



# Being the difference

A primer for states wishing to prevent atrocity crimes  
in the mid-twenty-first century

Dr Kate Ferguson  
Fred Carver

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Cover photo: A protest outside the house of the leader of the ruling Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) party, Jarosław Kaczyński, after the Polish Constitutional Tribunal banned abortion on the basis of foetal defects in Warsaw, 23 October 2020. Photograph by Grzegorz Zukowski



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## About the authors

**Fred Carver** is a freelance strategic consultant and researcher in the field of international relations, with specific expertise on the United Nations, Peacekeeping, Atrocity Prevention, civil wars and political violence. He worked for four years as head of Policy for UNA-UK, leading the organisation's policy development designing and implementing campaigns on UN reform, sexual violence prevention and UK foreign policy, and edited a magazine and two journals. Prior to joining UNA-UK, he ran the Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice, a human rights NGO which campaigned for a lasting peace in Sri Lanka based upon justice and accountability for crimes committed in the course of Sri Lanka's civil war. Before then he worked in local government and as a researcher and writer. He conducted field research in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Israel and Palestine. He is a trustee of Support a Survivor of Torture, a charity that provides psychosocial support to torture survivors living in the UK and a mentor for Out of London, an organisation founded to increase access to careers in international relations for people who come from outside London and identify as working class. He remains a member of the Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice's council of advisors. He lives in London.

**Dr Kate Ferguson** is Co-Executive Director at Protection Approaches. Kate is an experienced analyst and strategist driving a prevention-first approach to foreign policy and the cycle of crises with specific expertise on mass atrocity prevention, human rights and divided communities. For ten years she has worked to strengthen contributions made by the United Kingdom towards these challenges and has been instrumental in centring atrocity prevention concerns in Britain, contributing directly to significant changes in how government and civil society approach modern atrocities. Kate has published widely on related subjects and her research has informed government and NGO strategies to prevent forms of violence in the UK and internationally. She is Chair of Policy at the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect where she works together with the Executive Team to develop and improve research on the principle of the Responsibility to Protect and identify opportunities for innovative forms of knowledge exchange. She is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of East Anglia. Prior to founding PA, Kate worked in academia, with international non-governmental organisations in the UK and Rwanda, in the British parliament, and as a consultant. Her book, *Architectures of Violence: The Command Structures of Modern Mass Atrocities*, was published in 2020 by Hurst and Oxford University Press. She mentors a network of young women developing careers in foreign policy, human rights, and related research fields. She lives in London.

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## Executive summary

Questions regarding a state's responsibility to protect the lives of citizens in foreign lands pose some of the greatest moral and political challenges for any country wishing to contribute to building a safer and more stable world. As the threats of climate crises, democratic backsliding and technological change deepen, the uneven balance of power in international relations is shifting. Amid this flux is the opportunity – and responsibility – for states to engage more creatively in both the collective response to growing challenges and in shaping the coming era of global rights. This paper makes the case that states aspiring to uphold such responsibilities must redesign their national policy structures with that goal in mind.

In response to that need, and underlying this paper, is our call for a devolution of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P): moving the concept out from under the United Nations, demanding it be integrated by states, and be more consciously adopted and invoked by civil society is a necessary, and perhaps inevitable, progression of the principle.

Many continue to see atrocities as extreme and aberrant phenomena but in reality they are not particularly exceptional. They are fairly frequent and predictable given the means of criminal enterprise, motivation of identity-based bigotry or manipulation of identity politics, and opportunity of unchecked power. These and other risk factors of atrocities are present in all societies, albeit to greater and lesser degrees.

The approach of understanding atrocity prevention as a subset of work in areas such as conflict, development or fragility has been tried and tested and has failed. Lazy assumptions, such as that atrocities occur in circumstances of instability and thus can be prevented by investing in stability, do little good and can occasionally do harm. We set out a new approach to state-level atrocity prevention informed by two keystones: that the pathology of mass atrocities is different from other forms of violence; and that their prevention necessarily requires horizontal approaches to change in partnership with the grassroots.

A significant proportion of modern atrocities (genocide, crimes against humanity and, frequently, war crimes) have their roots in a particular pathology of violence. This pathology has the following features:

- it is commonly motivated by – or legitimised through – a politics of identity-based grievance, discrimination and/or human rights deficits
- it is perpetrated by an organised criminal conspiracy. Many parts of this conspiracy might be acting legally, or have been legitimised by state authorities, but nevertheless are participating in a conspiracy to commit an international crime. Unsurprisingly therefore, the architecture of the conspiracy will resemble the architecture of other forms of organised crime

- it takes advantage of unchecked power, even if such power is enjoyed in a limited environment
- unchecked its outcome is widespread and systemic human rights violations, frequently reaching the threshold of international atrocity crimes such as genocide or crimes against humanity

This pathology of violence is for the most part missed by contemporary approaches to conflict, stability democratisation and development. We argue that to be effective in preventing mass atrocities, state action must address this pathology in the following ways:

- the state must acknowledge the deliberate, political and ‘rational’ motivations of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes
- the state must be alert to the risk of atrocities occurring in areas of both stability and fragility. Where that risk is present its response must not be, or must not exclusively be, to increase stability, but must prioritise protecting and increasing the resilience of communities at risk of atrocity crimes and their antecedents
- the state must approach atrocities the way it approaches organised crime: criminalising the parts of the conspiracy that currently operate under the protection of the law, and using all tools at its disposal to map, disrupt and dismantle the structures and networks that enable atrocities
- the state must understand that the politics of identity-based grievance are present in all contexts and cultures, and must develop a whole-of-society approach to addressing grievance and combatting bigotry at home and abroad

Such a transformation requires atrocity prevention to be fully integrated into the policies and practices of states aspiring to make contributions on this agenda. Indeed, it is clearly far past time that this happened. In 2017 the UN Secretary General called upon all member states to “integrate atrocity crimes prevention concerns into the work of national human rights mechanisms”.<sup>1</sup> Nation states have the ability, and the responsibility, to disrupt the architectures of violence that allow atrocities to occur. They have thus far primarily failed to do so in large part because of a common absence of policy coherence and cross-governmental coordination not only between states but within states.

We call on states to develop and pursue national strategies of atrocity prevention, not to dilute either the collective nature of the pursuit of a world where mass atrocities are less likely or reduce the onus on the UN to perform its role as the primary forum for global diplomacy but as a means of strengthening – reinvigorating even – both. We propose four core approaches that should inform any national strategy of atrocity prevention.

