

Submission to UK Parliament, House of Commons, International Development Committee

Promoting dialogue and preventing atrocities: the UK government approach

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide is dedicated to stimulating timely global action to prevent genocide and related crimes against humanity and to catalyze an international response when these crimes occur. We seek to do for communities today what was not done for Jews before and during the Holocaust.

We at the Simon-Skjodt Center believe that genocide is preventable, and this core belief shapes our work along a continuum from prevention to response to accountability. We created and regularly update our [Early Warning Project](#), in partnership with Dartmouth College, which assesses the risk of mass killings around the world. We conduct “deep dive” analysis on particular [countries](#) at high risk of mass atrocities, especially where policy attention may be insufficient, and we support victims and survivors of mass atrocities in their pursuit of [justice and accountability](#). The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum fills a unique role as an independent government institution, and its Simon-Skjodt Center serves as a resource to the United States government and others on atrocity prevention issues. Over the past several years we have supported the United States government's efforts to institutionalize atrocity prevention, and to respond effectively in urgent cases where communities are at heightened risk. A similarly situated institution in the United Kingdom could strengthen atrocity prevention efforts domestically, and could present an opportunity for our governments to work even more collaboratively to strengthen trans-Atlantic cooperation on atrocity prevention.

In the last decade and a half, the United States went from a blueprint from the [Genocide Prevention Task Force](#), to a [Presidential Study Directive](#), to the establishment of an interagency Atrocities Prevention Board (now the Atrocity Early Warning Task Force) to the passing of the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act. These steps allowed the United States government to work in an increasingly coordinated effort to prevent and respond to mass atrocities, yet this growing architecture of atrocity prevention still failed to prevent devastating crimes that exacted horrific tolls on civilians in places including Syria, South Sudan, and Burma/Myanmar.

Preventing mass atrocities defies simple solutions, but certain foundations would give the UK government the best chance to help prevent mass atrocities: clear **policy** objectives pursued through efficient **processes**, supported by robust **resources**, and strengthened by strong and diverse **partnerships**. This strong foundation need not be financially onerous; rather it requires a shift in foreign policy perspective that prioritizes analyzing and acting upon early warning signs of mass atrocities. This shift would help mitigate the unimaginable harm these crimes exact upon civilian populations. Examples of what this approach may entail are outlined below.

Policy

- Clearly articulate that mass atrocities threaten national interests, even when they take place outside of armed conflict, and that preventing mass atrocities is a national security priority as well as a moral imperative.
- Strengthen an “all of government” approach to atrocity prevention that integrates the issue in mainstream foreign policy operations. In general, successfully integrating atrocity prevention efforts requires an investment in early warning monitoring and risk analysis; training of foreign policy staff and officials to identify and understand risk, and develop policy responses; consistent and robust

funding for the policy responses pursued; and support at the highest levels of government for the atrocity prevention agenda and the bureaucracy required to support it.

- Foreign policy leaders and staff across the UK government should have a general awareness of mass atrocity early warning indicators and those individuals and offices most closely tracking high-risk areas should be familiar with assessment tools such as the Early Warning Project to identify countries at growing risk of mass atrocities.
- In order to better understand situations of high atrocity risk, foreign policy staff should conduct atrocity assessments to gain insight into the particular dynamics of the situation. This assessment, such as the [framework](#) developed by the United States State Department and United States Agency for International Development, should identify potential perpetrators, potential target groups, enablers of mass atrocities, plausible scenarios in which mass atrocities may occur, and any developments that merit additional monitoring. A goal of these deeper assessments would be to develop effective policy responses, including at the UN Security Council, that address the context-specific dynamics of a particular case.
- Deepen support for justice and accountability for mass atrocities, including by supporting independent investigative mechanisms, formal prosecutions, and the specific needs of victim and survivor communities.
 - Past efforts supported by the United States, for example, include establishing and/or resourcing investigative teams to collect evidence of mass atrocities in Sudan, Iraq, Burma/Myanmar, and Ukraine.
- Integrate the United Kingdom's leadership on addressing sexual and gender-based violence, as well as promoting international religious freedom, into a broader atrocity prevention agenda.
- Examine new challenges and opportunities regarding the prevention of mass atrocities using public fora such as parliamentary hearings as well as private meetings.
 - Areas of concern may include the impact of climate change on atrocity risk, the role of new technology, including social media, in perpetrating as well as preventing mass atrocities, or the particular challenges of preventing mass atrocities committed by non-state actors.

Processes

- A senior level official with decision-making authority should be tasked with leading atrocity prevention efforts.
- Establish processes, including regular reports and early warning assessments to relevant Parliamentary committees, civil society, and/or the general public, that provide transparency and accountability for government policy on atrocity prevention.

Resources

- The United States Congress has dedicated funding for atrocity prevention as well as a larger amount of funding dedicated to preventing conflict, addressing fragility, and promoting democracy.

Partnerships

- Establish strong connections and opportunities for information sharing between government officials and experts among civil society within the UK and abroad, including from communities directly impacted by mass atrocities.

- Continue to engage with like-minded governments to coordinate atrocity prevention efforts, including through the International Atrocity Prevention Working Group.
- Consider supporting efforts to establish or expand an independent government institution, similar to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, in the United Kingdom that is dedicated to atrocity prevention and can serve as a resource to government officials and others pursuing this agenda.