

Introductory Remarks – Dr. Robert Zuber

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It is a great pleasure to be able to join with these colleagues in a discussion of how to address one of the most important responsibilities of our time – preventing and addressing the threat of atrocity crimes.

From the standpoint of our office and many of our partners, findings of such crimes and the tools and capacities needed to address the implications of those findings have to be reliable, inspirational and actionable.

Reliable in the sense that they reflect the best available evidence but also that tools we develop and refine to address threats are themselves competent, transparent and fair. In this session, we have already mentioned the extent to which our organization and others remain unwavering supporters of the work of the Genocide Prevention office at the UN in New York. At the same time, there are clearly instances where the UN system could be made more efficient and robust to focus more effective energy towards the prevention of atrocity crimes and the maintenance of post-conflict stability. Capacity gaps for which we are taking some organizational responsibility include the following:

- Tracking Findings – advocating for robust, transparent feedback loops from the SG's office and the Security Council, which are the primary audiences for findings of atrocity crimes prepared by members states, the Genocide Prevention Office, and other settings inside the UN
- Restricting Ideology Laws – providing voluntary capacity to states to ensure that laws seeking to criminalize hate speech, teaching about past genocides, or even expressions of ethnic identity are able to pass at least three essential tests of validity (careful crafting, independent authority, proportionate punishments)
- Supporting Civilian Engagement in Peace Processes – creating opportunities for the development of complementary civilian capacities and peace professional training that puts the right people in the field with the right skills
- Developing Emergency Response Peacekeeping – promoting adoption of standing UN capacity that allows us to arrive at the scene of potential or actual atrocities quickly before they spiral out of control

We also aim to make our work inspirational in the sense that our proposals (such as for a UN Emergency Peace Service) must tie into deep aspirations for the human community. Atrocity crimes are much more than a technical problem to solve – they are a blight on our human condition and a threat to our very existence. This is more than an engineering problem – in some ways it is a struggle for our souls as a species. We all recognize that we must do more to help protect civilians under siege; hopefully we also recognize the priority task of prevention that can, if properly discharged, dramatically reduce the need for formal peace operations of any kind.

And our work must be actionable in the sense that recommendations are couched in terms that help UN decisionmakers discern their multiple security responsibilities with a clear sense of all their policy options. Our sense is that most diplomats want to do the right thing when it comes to preventing atrocity crimes, responding to crimes once they occur, and holding perpetrators of crimes accountable. But the pathways to progress are not always apparent. Defining the most productive directions is not made easier when advocates in my sector invest so much in telling diplomats what they want rather than in helping them to process alternatives and opportunities. The most actionable information often comes from places of trust more than assertions of expertise. Both in tandem are preferable, but it seems to us that it would be better for us to spend more energy getting diplomats to trust our advice and less simply giving it.

Regarding more controversial proposals such as a UN Emergency Peace Service, there are three areas of trust that must always be kept in mind: in the technical aspects of the proposal itself, in the wisdom and cultural/geographic diversity of the people advocating for the proposal, and in the institution (in this case the UN) that would house and implement the proposal. But the most effective conduits for trustbuilding are represented by some familiar, if largely neglected human skills – attentiveness, fairness, clarity, active listening.

This aspiration to blend reliable, actionable and inspirational testimony provides essential guidance to us in many areas of our own work, from promoting women's participation to regulating the global arms trade. But it is a particularly potent blend when focused on the problem of atrocity crimes which includes robust prevention but also, in cases where diplomacy failed to halt the violence, responding quickly to outbreaks and then helping to ensure that societies that have emerged from mass violence do not create laws or endorse policies that inadvertently or otherwise motivate those societies to slip back into patterns of violence.

As you can see, a group of young researchers and practitioners is here with us in Vienna, people who have been sold on the promise of the responsibility to protect civilians if not entirely convinced by our current tools and strategies for implementation. We will hear more from them in the days to come about why these issues matter to them and their suggestions for how to ensure more reliable engagement at all levels of response to the threat of atrocity crimes. What I hope we will also hear from them is their assessment of my generation's level of due diligence when it comes to ending the scourge of atrocity crimes. Have we done enough to inspire citizens and governments to make that final push to end that scourge? Are we creating the tools and capacities that are most needed to prevent these crimes and respond quickly and effectively in those (hopefully rare) instances where diplomacy fails to resolve threats? Are we making enough space for a new generation of communications technologies, research and networking that can help us break policy and implementation impasses? Can we older folks learn how to effectively coach the energy and skills of this new generation without stifling their enthusiasm?

This workshop is funded in part by the Ira Wallach Fund for the Eradication of Genocide. Mr. Wallach was a visionary in many respects. For him, ending genocide was in part a function of sound global governance, having the right laws and also the right disposition to abide by binding international agreements. We know now, with some sadness, that we need a bit more than sound laws to end this scourge. We need a bevy of response tools to ensure compliance and more expansive and engaged networks to inspire participation and resolve in our citizens and governments. And we need new generations of practitioners to help those tools develop, find suitable homes and flourish.

The game is changing, but we are seeing in Libya and elsewhere in the world, the game remains deadly serious. Through the work of the UN's Genocide Prevention office, policymakers here in Europe, and a new generation of academics, diplomats and advocates, we may be finally on the cusp of a dream shared by Mr. Wallach and all of you in this room – the end of atrocity crimes as we have come to know them.