- **Prevention-first policy thinking** which seeks to stop atrocities before they occur by addressing the causes of atrocities, by disrupting and dismantling the organised criminal architecture of atrocities, and by investing politically in preventing circumstances of impunity
- **Investing in network analysis** which monitors and evaluates the propellants that cause atrocities, maps motivations and interrelations of both potential perpetrators and the coalitions that can help prevent atrocities, and identifies the points where leverage can be effectively applied and which actors can apply it
- **Institutionalisation** that finds the balance between integration and specialisation, ensuring that atrocity prevention is neither mainstreamed nor siloed to death but instead leads to more effective action by all practitioners by coordinating, convening, and unlocking responses
- **Developing resilient societies** where cohesive equitable communities, high public trust and strong inclusive institutions limit and mitigate the damage from internal and external shocks

The status quo of the world's rule-based system is in great flux. The approach we propose needs to be led by small and medium-sized states, rather than a small number of large powers. But it must not stop there. As with other global challenges such as climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals, state action is essential and so is the contribution of a broad coalition of non-state actors and civil society.



## Introduction

Mass atrocities are rising inside and outside of conflict.<sup>2</sup> The driving forces behind them – inequality, social fracture, democratic backsliding, resource scarcity, arms proliferation, climate change, and the internationalisation of malign networks – are all moving in the wrong direction.<sup>3</sup> As a result, structural and violent discrimination against people because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, political affiliation, age, disability or class remains a common phenomenon of our modern world. As COVID-19's societal, economic and political consequences deepen, climate change-induced events become more common and severe, and political dynamics become more polarised and exclusionary, widespread and systematic identity-based violence, including mass atrocities, will become increasingly frequent as we approach the mid-21st century.

Getting better at preventing mass violence is no longer simply a moral duty for responsible states but also an issue of strategic self-interest – albeit, rarely recognised as a core one.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, public expectations of how such responsibilities should be upheld continue to increase as travel, trade and technology shrink moral and political geographies and increase international and internationalist identities.

The complexities of threats states now face are rightly driving more integrated approaches to international policy; recognising the opportunities to be gained by joining up policy thinking across domestic and outward facing government departments and embracing theories of change that 'reach in' to the local as well as reaching outwards through global diplomacy.<sup>5</sup> States recognise that they have to do more, and have less to do it with, and so they must recalibrate their entire national approach if they are to have impact.

Our view is that this requires a reorientation of society and policy around the idea of human rights – not only a good unto itself but as a fundamental approach to ensuring that the unconscionable never occurs. As Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has said "wars don't start because people are poor, neither do they start because people are illiterate. They start because of structural discrimination and the deliberate attempt to marginalise people. [...] Indeed if you look at the conflicts of today all of them have their antecedents in human rights deficits."<sup>6</sup>

Human rights therefore must be a central element of the organisation of any society free from atrocities – it can never be a superficial add on. But a global human rights-based system needs to be supported in a very different way. Rights must be upheld and implemented rather than messianically promoted. Rights require consistency, not only by states but by international bodies, civil society sectors, and NGOs that exist to advance justice, equality, and peace. For those of us working from countries that generally consider themselves to champion human rights at home and contribute financially, diplomatically, and perhaps sometimes even militarily to their protection abroad, rights cannot be something we do 'over there' any more than 'over there' is the only place the threat of atrocities is present; any society looking to advance the cause of rights globally must start with itself.

The good news is that a rights-based reorientation of society does not just help prevent atrocities, it provides a roadmap for a wider approach to risk, prevention and preparedness that speaks too to a wider challenge in foreign policy strategy and how we conceive security.

This paper outlines that roadmap; not in detailed policy terms but in terms of the fundamental framing and the key components states should incorporate into effective atrocity prevention.

It contains three chapters. In the first we outline where atrocity prevention finds itself, reflecting on how atrocity prevention has evolved and then setting out our case for how it must now adapt to new realities. In the second chapter we articulate a new approach to state-led atrocity prevention. In the third chapter we define four core components that any effective atrocity prevention strategy must integrate.

This paper was written from London and draws on our years of experience working with and to effect change within the United Kingdom, other states, the European Union, and the United Nations. However, this paper makes the case for the prevention of mass atrocity crimes and identity-based violence to be consciously centred in and deliberately integrated across the domestic and foreign policies of all states that aspire to contribute to a world that is fairer, safer, and more stable.

We reject the binary division of the world into perpetrator states and states that have a role to play in prevention. Virtually all state actors are complicit in atrocities to a greater or lesser extent, and all state actors have responsibilities both towards upholding international commitments to prevent atrocity crimes and improving their own domestic responses to atrocity risks. That said, our primary policy familiarity is with the global north where the international impacts of a state's actions with respect to atrocity prevention are generally given greater consideration than the need to manage the risk of atrocities within their own borders. This leads to an approach to preventing atrocities which, while it must be broader than foreign policy to be effective, places foreign policy in the leading role. While we hope many of our policy recommendations are universally applicable, some may make more sense in this context. We welcome engagement and challenge from colleagues, particularly in the global south, in considering which parts of this agenda can be applied in different, particularly more fragile, contexts.

## Atrocities and identity-based violence

Of today's major and emerging violent crises, the vast majority – Syria, Yemen, Libya, Gaza, Myanmar, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, the Sahel, Cameroon, Tigray, Venezuela, Xinjiang – are driven, at least in part, by the deliberate violent targeting of civilian groups by political elites. The majority of today's refugees are civilians fleeing the threat or consequences of mass atrocities, rather than armed conflict per se.<sup>7</sup>

The continued rise in the deliberate targeting of identity groups and populations, including the perpetration of mass atrocities, has exposed the limits of current approaches. Intentional, systematic, and mass destruction or expulsion of identity groups have been drivers of violence and armed conflict for as long as war itself has been recorded. But we are now witnessing a concerning global deterioration with regards to many of the indicators of resilience to persecution and vulnerability to identity-based violence.

States that have previously seen themselves as flagbearers for rights protections and violence prevention have been shown to be places of considerable identity-based violence, as the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, the most recent discoveries of mass graves of Indigenous children in Canada, or the creation of “LGBT free zones” in Poland, have demonstrated. The prevailing assumption among many middle and large powers (and large parts of the sector itself) that atrocity prevention was something needed in some (other) places some of the time has – finally – been dramatically overturned.

As the dynamics of modern atrocities evolve – or our comprehension of them improves – so we must adapt and strengthen how we prevent them. This means moving beyond narrow conflict prevention, development and stabilisation strategies, rethinking the overreliance on humanitarian response, and committing to joined-up consistent policy-making that treats modern atrocities as a persistent global challenge emanating from ever present dynamics rather than occasional aberrant events. Implicit in this necessary shift must be a willingness to interrogate the political derivations of where atrocities come from but also the relationship between – and allocation of resources to – humanitarian ‘firefighting’ and political prevention. Alongside this need for deeper focus on prevention are growing calls to look at how we prevent; what we describe as a horizontal approach to prevention and protection that succeeds in connecting both the needs and agencies of communities most affected by atrocities with the responsibilities of and contributions by international actors necessary to reinvigorate global norms against atrocities.

Such an approach in turn requires the integration of the domestic and international responses of responsible powers.

