

The freedom to live without fear of discrimination, persecution and violence is a fundamental one. Yet, these freedoms are increasingly under attack. As already fragmented societies face repeated crises and shocks, communities find themselves the target of divisive political strategies that attack democratic values and unravel the bonds that unite us. Impunity and inconsistency in the face of mass atrocity crimes are unravelling the very foundations of international law, resulting in the most severe human rights, humanitarian and protection crises in a generation. As we remember those who perished in the Holocaust and all victims of mass atrocity crimes, we must transform our shared desire for a world free from such violence into resolute action, for a better future.

On Holocaust Memorial Day we reflect upon that egregious period of European history, and in particular this year we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz Birkenau.

On this day, we honour the Jewish, Roma, Sinti, LGBTQI+, Black, disabled and political communities who were persecuted by the Nazis and their allies. It is a day when we re-commit ourselves to building a future free from identity-based persecution, here in the UK and around the world.

The Holocaust was unique, as all atrocities are. We must, however, learn from and be attuned to the parallels of discrimination present across many modern atrocities perpetrated around the world today.

Atrocity crimes have not been relegated to history. They are not only fairly frequent, but rising.

Far from living up to our commitment of 'Never Again', the repeated failure to confront genocide and crimes against humanity has helped usher in an age of impunity. In practically every region of the world, from Ukraine to Syria, Myanmar to Ethiopia, and Sudan to Israel and Palestine, identity-based violence against people because of who they are - their race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, political affiliation, age, disability or class - is becoming a defining feature of this political era. In 2024:

- The [Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect](#) identified more than 30 countries wherein populations were at risk of, or are currently facing, mass atrocity crimes.
- The UN Refugee Agency recorded the number of forcibly displaced people reached an unprecedented [120 million](#) in May 2024.
- [It is estimated up to 150,000 have been killed in Sudan](#) and 11 million displaced, in part due to the identity-based violence perpetrated by the Rapid Support Forces, and the indiscriminate use of force by Sudanese Armed Forces, making it the world's largest humanitarian crisis.
- In Israel, [1,200 people were killed](#) and over 250 taken hostage in the October 7 Hamas attack.
- In Gaza, 1.9 million – [90 per cent](#) of the population – have been displaced, and over the past year an average of [475 children every month](#) – or 15 children a day – have sustained lifelong disabilities, including severely injured limbs and hearing impairments, due to the use of explosive weapons.
- The UN estimated that 2.7 million Haitians, including 1.6 million women and children, live in areas under gang control. Such areas are at [heightened risk](#) of grave and widespread human rights abuses, including killings, kidnappings and sexual violence, which may amount to crimes against humanity.
- In China, more than [100,000 Uyghurs](#) are working under conditions of forced labour, systematic oppression and evidence of imposing measures intended to prevent births.
- In Myanmar, around [630,000 Rohingyas](#) remain under a system of apartheid that leaves them exceptionally vulnerable to the military's [indiscriminate attacks](#) on civilians using helicopter gunships, artillery, and ground assaults.

Genocide and crimes against humanity are never inevitable and can often be prevented. The UK must prioritise efforts to raise the alarm, mitigate violence, hold perpetrators accountable, and save lives.

As a result of growing cross-party calls across both Houses, positive change in the UK's approach to preventing mass atrocities is gaining pace. In 2021, atrocity prevention was identified as a priority in the Integrated Review on Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, spurring the FCDO to establish a team in Whitehall with dedicated staff, a welcome commitment to prevention. However, the prevention of genocide and crimes against humanity needs consistent political leadership and resource – it also requires clear strategy.

Since 2017 the Foreign Affairs and International Development Committees have made repeated demands for a whole-of-government approach and dedicated atrocity prevention strategy.

"Our predecessor Committees and a multitude of civil society actors have criticised the Government's approach of conflating atrocity prevention with conflict prevention. History tells us time and time again that these are distinct issues, demanding distinct approaches, each with a clear strategy. We recommend that the Government introduce a national, cross-departmental strategy for atrocity prevention."

- Foreign Affairs Committee, *Never Again: The UK's Responsibility to Act on Atrocities in Xinjiang and Beyond*

"Without a strategy, I am concerned about how the government will measure whether its efforts stack up and deliver real change for those at risk. I fear that, once again, individuals and communities will fall through the cracks of UK policy. They are the ones who will pay the ultimate price."

