plan to protect civilians from systematic atrocities. The group will develop scenarios for consensual and non-consensual missions. We have discussed this project with military planning organizations such as MARO and the Henry L. Stimson Center.

We will discuss and vet our findings with the range of individuals and organizations we have discussed our proposal with, including: our survivor organization partners, the International Crisis Group, the United States Institute for Peace, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Genocide Prevention Task Force, the R2P Coalition; R2P – Engaging Civil Society (World Federalist Movement-IGP); United Nations Emergency Peace Service; Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect; Jacob Blaustein Institute; Henry L. Stimson Center (Future of Peace Operations Program); Security Council Report; The MARO Project; the Stanley Foundation; the Fund for Peace; Independent Diplomat; the Save Darfur Coalition; Genocide Intervention Network; Society for Threatened People; Enough; Human Rights First; American Jewish World Service; Genocide Watch; the Elders; Chasing the Flame; and others. Each of these institutions has received our proposal and/or discussed the idea with us. Many have agreed to participate actively. We are reaching out to more organizations, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International and the faith communities.

While the report is designed as an internal document, we may decide to release its contents publicly if appropriate.

STAFFING AND GOVERNANCE.

The Genocide Prevention Project is an initiative of Public Interest Projects, a public charity based in New York. Jill Savitt is the Executive Director of the project. The Genocide Prevention Project is the next venture of the team behind Dream for Darfur, the campaign that used the Olympics to urge the Chinese government to use its influence with the Sudanese regime to bring security to Darfur. Dream for Darfur significantly raised global awareness about China's complicity in the genocide. The focused, high-profile media and organizing effort forced China to take unprecedented steps in its foreign policy. The Genocide Prevention Project will utilize the same tactics and techniques in its new effort. An impact statement for Dream for Darfur is at www.dreamfordarfur.org.