### (D)evolving R2P

It is more than unfortunate that the concept of the “responsibility to protect” (R2P) emerged too late to provide a framework through which to address the September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and that, not unrelatedly, the principle has since been both deliberately and unintentionally conflated with late 20th and early 21st century liberal military interventionism which in turn sat, often uncomfortably and counterintuitively, within the context of the “War on Terror”.

Nevertheless, the roots of the concept are ancient and universal. As Ramesh Thakur put it:

*[t]he notion that R2P is an updated version of the old “white man’s burden” can itself be racist. It denies agency to developing countries, insisting they can only be victims. It suggests their citizens should either be left to the mercies of thuggish leaders, or to the ad hoc geopolitical calculations of powerful Western countries, rather than to globally validated norms and due process...It also ignores the indigenous traditions in many parts of Asia and Africa that hold rulers owe duties for the safety, welfare and protection of their subjects. For instance, the Hindu concept of rajdharma means duty of rulers...<sup>8</sup>*

Indeed, at its best, R2P is an inherently anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-authoritarian idea, which at its heart is a challenge to power. It raised expectations for and placed limitations upon state centric, and thus political elite centric, approaches to the modern nation state because ultimately, R2P determines sovereignty to be embodied by a state’s relationship with its most vulnerable, not its most powerful. Atrocity prevention should always be emancipatory, as free self-governing communities are the most durable and sustainable form of prevention, and therefore acts of atrocity prevention should invariably take the form of challenging, not imposing, authority. Small wonder the term R2P is on the lips of marchers in Myanmar.<sup>9</sup>

To live up to R2P’s best values atrocity prevention must therefore be firmly rooted in a comprehensive analysis of power, an understanding of history, context and dynamics (particularly racial, colonial, gendered, ableist and heteronormative dynamics), and an assessment of the extent to which each action damages or strengthens local agency.

Atrocity prevention must be feminist,<sup>10</sup> intersectional,<sup>11</sup> and locally owned.<sup>12</sup> And atrocity prevention must begin – but not end – at home, with an acknowledgement that the risks of atrocities are present in all societies, and must be addressed in all societies, starting with one’s own.

However, R2P has not always taken this form. While many of the activists and academics whose work helped R2P to germinate were of the global south, some

others imbibed the concept with a west-centric liberal paternalism or contaminated the embryonic agenda of a progressive responsible internationalism with the pursuit of other less humanitarian foreign policy enterprises.<sup>13</sup> The muscular liberalism that came to characterise domestic and foreign policies of the UK, France, the US, Australia and Canada in the first decade of the century integrated the language of humanitarianism, international responsibility and civilian protection as a means of communicating – and some might say sanitising – security strategies of counter-terror. Among the many consequences of this discourse has been a persistent conflation of R2P and atrocity prevention with western military intervention. In turn this led directly to hesitancy, scepticism and challenge throughout the millennium's second decade where both R2P and atrocity prevention came to be seen by many as far more malign than its stated intention. This was particularly true in the UK. Other states and regional organisations that initially advocated for R2P became subsequently either less activist (Canada, Brazil) or less self-reflective (the US, France, the African Union). Many NGOs and donors dropped their atrocity prevention work, focussing on what were considered to be politically safer priorities.

If states wish to uphold the best of the principle and vision of R2P, both as set out in 2005 and as it has evolved over the past 16 or so years, they must necessarily centre atrocity prevention in their national policy frameworks, mechanisms, and budgets. This requires input from and coordination with civil society actors, whether NGOs, affected communities, religious leaders, or other experts to connect people to policy and policy to people. In this way the responsibility to protect people from atrocity crimes stretches not only to the actions of member states, but also through them and throughout the composite parts of their societies.

Yet R2P and atrocity prevention architectures, where they exist at all, remain fragmented.

The goal for those wishing to preserve, promote, and strengthen the principle is therefore to 'open up' how R2P and atrocity prevention is understood, 'taking it out' of the UN, and integrating it into state structures and civil society practice. Pluralising conceptual access to, and invocation of, R2P would neither remove nor reduce R2P's influence at the UN but would represent better mainstreaming of the principle and build consolidated means for action.



## A new approach to state-level atrocity prevention

Efforts to integrate approaches to the more effective prediction and prevention of mass atrocities within national working methods are already becoming more common.<sup>14</sup> However, the majority of responsible states still have work to do. Progress has been made but approaches to atrocity prevention remain piecemeal, disjointed, and vulnerable to inconsistency.<sup>15</sup>

For states whose resources are not vast – and perhaps for all states grappling with the financial impacts of the pandemic and competing priorities – the recognition that preventing atrocities requires distinct strategies, systems, and skills should not raise fears of increased costs. The application of a coherent strategy, greater consistency and integration of approaches, and a mapping and networking of the levers and actors for change, can achieve significant improvements in response without much increase in resourcing beyond staffing. Here, modest investment in analytical capacity to better understand problems can dramatically increase the efficacy of the application of remaining resources. Where there are opportunities to increase resourcing it is nearly always cost effective to do so, as can be seen when one weighs these costs against the crippling and long-lasting economic consequences of either action or inaction in the face of atrocities that are not prevented.<sup>16</sup>

Developing a national strategy or system on atrocity prevention should also have serendipitous benefits by leading to more fluid policymaking better able to handle current and future global catastrophic risks – be they unexpected ‘unknown unknowns’ such as the coronavirus pandemic or expected challenges such as climate change. Atrocity prevention strategies should provide an effective model for foreign policy more broadly, particularly in the manner in which it integrates, and acknowledges the need for a harmonisation between, domestic actions and foreign policy positions. Preventing atrocity crimes, much like confronting comparable global challenges such as climate change or organised crime, require a whole-of-government approach that brings together relevant departments, intelligence capabilities and risk assessment systems. Such an approach is equally important across modern foreign policy in ensuring that diplomacy advances the national interest.

Finally, an atrocity prevention strategy and associated architecture should communicate the strength of a state’s convictions and commitments to allies and transgressors alike. It should provide clarity for parliamentary and civil society engagement and demonstrate that a state matches its dedication to stand against atrocities on the multilateral level in its national policy.<sup>17</sup>

### Confronting the pathology of modern atrocities

Atrocities take place both during times of war and so-called times of peace. Far from being a *consequence* of war, atrocity crimes are a major *cause* of violence escalation and instability. It is often noted that situations of armed conflict are a precursor to or an enabling condition for the occurrence of mass atrocity crimes. As such, the goal

of preventing such crimes is often seen to follow on from conflict prevention or, once violence has begun, the protection of civilians.<sup>18</sup> However, such analysis fails to recognise that this relationship of cause and effect is frequently reversed. Often the atrocities come first and cause armed conflict to break out. The violence in Yugoslavia in the 1990s was such an example. So too is the decade-long crisis in Syria, propelled by the deliberate perpetration of atrocities by the state, leading to protracted armed conflict. Failures to adequately respond to the mass atrocities against the Rohingya in Rakhine in 2017 can be seen to have emboldened the Tatmadaw to seize power in February 2021.<sup>19</sup>

