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## How We Can Prevent Genocide

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When the Genocide Convention was passed by the United Nations in 1948, the world said, "Never again."

But the history of the twentieth century instead proved that "never again" became "again and again." The promise the United Nations made was broken, as again and again, genocides and other forms of mass murder killed 170 million people, more than all the international wars of the twentieth century combined.

Why? Why are there still genocides? Why are there genocidal massacres going on right now in southern Sudan by the Sudanese government against Dinka, Nuer, and Nuba; in eastern Burma by the Burmese government against the Karen; in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by both government and rebel forces against Tutsis, Banyamulenge, Hutus, Hema, and Lendu? Why has ethnic and religious hatred again reached the boiling point in Israel and Palestine; Côte d'Ivoire, and Burundi?

There are two reasons why genocide is still committed in the world:

The world has not developed the international institutions needed to predict and prevent it.

The world's leaders do not have the political will to stop it.

In order to prevent genocide, we must first understand it. We must study and compare genocides and develop a working theory about the genocidal process. There are many Centers for the Study of Genocide that are doing that vital work - in Australia, Brussels, Copenhagen, Jerusalem, Montreal, Memphis, Minneapolis, New Haven, Nottingham, and elsewhere.

But studying genocide is not enough. Our next task should be to create the international institutions and political will to prevent it. Four institutions are needed: centers for early warning, programs for conflict transformation, standing forces for rapid intervention, and international courts for effective punishment.

The U.N. Security Council and key governments need strong, independent Early Warning systems to predict where and when ethnic conflict and genocide are going to occur, and to present policy options on prevention and intervention. The Brahimi report made by the special commission on U.N. Peace-keeping makes just such a recommendation, and it should be implemented. Selected country desk officers and top officials of the U.N. system now hold monthly "Framework for Coordination" to discuss current crises, but inadequate staffing prevents long-range strategic planning. There is not a single person at the United Nations who's responsible for genocide early warning and prevention. Who do you call? Ghostbusters.

Early Warning models matter. They must be comprehensible to policy makers, and provide specific guidance. The U.N. Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs currently has a small contract with a London-based coalition to provide early warning services. The model is useful to the extent that it demonstrates the benefit of promotion of democracy and other general policies. But statistical models do not describe the intentional process by which political leaders push a society toward genocide. They therefore cannot be used to formulate specific counter-measures at each stage of the genocidal process. What can a policy maker at the U.N. or the State Department do about a history of armed conflict or ethnic diversity?

It seems that because all people grow up and live in particular cultures, speaking particular languages, they identify some people as "us" and others as "them." This fundamental first stage in the process does not necessarily lead to genocide. Genocide only becomes possible with another common human tendency - considering only "our group" as human, and "de-humanizing" the others. We thus not only develop cultural centers. We also create cultural boundaries that shut other groups out, and may become the boundaries where solidarity ends and hatred begins.

We are seeing this phenomenon right now in Jerusalem, Washington, and Baghdad. Jerusalem is a symbolic center for Jews, Muslims, and Christians. It is heavily loaded with religious significance and its control has, through the centuries, become a definitional indicator of cultural identity and domination. It has been the scene of many genocides and ethnic cleansings, including the Biblical deportation of the Jews to Babylon, and later their Diaspora by the Romans, the mass murder of its Islamic inhabitants by Christian Crusaders, and the exclusion of Jews from the Old City and Temple Mount by Muslims. When Israel was created, this volatile combination of religious-centrism and boundary-maintaining exclusion resulted in a U.N. Resolution to "internationalize" the city. If the U.N. had had the strength to enforce the resolution, perhaps it would have been a good idea. But neither the Israelis nor the Arabs ever accepted it. So we have the current situation, which has moved up the scale of stages of the genocidal process to at least stage five - polarization - and possibly to stage six, identification of Arab militant leaders who are being gunned down by snipers with silencers, while Israeli soldiers are captured and lynched by Arab mobs. It is not genocide yet (stage seven), but it is very, very close. If Saddam Hussein, the Hezbollah, and al Qaeda had their way, genocide - a new Holocaust - would begin.

We can also see the "us versus them" thinking in "axis of evil" ideology. It is bad theology. One of the crucial lessons of sound theology is that the division between good and evil is not vertical, between "us and them." It is horizontal, with every human being having the capacity for both good and evil. The Nazi Holocaust was among the most evil genocides in history. But the Allies' firebombing of Dresden and nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were also war crimes - and as Leo Kuper and Eric Markusen have argued, also acts of genocide. We are all capable of evil and must be restrained by law.