A new model requires a plan that extends to the whole of government. It requires dedicated budget lines, whether within the sanctions team, in key embassies, or within the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund [now Integrated Security Fund]. It requires mandatory training for ambassadors so that there is no chance that they are left without support in their hour of need. Most of all, this emerging model needs political leadership."

- Sarah Champion MP, Chair, International Development Committee

The prevention of identity-based violence and mass atrocities is a collective responsibility that begins at home and extends through to our participation in the world.

No community, society or country is immune to identity-based violence. All states, governments, and policymakers have a part to play in upholding national and international commitments to prevent atrocity crimes, including improving the UK's own domestic responses to the spectrum of identity-based harms, from hate crime to violent extremism and atrocity crimes. In times of political, economic or social crisis, societies become more vulnerable – with history showing the most marginalised groups often paying the greatest price. As an organisation that also works to confront and prevent identity-based violence in the UK, we know that when violence escalates abroad, hate crime and hate incidents rise in our own towns and cities.

This summer saw the most geographically widespread racist, and in particular Islamophobic, riots in a century, exposing the fragility of our social fabric. Hostile UK asylum and immigration policies risk abandoning the lessons and commitments borne out of the horrors of the Holocaust regarding the need to provide safe routes, sanctuary and solidarity with those fleeing atrocities. Violence in Israel and Palestine has propelled [sharp rises of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia](#) across the UK, damaging decades-long intercommunity relationships. LGBTQI+ communities across the world are increasingly being targeted by divisive populist agendas, leading to increased levels of hate and violence against queer communities both within and beyond our borders.

The responsibility to protect people from discrimination – whether from hate crimes or mass atrocity crimes – is therefore both domestic and international. Ongoing effort is required, from local grassroots groups to political leaders, to ensure that everybody's rights and freedoms are protected and respected. As this time of year offers an opportunity reflect on the lessons we have learnt since January 1945, drawing on the fortitude and leadership of those who survived Nazi persecution and continue to raise their voices in pursuit of a more just, less divided world, we are dutybound to not only look to, but forge, a better future.

A chance for global British leadership: towards an atrocity prevention strategy

In pursuing a military victory above all else in the Second World War, Europe's Jewish communities were left unprotected by the Allied Nations. 'Never Again' means accepting this hard lesson, learning from history and prioritising the protection of human lives. Thus, the lessons of the Holocaust teach us that the prevention of mass atrocity crimes and identity-based violence cannot wait. Prevention must be consciously centred in, and deliberately integrated across, the domestic and foreign policies of all states that aspire to shape a better future.

The International Development Select Committee's 2022 report *From Srebrenica to a safer tomorrow: Preventing future mass atrocities around the world* provides a practical roadmap for how the UK can better respond to and prevent identity-based violence and atrocity crimes, enshrining a whole-of-government approach and dedicated strategy on mass atrocity crimes.

Since 2018 the UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group has called for a national strategy on mass atrocity crimes. Protection Approaches has recommended that any such strategy have four components:

- **Prevention-first policy thinking** which seeks to stop atrocities before they occur, by disrupting and dismantling the structures that allow perpetrators to act with impunity.
- **Mapping the networks of enablement and profit** to identify and confront those who drive mass atrocities and identify points of influence where the UK and others can help disrupt and mitigate violence.
- **Institutionalising the commitment to Never Again** that finds the balance between integration and specialisation, ensuring that atrocity prevention is not siloed but rather a cross-government priority.
- **Developing resilient societies** where cohesive equitable communities, high public trust and strong inclusive institutions limit and mitigate the damage from internal and external shocks.

What can Parliamentarians do?

We therefore ask parliamentarians this Holocaust Memorial Day to call on HMG to embrace the International Development Committee's recommendations on how the UK and likeminded states can do better to prevent genocide, crimes against humanity and other mass atrocities, including by:

- Establishing a **national strategy on the prevention of mass atrocities** that integrates commitments across domestic and foreign policy.
- Making a **whole-of-government commitment** to use all its tools and levers to help prevent genocide and crimes against humanity.
- Creating **dedicated budget lines** to adequately resource prevention efforts across departments and teams, whether in the sanctions team, to support key Embassies, or within the Integrated Security Fund.
- Ensuring all **embassies and posts receive atrocity prevention training** and priority countries receive specialist support, training and adequate resources.