A significant number of modern atrocities occur outside of situations of armed conflict, for example the atrocities committed by the governments in Venezuela or North Korea, the treatment of the Uyghur and other minorities by the Chinese government, the war on drugs in the Philippines, or the deliberate destruction of Indigenous communities in Brazil in the pursuit of deforestation.<sup>20</sup> Of the 12 crises mapped by the Global Center for the Responsibility to Protect as of November 2021, three (North Korea, Venezuela, China) are taking place in countries where there is no armed conflict and a further three (Afghanistan, Myanmar and Cameroon) are situations where there is limited interaction between the armed conflict and the risk of atrocities. Collectively therefore half of even the most explicit and publicly acknowledged current situations of atrocity are occurring outside of, or unrelated to, armed conflict.<sup>21</sup>

Atrocities and conflict operate in different ways and merit different responses. Traditional responses to violence, even modern responses of conflict prevention which give regard to political sustainability and the risks of negative peace, are fundamentally approaches designed to reduce instability. Granted bad things happen in unstable circumstances, but atrocities do not require instability to occur and therefore reducing instability will not always reduce the risks of atrocities. This governing assumption regarding where modern atrocities come from continues to blinker prevention efforts and constrict policy thinking. As a result, politicians, conflict experts and prevention models all at times ‘miss’ risks – and often ongoing crimes – in ‘more stable’ states, such as China, India, Brazil, or the Philippines.<sup>22</sup> In extremis reducing instability will reduce the extent to which power is contested, actually making atrocities more likely as the potential perpetrator becomes less fettered.<sup>23</sup> Folding atrocity prevention into conflict prevention, as many democratic powers tend to do, is therefore not simply insufficient but may even be counterproductive as it is predicated upon a false assumption.

Atrocity prevention and conflict prevention also motivate different approaches. Conflict prevention generally seeks to treat parties to conflict in a similar manner through a commitment to impartiality. Conversely, atrocity prevention aims ultimately to deter international crimes, meaning that it would be wrong to treat would-be or actual perpetrators and victims equally.<sup>24</sup> Likewise while conflict prevention seeks to deescalate all forms of tension and reduce all instances of violence, atrocity prevention acknowledges that not all violence is equal and

differentiates between violence that is employed to commit an atrocity, violence that is employed in self-defence or to prevent an atrocity occurring, and violence that occurs outside of atrocity contexts, and prioritises its responses accordingly.

As an example, consider a situation of fragility in which multiple state, non-state and proxy state armed groups are in conflict. A traditional conflict prevention-based approach might look to disarm the armed groups and reduce tensions between them, while mediating peace negotiations towards a long-term political solution and investing in development work to address root causes of grievance. An atrocity prevention approach would additionally look at which groups are using violence and to what end. Such an analysis might uncover, for instance, that some of the non-state armed groups are locally organised forces who have banded together in order to defend their communities. If they are disarmed, they may be less able to defend those communities from atrocities, particularly if the perpetrators are state or proxy-state forces who have ready access to arms. An atrocity prevention-informed approach might therefore see the disarmament process prioritised and phased so that local self-defence forces are not disarmed until after the threats to those communities are neutralised.

In other words, while both conflict prevention and atrocity prevention have the same ultimate goal of establishing a stable and lasting peace, conflict prevention seeks to get there as directly as possible, whereas atrocity prevention seeks to get there while minimising the risks of atrocities occurring en route.

Another false assumption which has a multiplying effect upon the first is that the pursuit of democratisation is the most direct route to stability and thus also to a reduction in the prevalence of atrocities. This ignores the risks of identity-based violence and atrocities posed by transition periods, elections, and other junctures of political contestation that democratisation requires. The UK's Parliamentary Select Committee on Foreign Affairs concluded in its inquiry on the 2017 atrocities in Rakhine that there was too much focus by the UK and others on supporting the democratic transition in Myanmar and not enough on atrocity prevention.<sup>25</sup>

Where early recognition of such risks are flagged, such as the disputed and violent 2007 elections in Kenya or in the course of the Colombian peace process, atrocity prevention strategies can mitigate and deescalate transitional risks effectively.<sup>26</sup> Conversely, where the focus is placed too singularly on democratisation –or too narrow an interpretation of democratisation– not only are atrocities more likely to occur but the architectures of power and securitisation that facilitate, and draw additional strength from, those atrocities can ultimately thwart democratisation. It appears that this may have been a contributory factor in the coup in Myanmar,<sup>27</sup> and to have hampered South Sudan's path towards sustainable democratic rule.<sup>28</sup>

It is likewise important to avoid assuming that development will always reduce the risk of atrocities. Atrocity sensitive development can have that effect, but atrocity insensitive development can simply enhance the capacity of perpetrators to commit

crimes without reducing atrocity risk factors,<sup>29</sup> and too myopic a focus on traditional or narrow development objectives can lead to a side-lining of political and human rights concerns by international actors, a lesson the United Nations in particular learned painfully in Sri Lanka and Myanmar.<sup>30</sup>

Many of these misconceptions stem from a common view that still sees atrocities as extreme and aberrant phenomena. But atrocities are not particularly exceptional: they are fairly frequent and predictable. Risk factors of atrocities are present in all societies, albeit to greater and lesser degrees. This will always include one's own society, and thus atrocity prevention can never be exclusively a question of foreign policy; the work of preventing atrocities and their antecedents in one's own community and globally are fundamentally intertwined.

Violence that constitutes genocide, crimes against humanity, and many war crimes<sup>31</sup> is inherently political and therefore, within its own confines, both rational and intentional. Its driving pathology has the following features:

- it is commonly motivated by – or legitimised through – a politics of identity-based grievance, discrimination and/or human rights deficits
- it is perpetrated by an organised criminal conspiracy. Many parts of this conspiracy might be acting legally, or might have been legitimised by state authorities, but nevertheless are participating in a conspiracy to commit an international crime. Unsurprisingly therefore, the architecture of the conspiracy will resemble the architecture of other forms of organised crime
- it takes advantage of unchecked power, even if such power is enjoyed in a limited environment
- unchecked, its outcome is widespread and systemic human rights violations, frequently reaching the threshold of international atrocity crimes such as genocide or crimes against humanity

We do not propose this identifying framework as a perfect or even new paradigm for explaining all atrocities. We recognise that the category of war crimes in particular comprises many acts with many motivations and no one pathology will explain them all. Rather we simply ask states to look at this particular typology of violations, which is driving a high proportion of persecution, human rights violations, displacement, and killing and where the response from states and the international community has been historically so poor.

