

## Preventing genocide and crimes against humanity The case for an atrocity prevention strategy

Holocaust Memorial Day 2021: *"Be the light in the darkness"*

Holocaust Memorial Day is a day where we reflect upon that most egregious period of European history and the genocides that came after, and it is a day when we look to a future free from identity-based persecution. Remembrance of past atrocities should help us understand that these appalling crimes are not inevitable; that they can, and must, be prevented.

The Holocaust was unique, as all atrocities are. But there are parallels and patterns of discrimination in the modern dynamics of genocide and crimes against humanity that cannot be ignored by Her Majesty's Government. The situation in the Xinjiang province of China is abhorrent and the parallels with Nazi Germany, such as train deportations and the removal of human hair, seem stark.

### Doing more to help prevent mass atrocities should not be contentious

Genocide and crimes against humanity are gross, widespread and systemic violations of human rights, often linked to identity. They can happen in conflict situations, such as in Syria and the Central African Republic, outside them, such as in North Korea and Xinjiang in China, or in hybrid contexts such as Myanmar or Iraq where atrocities occur as a distinct phenomenon from other manifestations of political violence.

These appalling crimes can be predicted and prevented but Her Majesty's Government currently lacks clarity on how it can help do so.

### A national strategy on genocide and crimes against humanity

A national atrocity prevention strategy would ensure that the UK government consider how best to mitigate or prevent widespread loss of life. The commitment made each Holocaust Memorial Day to learn from the past would be embedded in Britain's embassies, in Ministers' portfolios, and in Britain's contributions abroad. A national strategy would make the most of existing mechanisms that too often go unused, like prosecuting in our domestic courts genocide suspects living in the UK and safeguarding our banking system from the profits of slave labour, ethnic cleansing and other gross violations.

Without such a strategy, without applying a framework of how to help prevent future atrocities, opportunities to influence and mitigate will continue to be missed –as they were in Rakhine and Xinjiang.

### Support for a national strategy

The UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group have long been pushing for the government to adopt a national strategy. It was championed by the late Jo Cox during her year in parliament and has secured backing from members of parliament from the Conservative Party, Labour, SNP and Liberal Democrats. The Foreign Affairs Select Committee have repeatedly called upon the government to prioritise its atrocity prevention capabilities, most recently in its report on the future of UK international policy.

### Further reading

[Integrating atrocity prevention across UK policy: The need for a national strategy](#), Submission to the Integrated Review of International Policy from the UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group, August 2020

[Putting atrocity prevention at the heart of British foreign policy](#), Dr Kate Ferguson, Foreign Policy Group, September 2020