Early Warning is not enough. What if the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution to implement a peace agreement, and sent in peace-keepers, but then genocide began? That is what happened in Rwanda. There was plenty of early warning. The UNAMIR commander, General Roméo Dallaire learned of the plans for the genocide three months before it began, had conclusive evidence of massive shipments of half a million machetes to arm the killers, and knew of the training camps for the Interahamwe genocidists. Yet when he cabled the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations requesting authorization to confiscate the machete caches, Kofi Annan's deputy Iqbal Riza refused, claiming it exceeded UNAMIR's mandate. Then when the genocide actually began in April, General Dallaire desperately asked for a Chapter Seven mandate and reinforcements to protect the thousands of Tutsis who had taken refuge in churches and stadiums. Led by the U.S., the Security Council instead voted to pull out all 2500 UNAMIR troops. General Dallaire has since said that even those troops could have saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

We must also build institutions to intervene non-violently before genocide begins. Every church, synagogue, mosque, and temple should teach peace-making, and inter-religious leaders' councils should be formed wherever there is religious division. In ethnically divided societies, radio and television and educational systems should be used to advocate tolerance and to humanize the other groups in the society, to show that they are like "us." Programs like Search for Common Ground and the Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance program should be taken to every country with the potential for ethnic conflict or genocide.

The United Nations needs a standing, volunteer, professional rapid response force that does not depend on member governments' contributions of brigades from their own armies. Articles 43 through 48 of the U.N. Charter already provide for a permanent command structure, which has never been created, and a liberal interpretation of those articles would also permit creation of a standing army. The Standing High Readiness Brigade organized by the Danes, Canadians, Dutch and others is a step in the right direction, though it still depends on national contingents. A standing U.N. force will have to have the support of at least some of the major military powers, must be large enough to effectively intervene in situations like Rwanda, and should be composed of volunteers from around the world, the best of the best, who train together specifically for U.N. peace-keeping. Despite Bush administration opposition to such a U.N. force, when polled, two-thirds of the American people favor its creation. And over eighty percent favor American involvement in a force to stop genocide. It is an idea whose time will come.

The world needs and finally has an International Criminal Court. Impunity for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity must end. The ICC must be backed by the will of nations to arrest those it indicts. The ICC may not deter every genocidist, but it will put on warning every future tyrant who believes he can get away with mass murder. In 1999 and 2000, I served as the Coordinator of the Washington Working Group on the International Criminal Court. Despite the position of my own U.S. government, which is still advocating impunity for U.S. officials (a position that would have immunized every tyrant of the last century), the ICC will soon be able to try perpetrators of genocide.

These institutional changes will not be enough to end genocide in the twenty-first century. Eventually we must return to the problem of political will. It was not for want of U.N. peace-keepers in Rwanda that 800,000 people died. They died because of the complete lack of political will by the world's leaders to save them. Indeed, it was their political will to actually withdraw the U.N. peace-keepers and leave them to their murderers. Neither the U.S. nor any other member of the U.N. Security Council had the political will to risk one of their citizens to rescue 800,000 Tutsis from genocide.

There is something profoundly wrong about that. What is wrong is the very same problem of ethno-centrism that I spoke about earlier. We drew a national boundary, a circle that shut them out of our common humanity. In October 2000, the second debate of the candidates for President of the United States demonstrated that neither candidate has learned the lessons of Rwanda.

The time has come to reassert our common humanity. Any time someone says it's not in the "national interest" to stop genocide, ask about the billions we'll spend for relief of refugees, the hundreds of thousands who will flee to our shores, and more importantly the shame we should feel as human beings to see mass murder before our eyes, but walk by on the other side. When you get a form at immigration or at a job application that asks you your race, what do you write? I simply write, "Human." Because that's the truth. We are all of the same race.

How can we create a consciousness of our common humanity? We must create a world-wide movement to end genocide, like the movement to abolish slavery in the nineteenth century. The International Campaign to End Genocide, organized at the Hague Appeal for Peace in May 1999, intends to mobilize the international political will to end genocide. (For a more complete description of the Campaign, see Appendix 3, below.)

The first job in preventing and stopping genocide is getting the facts in clear, indisputable form to policy makers. Some of that job is done by the news media. But conveying the information is not enough. It must be interpreted so that policy makers understand that genocidal massacres are systematic; that the portents of genocide are as compelling as warnings of a hurricane. Then options for action must be suggested to those who make policy, and they must be lobbied to take action.

Policy makers act when they feel public pressure to act. If the international campaign is to be effective it must build an international mass movement that will exert the political and cultural pressure on world leaders necessary to create political will.

I remember when segregation was still the law in the southern United States and when apartheid ruled South Africa. When I was a civil rights worker in Mississippi in 1966, the Ku Klux Klan followed us and shot into the house where our group stayed, and two of my friends were wounded. It is still the most dangerous place I have ever worked, including Cambodia and Rwanda. But in both the U.S. and South Africa, mass movements created the political will to change the laws and are gradually changing the cultures.

Mass movements must mobilize the moral and religious leaders, the celebrities and stars, the churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples. We must make indifference to genocide culturally unacceptable and politically impossible. We must educate and advocate, demonstrate and legislate.

Just as the nineteenth century was the century of the movement to abolish slavery, let us make the twenty-first the century when we abolish genocide. Genocide, like slavery, is caused by human will. Human will - including our will - can end it.