We outline four key tests states must meet if their work on conflict and fragility is to be effective in preventing the particular pathology of violence that leads to atrocities:

- the state must acknowledge the deliberate, political and 'rational' motivations of

genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes

- the state must be alert to the risk of atrocities occurring in areas of both stability and fragility. Where that risk is present its response must not be, or must not exclusively be, to increase stability, but must prioritise protecting and increasing the resilience of communities at risk of atrocity crimes
- the state must approach atrocities the way it approaches organised crime: criminalising the parts of the conspiracy that currently operate under the protection of the law, and using all tools at its disposal to map, disrupt and dismantle the structures and networks that enable atrocities
- the state must understand that the politics of identity-based grievance are present in all contexts and cultures, and must develop a whole-of-society approach to addressing grievance and combatting bigotry at home and abroad

### **Reaching in: the imperative for locally-led and horizontal approaches to prevention**

*The United Nations is an association of sovereign States, but the rights it exists to uphold belong to peoples, not governments. By the same token, it is wrong to think the obligations of United Nations membership fall only on States. Each one of us -- whether as workers in government, in intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations, in business, in the media, or simply as human beings -- has an obligation to do whatever he or she can to correct injustice. Each of us has a duty to halt -- or, better, to prevent -- the infliction of suffering.*

Kofi Annan  
The Secretary-General reflects on intervention  
35th Annual Ditchley Foundation Lecture  
26 June 1998<sup>32</sup>

Local, community and wider civil society actors contribute everywhere to the prevention of identity-based violence and mass atrocities on a daily basis, whether by adopting practices and strategies to avoid escalation, employing self-protection strategies, or establishing their own response systems and using transitional justice approaches to heal communities in the aftermath of violence. Locally-led contributions to the prevention of atrocities take many forms but can be loosely described as work that confronts the drivers of discrimination and violence, and reduces their consequences. Whether or not this work is consciously undertaken as ‘atrocity prevention’ or ‘identity-based violence prevention’ on the local level, work of this form is too often excluded in international donor (and some international NGO) conceptualisations of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.<sup>33</sup>



Local actors, and the understanding they bring to the specificity of the issues they face, can help navigate the nexus and points of conflict between protection and peacebuilding. Local actors can more clearly articulate points of cooperation and navigate points of tension between different approaches.<sup>34</sup>

Several of the Secretary-General's annual reports of the implementation of R2P have stressed the increased role that civil society can play and needs to play in the prevention of atrocities.<sup>35</sup> In a time of stretched resources such an approach enables the state to leverage the considerable power and capacity of the non-state sector. It can support the conceptual broadening of the collective responsibility to protect whereby atrocity prevention becomes a whole-of-society endeavour. Perhaps most importantly, it can and should enable local ownership of atrocity prevention.<sup>36</sup>

But beyond the importance of civil society as a stakeholder and the value of local knowledge in more effectively defining the sector, there are clear practical, normative and political rationales for atrocity prevention to be locally-led, locally-informed, and co-created.

Peace Direct define 'locally-led' peacebuilding as meaning "local people, groups and civil society organisations design their own approaches and set priorities, whilst outsiders may assist with resources, by playing a supportive, accompaniment role and acting as a critical friend". In addition to the clear moral imperative for local leadership, and the fact that it was promised as part of the 2016 'Grand Bargain', locally led initiatives have been shown to be far more effective than 'locally managed' or merely 'locally implemented' approaches.<sup>37</sup> Of course local actors contain a myriad of complexity, and one must be careful not to fetishise, instrumentalise, or place too great a burden on those most directly affected while also not negating their right to shape and lead peacebuilding approaches.

Locally led atrocity prevention is practical. There are both needs and opportunities for locally led initiatives to be more consistently centred in early warning, response as well as prevention activities.<sup>38</sup> As former United Nations Special Advisor to the Secretary General on the Prevention of Genocide Adama Dieng put it, "at its best, civil society nurtures a plurality of different views and defends the right of groups to hold and express alternative perspectives while protecting the population from hate speech and incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence."<sup>39</sup>

Sustainable change and effective prevention require joined up, horizontal coordination, moving beyond the emerging commitment among donors to better invest in local and grassroots initiatives towards an integrated – and inclusive – understanding of collaboration. Our research and practice indicate neither top-down nor bottom-up models will be sufficient without partnership with the other. What is still frequently missing in effective prevention and protection work is the bridging or convening role to ensure that local information and perspectives are effectively shaping the responses of external actors and wider international behaviour. Whether through mediation, innovative funding models, in developing locally-led but

internationally connected early warning, or in simply augmenting national thinking, these are vital and supportive roles that responsible medium powers can assume without considerable financial or political costs.<sup>40</sup>

Secondly, locally-led atrocity prevention is normatively important, indeed a lack of local leadership in policy, particularly policy that profoundly shapes communities and societies, is deeply immoral, and frequently racist. As Peace Direct put it in their Decolonising Aid report:

*Following the Black Lives Matter protests that evolved into a global movement in the summer of 2020, those working in the aid sector have been forced to confront the reality that their own work is steeped in structural racism. [...] Many global north aid sector practitioners perceive themselves (and the wider sector) as operating neutrally, which is not only a fiction, it also reinforces the ‘white saviour’ and ‘white gaze’ mentality that has its roots in colonialism.*

*In recent years, a growing chorus of activists and organisations have been pushing for the ‘localisation’ of development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding efforts. From the Grand Bargain agreement to centring local civil society actors in peacebuilding, locally-led approaches are increasingly a primary concern for international actors attempting to address unequal global-local power dynamics. Despite a growing list of international commitments, attempts to ‘shift the power’ towards local actors have been inconsistent, failing to address the deep-rooted, systemic issues that exist. Beyond broad commitments to locally-led approaches, the development, humanitarian aid and peacebuilding sectors have struggled to implement any significant structural change.<sup>41</sup>*

The absence of local leadership across many of the tools of development, aid and peacebuilding upon which atrocity prevention rests can therefore be seen not only as counterproductive, as it feeds structures of identity-based oppression that drive up atrocity risks, but also as an ethical failing.

Finally, local leadership is a natural consequence of the politics that must underlie effective atrocity prevention. As discussed earlier, there are already many who, in good faith and bad, argue atrocity prevention is a western imposition. Avoiding both the reality and perception of this charge requires atrocity prevention to be feminist, in the sense defined by the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy as:

*a political framework centred around the wellbeing of marginalised people and invokes processes of self-reflection regarding foreign policy’s hierarchical global systems.<sup>42</sup>*

Clearly and axiomatically such an approach requires local leadership. Further, such a political framework must contain a thorough understanding of the interplay between

and within those hierarchies and drivers and risk factors of atrocities, be they race, class, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, colonialism or other forms of power and/or grievance. In other words atrocity prevention must be intersectional. We must look at our own blind spots.<sup>43</sup>

So how can states wishing to make contributions to the prevention of atrocities abroad do so, while being supportive of local leadership? First and foremost they should be proud of their own civil societies, their NGOs, and all those who seek to enhance local and national contributions to that goal. These are the organisations that work with diaspora groups, victims, vulnerable communities and other populations present within a state's national borders who are directly affected by atrocities and who are already plugged into community networks of early warning; and this is where expertise of national specificities of policy, culture, and capabilities lie. Very few states in the global north that seek to advance R2P and the prevention of mass atrocities invest in their own domestically-based atrocity prevention civil society. Such investment is usually cheap, consisting of research, analysis, coordination and convening, training, psychosocial support, documentation, legal advice, advocacy, commemoration and cultural events.<sup>44</sup> For states that currently lack atrocity prevention expertise or are still developing national capacities, domestic-based civil society provides a ready source of knowledge, diverse perspectives, and potential partnership.

