

## Can Genocides be prevented?

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There are serious problems with the definition of genocide in the 1948 Genocide Convention. It speaks of the destruction of an ethnic, national, racial or religious group as such, in whole or in part, and it indicates that there has to be an intent in so doing to constitute a genocide. It then lists five elements, each one of which constitutes acts that would make the event a genocide: killing members of the group, causing them bodily harm, creating conditions of life that would endanger the existence of the group, obstructing procreation, and kidnapping children. No other elements are listed. The intent of partial or total destruction are thrown in together, and if you kill every single person of the targeted group, as was the case in the genocide of the Jews, the elements listed in the convention become irrelevant, because killing members of the group is different from killing all of them, and shoving people into gas chambers is not exactly creating conditions of life endangering their well-being. What we call today ethnic cleansing, or mass killing for political reasons, is not addressed at all.

These problems stem from two sources: one, that the Convention was the result of political horse-trading between the West and the USSR. The West wanted to include mass murder for political reasons, but the USSR of course resisted strenuously, because that would have meant including the Gulag as genocide. But they agreed to the inclusion of religious groups, which actually is something quite different from ethnicity, because religion, at least in theory, is something that you can choose, whereas ethnicity or nationality is something you are born with, and by the time you are born it is too late to choose your parents. The other reason for the problematic character of the genocide definition goes much deeper: our definitions are abstractions from reality, and reality is always much more complicated than our definitions are. Usually, after we have defined genocide, instead of adapting our definition to reality, we attempt to fit reality into our abstraction, and that is not a good idea.

Technology has made genocides and genocidal mass murders easier, as the cases of Biafra, Cambodia, Southern Sudan, Rwanda, and now Darfur, have shown. Now and then, various political bodies have been trying to find international and political tools to fight that scourge. So far, with no great success.

Yet there is, if you want to be optimistic, some movement forward. Non-governmental organizations, usually quite critical of established governments and, unfortunately, of each other as well, have been exercising increasing pressure on the political world to change the situation, and that is a process that is increasing in intensity. Rather than appeal only to conscience, social scientists have been doing homework on practical ways to fight genocide. Academics have become involved in the political process, and this conference is one of the many signs of this. Social scientists in the US have developed effective risk assessments, which means that we can today identify places and populations in the world where mass violence might occur and escalate into genocidal situations. When the factors that may produce mass violence become threatening, a model of early warning that has been developed can actually foretell, with impressive accuracy, that unless steps are taken to prevent it, mass violence will erupt within between three to six months. The same models identify causes for the outbreak of such mass violence, so that we now have a better tool to deal with the basic factors. There is no longer a real question of knowledge or warning, but of the political will to act against genocidal threats. Of course, you can say, rightly, that in the cases of the Armenians, of Rwanda, of East Timor, and to an extent also of Darfur, prior knowledge of an impending catastrophe was there anyway, though one cannot say the same about the Holocaust, or about Namibia, or about Cambodia. In the case of the Armenian genocide you could also argue, I think rightly, that it was an ongoing genocide, from 1896, through 1908/9, through World War I and right up to 1923, and that there the

Convention fits. There is an ongoing genocide in Darfur, where the horror will continue even if the killing is stopped, because the children will die of irreversible malnutrition as a result of the policies of the genocidal Sudanese regime. There is no problem in Darfur of lack of prior or immediate knowledge.

The Holocaust, and its humanitarian and political legacy, was certainly the main motivating force, despite the decades that have passed since that event, for the engagement of the Swedish government in an effort to mobilize the international political scene for a general discussion of the prevention of genocide. A conference, at which many of those present here participated, took place in January, 2004, in Stockholm. Some 55 governments - and observers from the Vatican - participated, as did Kofi Annan. One of the problems was how to get around the problem of definition of genocide, while at the same time making use of the Convention, which is after all the only internationally recognized document that defines it, however badly. An academic discussion had to be avoided at all costs, because it would have led nowhere, for many reasons, one of them being that no two academics can agree on an alternative definition of genocide. The solution was to talk not of genocide, but of genocidal threats, meaning situations that have the same kind of quality as genocides. We identified four such threats - genocide according to the definition of the Convention; mass murder for political, economic, or social reasons, which we call politicide; ethnic cleansing, or expulsion of ethnic groups intended to destroy the group as such; and global genocidal ideologies, such as contemporary radical Islam. When we talk of Prevention of Genocide, my colleagues and I mean these four cases. The Stockholm Forum did not save humanity, and its final declaration, signed by all the 55 governments, adorns the insides of waste-paper baskets in many governmental offices. And yet, there are some results: in the wake of Stockholm, Kofi Annan nominated a Special Adviser for Genocide Prevention, with access to the Security Council; and NGOs presented and discussed practical options for policies designed to prevent genocide, as described in the four points mentioned above. The trend is, hopefully, for NGOs to develop into more effective pressure groups on the international political scene, and for academics to enter these international politics as important actors.