More effective coordination or collaboration across national civil society facilitates resource-light, impact-heavy activities such as communication, semi-regular meetings, knowledge exchange and best-practice sharing, goal setting, and collective advocacy. Beth van Schaack, who was recently nominated as US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice, has argued for the Biden administration to “capacitate, and encourage cooperation around, the preventive and accountability work of civil society actors, survivor groups and other consortia of affinity groups such as the UK’s Atrocity Prevention Working Group,”<sup>45</sup> convened by Protection Approaches. The UK government currently provides no such support to the group – nor do many medium powers provide convening or financial contributions to their respective domestic networks. But interest in consortium and domestic civil society funding in this area is growing among states, especially as the cost-benefits of prevention efforts over firefighting programmes become clearer.

Reaching-in should be intentionally integrated by states who have missions in atrocity-at-risk states; encompassing risk monitoring, risk analysis, communication of risk, and designing response. For example: new approaches to local-international early warning and response systems that are designed around a symbiotic feedback loop of sharing information and analysis will better address mismatched expectations while strengthening the quality and usability of data. Co-designing risk assessment tools and response strategies that intentionally seek to deepen horizontal relationships, cross-working, and understanding will in time help to facilitate coordinated interventions between local and international actors. Donor

states (and other funders) can open up easy-access, quick release, low-level funds to support community-based initiatives on prevention, early warning, and response efforts to identity-based violence that require light-touch reporting.<sup>46</sup> There are simpler things states can do in-country too. Our research found that while foreign affairs recruitment commonly prized relationship management as a core competency, this was far more likely to be seen through the lens of elite stakeholder networks rather than the quite different skills set of community building. Changing the job descriptions and hiring processes of state missions in atrocity-at-risk states could be an easy place for governments to start.

National strategies of atrocity prevention must, from the off, reach in to domestic and international civil society to ensure that an emancipatory conceptualisation of R2P are at the heart of the endeavour.

## Key components of effective atrocity prevention by ambitious responsible powers

Translating atrocity prevention into practice must always be context specific; being consistent does not mean always doing the same thing – only approaching circumstances objectively and in accordance with consistent principles. Here we set out four of our own such principles, which build upon the work of the last several decades of atrocity prevention practice and analysis of state capabilities.<sup>47</sup> They are intended to be instructive rather than comprehensive, to complement existing contributions rather than to replace them.

### Prevention-first policy thinking

It seems obvious to state that the priority for an atrocity prevention strategy should be prevention. Certainly this is the experience from prevention work in other sectors, most notably in recent years in the field of public health and disease control. Yet frequently we see that the resourcing and political capital devoted to responding to or punishing ongoing atrocities far outweigh that applied to upstream work to prevent atrocities from occurring in the first place. Active management of potential atrocity crimes and wider dynamics of conflict and instability does not just save lives, it would also save resources – prevention is always cheaper than cure. The primary objective of an atrocity prevention strategy should therefore always be proactive, whatever stage a crisis or cause for concern may have reached.<sup>48</sup>

The principles of crisis prevention teach that moments of stress can lead to rapid fracture and sharply exacerbate existing instabilities and increase the vulnerabilities of already marginalised groups. Failure to activate this thinking when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out led to identity-based violence in practically every country in the world, from anti-Asian hate in the US and UK to providing distraction for the Tatmadaw in Myanmar or Assad in Syria. States need to get ahead of global risk trends in order to predict and prevent or mitigate the propellants of mass atrocity crimes rather than focus on the short crisis window that exists as violence is emerging or underway. Prevention-first systems assess threats that can still be prevented, mitigated or avoided at every stage of the risk life-cycle.

Most states already integrate prevention thinking and employ some level of future-oriented and foresight policy making. The Sustainable Development Goals and net emissions targets, for example, tie tangible if ambitious long-term objectives to national strategies. Some states such as the US and the UK are more consciously integrating horizon scanning that takes a longer view and/or explores a range of scenarios or possible futures as a means of preparing for or seeking to shape global trends, threats, or opportunities.<sup>49</sup>

Prevention-first thinking can be understood as a composite part of this growing ‘foresight’ approach to policy planning. These analytical techniques allow states to explore the many outcomes that could result from various pathways and should encourage joined-up policymaking by stimulating communication, knowledge and understanding between policymakers, policy delivery partners and stakeholders.



According to the UK government, “it helps evaluate our knowledge – in particular, any blind spots that we might have. Collectively, a greater understanding of uncertainty and complexity helps develop more resilient strategies and policies.”<sup>50</sup>

These strategies are in their infancy. Prevention-thinking is not yet properly prized by states as governments face increasingly rapid news cycles and the dual pressures of rising populism and shrinking resources encourage cuts to bureaucracies and civil service numbers. But the COVID-19 pandemic has now raised public as well as policy expectations regarding preparedness for crises, whether from the point of view of social resilience or systems thinking. Investing in and communicating commitment to meaningfully confront and prepare for crises could well emerge as the counterweight to plummeting trust in institutions and governments all over the world.

### **Investing in network analysis**

Knowing what to look for, how to analyse the information and how to ‘raise the alarm’ are crucial steps for timely warning and effective action. Atrocity prevention analysis has traditionally focussed on indicators of risk frequently missed by conflict and instability assessments but perhaps less on the dynamics that drive those risks or where opportunities for interruption or prevention might lie. Network mapping is an analytical tool that continues to be undervalued in the field of atrocity prevention. Disrupting and dismantling the architecture of atrocities as a means of prevention or mitigation remains more a tool likely to be employed by military actors engaged in armed conflict, security actors in response to violent extremism and terrorism, and in the increasingly sophisticated strategies against organised crime.

We agree that identifying, monitoring and analysing risk indicators is critical – in fact we advocate for an opening up of these processes to encourage more co-creation with local and civil society partners and redressing persistent gaps that continue to miss, for example, risks related to gender and sexuality.<sup>51</sup> We also believe stakeholder mapping or network analysis, which is far less discussed in the policy and literature of this field, could be much better used in multilateral, state and civil society approaches to modern atrocities.

Network analysis allows states to untangle the complex criminal architectures that perpetuate atrocities and so encourages a more creative and evidenced focus upon how these networks can be disrupted or dismantled. It brings to light the full spectrum of actors that enable the perpetration of violence, including supply chains, human trafficking networks, the arms trade (legal and illicit), media outlets, armed groups, and communities themselves. While political elites remain disproportionately responsible for the commission of mass atrocity crimes, they are not always the weak spot in the atrocity perpetration architecture. Network analysis allows actors to target those weak spots – be they financial flows, communication systems, or other forms of enablement.

From Bosnia to Syria, the failure to conduct such an analysis inhibited timely and effective response but even more fundamentally has meant decisions have been made based on incomplete intelligence, not because such information is impossible or costly to gather but because the systems are not in place. Without such a mapping, unclear chains of military command, or what were claimed to be non-state armed groups, were cited by policy makers and member states at the UN as reasons not to pursue protective action in Bosnia, Rwanda, initially in Darfur, Sri Lanka and, more recently, in Syria, Myanmar and Burundi.<sup>52</sup> The absence of clear intelligence and too limited a comprehension of perpetrators and defenders has consistently undermined the process of decision making at crucial moments in the face of the most serious violations. NATO, for example, was hamstrung in Libya in part because it did not have either the military or civilian systems to map and assess the network of actors involved in the aftermath of Gadaffi's fall.

As a result, state responses to atrocity risks tend to come from an unnecessarily narrow, fairly predictable playbook that begins with diplomatic statements of condemnation, might progress to the application of sanctions and the provision of humanitarian aid, and for some states escalate to punitive airstrikes. These unimaginative policy actions seem often to be pursued by states so as to be seen to be doing something, rather than be led by either a commitment to protect populations or analysis of what will work. Moreover this playbook is now well known by perpetrators who have usually priced such actions in as part of the cost of doing business.<sup>53</sup>

Network analysis is also vital for states seeking to support civil society and locally-led prevention efforts, a necessary tool in connecting early warning to local response, and connecting warning and response at the local, national, and international level. It therefore strengthens the process of reaching in and enables external actors to better support locally-led atrocity prevention. In his 2016 assessment of the early warning and response systems in the Great Lakes region, Ashad Sentongo concluded that what was needed was “a robust national and regional advocacy agenda, strengthening the capacity of [early warning and response] structures, resource mobilisation, creation of awareness, domestication of international instruments, and institutional linkages for information sharing around best practices and prevention-sensitive policies and local programmes.”<sup>54</sup>

We – and others – believe that conceiving of the networks that support perpetrators as a form of organised crime would both strengthen the understanding of where atrocities come from but also expose a hitherto concealed spectrum of possible entry points to aid prediction, prevention, protection and punishment strategies.<sup>55</sup> We therefore recommend that states invest in network analysis capabilities and so better understand what levers are available to them, what levers might prevent atrocities in a certain circumstance, what the overlap between those levers are, who holds the levers they do not, and what levers they in turn have with those actors. Without analysis of actors, power structures, flows of goods and finances, the analysis of the risk factors that conventional frameworks of atrocity

analysis capture is only ever half-way useful; bringing the two together combines knowledge of risk levels with knowledge of where power (and vulnerabilities) lie.

Such activities require conventional intelligence but also working with, and cultivating, national civilian expertise in the dynamics of modern atrocities, organised crime, the arms trade, and open-source analysis.

National strategies of atrocity prevention should therefore consciously integrate the commitment to and capacities for such analysis. While the specifics of state implementation of atrocity prevention efforts will always vary, risk analysis systems should usually form a crucial part of government capabilities. Whether this means integrating atrocity prevention risks and understanding into existing mechanisms of national security, horizon scanning or foresight thinking, the ultimate job of analysis is to disseminate information, raise red flags, and trigger action. Depending on severity this might require the country team, the R2P focal point, a designated minister, or the national security council to implement appropriate steps. Supporting those actors with the analysis they need requires modest but skilled capacity.

### **Institutionalisation: Between integration and specialisation**

For now most states in the global north, atrocity prevention is mostly likely to sit within foreign affairs ministries. Some states now include atrocity prevention in the job descriptions of their missions to the United Nations, in their conflict or stability frameworks, and in their embassy teams. It is common, although not yet common enough, for states to provide relevant officials with training in the fundamentals of atrocity prevention, whether to assist in identifying and responding to domestic or overseas risks. However, the vast majority of middle powers of the global north have yet to meaningfully integrate their commitment to and strategy for preventing atrocities across their government structures.

In her blueprint for atrocities prevention for the Biden administration, Beth Van Schaack wrote “atrocities prevention and response cannot be pursued in a vacuum.” “The atrocities prevention agenda should” she argues “be better integrated with adjacent rubrics, such as counterterrorism and preventing/countering violent extremism; addressing state fragility; Women, Peace and Security; engaging in conflict prevention; protecting civilians in our own and our partnered operations and ensuring their protection during peacekeeping activities; and providing humanitarian assistance where needed.”<sup>56</sup> In response to Van Schaack, Lawrence Woocher, on the other hand, while acknowledging the need for an intersectional atrocity prevention strategy, warns that “better integration of atrocities prevention with related agendas — is at risk of getting lost in the long list of more tangible to-dos.”<sup>57</sup>

There does not need to be a trade-off between mainstreaming – or integration – and specialisation. Indeed, both are required. Atrocity prevention has to be a whole-of-government strategy, otherwise the attempts to prevent atrocities by one section of

the government will be undermined by actions of other parts of government. But the way to ensure that such a strategy is implemented is by investing in analytical capacity and expertise, and a central focal hub, to develop atrocity prevention policies and communicate with the network of actors across government to ensure its implementation. At the very least, such an approach would allow for all relevant decisionmakers to make an informed risk-assessment as to how their actions might lead to possible state complicity in potential future atrocities – thus proactively managing liability and ensuring that all sectors of government amplify rather than hinder the state’s approach.

As we have learned from other fields such as Women, Peace and Security (WPS),<sup>58</sup> where an approach is mainstreamed, it can often become a tick box exercise, and where it is specialised, it can often become siloed and sometimes neglected. But where a focal hub that works through a whole of government network is established, it can coordinate, convene, and unlock.

Institutionalisation of atrocity prevention thinking, analysis, and policy could in fact help integrate currently overlapping but rarely coordinated approaches to preventing atrocities, increasing impact and reducing duplication, by increasing coherence of national contributions to agendas such as WPS, Protection of Civilians (POC), Human Rights (including Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Freedom of Religion or Belief, and Media Freedom), conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and counter terrorism/counterinsurgency (COIN) and Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE).

Likewise, officials tasked with upholding and developing national atrocity prevention contributions should also help establish greater coherence across, and therefore more effective implementation of issues such as sanctions policy, trade, justice and accountability, refugee policy, humanitarian response. In other words, establishing an atrocity prevention “seat” at the policy-making table will help maximise and coordinate contributions towards effective prediction and prevention across government<sup>59</sup> – but this should only be the beginning of the process. Atrocity prevention has to be consciously integrated into job descriptions and job titles but also has to be integrated across existing systems of monitoring, analysis, communication and policy.