We now talk of humanitarian intervention, for instance in Darfur, i.e. an intervention designed to physically protect endangered populations, and provide them with the necessary help. Up to now, intervention to protect the endangered African ethnicities in Darfur have been prevented by some of the great powers, e.g. China, and partly also by Russia. The situation today is different from that in the cases of the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide. By the time the mass annihilation of the Jews started in 1941, and by the time the Ottoman rulers decided to annihilate the Armenians in April, 1915, great powers outside of the areas concerned were either unable to intervene - as in the case of the Holocaust - even had they wanted to, which they didn't, or were allied to the perpetrators, as were Germany and Austro-Hungary in the Armenian case. In both these cases the great powers could have stopped the genocide before it happened. In the Armenian case, as Vahakn Dadrian has shown, the great powers encouraged Armenian political groups to demand autonomy, in the interest of these powers, and then left the Armenians in the lurch, both before and after World War I. Today, the great powers can no longer ignore genocidal situations, but have not developed effective ways of dealing with them. We have not even begun tackling the crucial difference between, say, Darfur and Rwanda, where genocide was or is being committed by a relatively weak political power, and Chechnya, where a bitter struggle with genocidal implications is being waged by two sides, one of which is a major power which cannot be influenced by the kind of policies suggested in Rwanda or Darfur.

But in order to deal with practicalities, we first have to realize the basic motivation for genocidal mass murders, beyond the particularities of each individual case. I would suggest that the basis lies in the inclination of all humans to kill those whom we perceive to endanger our turf, or our life and well-being. The existence of this murderous urge in all of us is testified to by the fact

that all civilizations have laws against murder, or at least against some murders. Such laws would be superfluous if there was no instinct to kill. As an American sociologist has shown, between 1900 and 1987, 169 million civilians and unarmed POWs were murdered by governments and/or political organizations - as compared to 34 million soldiers who were killed in battle in that period, which included the two world wars. We are the only mammals that kill each other in huge numbers.

Is there then any hope that we might devise ways and means to stop genocidal threats? I do think so, and the basic reason is that while we have the killing urge within us, we also have in us the opposite urge, namely to rescue, support, feed people, even if they are total strangers. The very fact that we have humanitarian organizations that feed the hungry and cure them, shows the existence of that instinct, as does the fact that in practically all genocidal situations there are individuals and groups that try to rescue. At Yad Vashem we call them the Righteous, people who endangered themselves in order to save Jews from murder; there were Turks and Kurds who rescued Armenians, there were Hutu who rescued Tutsi, there were Spanish priests who tried to stop the slaughter of Indians in America, and so on. The purpose of all efforts, political, educational, propagandistic, against genocide, including this conference, is to move people from nearer the one extreme to nearer the other one.

In Rome, as we all knew, an International Criminal Court was born, with its seat in The Hague, and though the US, Israel, and a number of other countries did not join it, it does represent a first step against impunity which is so destructive of all efforts to limit the possibility of genocidal murders. Just very recently, the Security Council passed a resolution which, though it is, again, limited, and has so far been ineffective, nevertheless threatens the perpetrators of the Darfur genocide with the prospect of a court trial before the ICC. The US abstained, and thus enabled the resolution to pass, and I believe this was due to a great deal of pressure and persuasion exercised, among others, by some of the people at this conference, and their colleagues.

A major obstacle to the struggle for genocide prevention is denial of a genocide, and the most obvious case is the denial by the Turkish government of the Armenian genocide. Other governments, including unfortunately my own, aid and abet the denial. In some other cases of genocide, denial is really more of a marginal phenomenon. There is no doubt in my mind that there can be no cultural or political advance within Turkish society until the fact of the genocide is recognized, so that it is first of all a Turkish interest to face the fact that another Turkish government, in another era, initiated and executed a genocide. The only thing one can do against this denial is to stand firm, and endlessly repeat the demand for recognition of the fact that a genocide took place against the Armenian people.

We have to be practical: there is no way to stop violent conflicts between humans altogether. The destructive instinct is there, and it cannot be wished away. However, it could perhaps be reigned in, and the worst excesses could be avoided. The analogy with a well-ordered society is tempting: in such a society you have occasional murders, however motivated, but you have a legal system that threatens punishment, and a police force to enforce the law. You will not avoid outbreaks of mass violence, But you can limit them, organize an international legal system that will punish the worst transgressors, and establish a system of graded measures to prevent the worst, or at least stop it when it occurs. We need three things for that: one is a theoretical framework that will be elastic enough to fit different situations; the second is a tool box of diplomatic, political, social, psychological, economic and military options to be adapted to individual cases as they happen. And third, such a tool box will of course be useless if there is no international body to use it and apply it, and the only such body is the UN. How should we regard the UN? In a public speech I quoted myself as a 5-year old child, when I said to my

mother-mother, pretty you are not, but you are mine. The UN is the best UN we have, because it is the only one. Rather than run it into the ground, we should devote efforts to improve it as much as possible. The problem is that these three agendas have to be pursued simultaneously. For that we need academics who begin to understand the political world as it actually is, and not as they would like it to be; we need to be involved with NGOs who work on the ground, and need to be combined into alliances that will put pressure on politicians; and we need committed politicians who understand what they are doing. They do exist, you may be surprised to hear, as do academics who understand politics. We don't just need to commemorate genocides, here or in Berlin, or Jerusalem, or Kigali. We need to try and prevent them.