### **Starting at home: Resilient societies**

Equitable, cohesive and resilient societies will not tolerate discrimination, identity-based violence or mass atrocities; they also can better withstand shocks and junctures of all kinds. Investing in community building is thus one of the most cost effective and sustainable means of preventing not only mass atrocity crimes but many other ills besides. This is as true for the UK as it is for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, many large and middle powers were ill-prepared for an external shock such as the Covid-19 pandemic in part because societal resilience

was already low and risks of social fracture were rising.<sup>60</sup> As a result, the pandemic was – and remains – not only a health crisis but a social and community crisis in much of the world.

The measure of a country's resilience is the cohesiveness of its communities, the responsiveness of and public trust in its institutions, and the stability of its economy.<sup>61</sup> Resilient societies are societies that address and redress grievances and other risk factors for identity-based violence. They are characterised by strong civil societies, functioning political societies, high levels of acceptance of the social contract and the absence of excluded or marginalised groups. This has the consequence of creating empowered and secure communities that are able to address problems that do occur before they become acute, and where – for example in response to an external force – resilient societies do come under threat they have the power and capabilities to respond to it.<sup>62</sup>

The investment in social resilience is worth making, even for countries that consider themselves not to be at risk from atrocities themselves. Over the past decade, more middle-income countries, including those with relatively strong institutions, experienced rising violence, including mass atrocities, calling into question “the long-standing assumption that peace will accompany income growth and the expectations of steady social, economic, and political advancement that defined the end of the twentieth century.”<sup>63</sup> The globalisation of hate-based networks and growing polarisation in democratic politics has likewise upended the belief that the prevention of identity-based violence is only required in some parts of the world but not others. These trends could well be accelerated by the pandemic and its ripple effects. It is likely this kind of rapid emergence of complex local-to-global challenges will become a more common feature of threats facing large and middle powers as well as fragile states, only to be exacerbated as consequences of climate change deepen.

Resilience is often seen in institutional or systems terms but it also comes from societal empathy and interpersonal connectivity. In her book, *The Force of Nonviolence*<sup>64</sup>, Judith Butler argues that the driving force behind much violence comes from the ability to not see certain kinds of victims – the ‘ungrievables’ as she terms them. The risk of being a victim of violence “is less a matter of who is a friend and who is an enemy but who counts as a life that matters and whose lives are regarded as dispensable.”<sup>65</sup> In response she articulates an ethical framework around the idea of deepening and developing interpersonal connections and empathy in order to eliminate ‘ungrievable’ persons. She argues against traditional notions of self-defence, which venerate the self, in favour of a notion of mutual defence through enhanced connectivity. This interconnectivity is what we mean by societal resilience, and this notion of mutual defence is an articulation of the responsibility to protect in its most fundamental and inspirational form.

Integrating a commitment to building a whole of society approach to resilience domestically and abroad requires a greater number of states, and perhaps

increasingly medium-sized powers, to become more effective at measuring indicators of cohesion, trust, critical thinking, civic participation, and inclusive democratic development. Moreover, governments must pivot to meet these challenges while clearly communicating how and why to the public, recognising that resilience necessarily requires support and participation from the local to the global. As such, the development of a comprehensive, effective approach to building resilience requires the buy-in and nurtures the trust of the publics it is designed to serve. Wide and open consultation would be essential. Civic education, in the classroom and beyond, must be an integral component.<sup>66</sup>

Building resilient societies therefore requires the participation of, and a willingness by governments to at times be led by, minority, marginalised and excluded groups, wider civil society, and expertise that is far more likely to be absent from policy decision rooms. It also requires governments to recommit to resolving inequalities, whether between genders, classes or other lines of division, and strengthen the offer of the social contract even, indeed especially, during times of economic hardship. In this manner a truly inclusive approach to cohesion and resilience in itself earns and develops trust in institutions, while strengthening civil society's power to hold those institutions to account.<sup>67</sup>

A whole-of-society approach to strengthen resilience is integral to ensuring that states can withstand shocks and continue to reduce domestic levels of identity-based violence, structural discrimination, and build a more responsible, empathetic, critically-minded online polity. Such an approach necessarily requires efforts not only to inform but to empower all parts of society who can make a contribution.

Domestic resilience is increasingly closely entwined with the global, and prioritising resilience at home should encourage greater harmonisation between domestic and foreign policy, not only on issues related to the prevention of mass atrocities but wider international challenges, from pandemics to climate change to misinformation.

## Conclusion

The mid-twenty-first century will be a very different era to the one we inhabit now. Many of the trends we can already identify indicate that even conservative projections would consider the continued increase of mass atrocity crimes highly likely. This paper has made the case for all states, but perhaps especially medium-sized powers, to take forward the unanimous commitment made in 2005 to help protect the lives of the world's most vulnerable from the very gravest international crimes. We have called for the devolution of this responsibility to flow out from the rooms of the United Nations through member states - not to dilute either the collective nature of the pursuit of a world where mass atrocities are less likely or the to lessen the onus on the UN to lead but as a means of strengthening – reinvigorating even – both.

We have endeavoured to present a view of state-level atrocity prevention that is rooted in certain fundamentals; that the pathology of mass atrocities is different from many other forms of violence and that their prevention necessarily requires partnership with the grassroots. But there is no one-size-fits-all answer, either for individual states wishing to adopt national strategies on atrocity prevention or across each of the many, many cases of mass atrocity we face today. Even our more concrete recommendations are only intended as guiderails and to complement the rich contributions our field has already made. Rather, we call for a means of looking at mass atrocities and their antecedents that moves away from an approach we believe too often encourages selectivity, inconsistency, firefighting and ultimately leads to warning signs and responsibilities falling through gaps. We urge too a final shift away from viewing (and implementing) atrocity prevention as an elite agenda belonging to a small circle of states and associated actors.

We urge a systems change that privileges the understanding of difference. Being consistent means applying the same principles to decision making, even if different contexts mean the same answer is not always reached. A failure to demonstrate such an application of principles leaves one open to charges of inconsistency and of complicity in atrocities, with devastating consequences for a state's credibility and thus the efficacy of their strategy. Inconsistency can and frequently has even taken the form of actively facilitating the perpetration of atrocities, whether in the sale of arms and police equipment to perpetrating states, in divisive and hostile immigration and asylum policies, in words and actions that stoke communal tensions or weaken our international system for short term political gain, in providing financial havens for the profits of atrocities, or in supply chains that connect industries of atrocity and their victim producers with global consumers.

Preventing atrocities is the right thing to do. It is one of the most noble tasks a state can perform. We call for states to replicate their commitment to pursue this task through their national policies and government architectures to ensure the hard, consistent work necessary to build a more just, equal and safe world is pursued at home and abroad in harmony and with vigour.



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