

Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus

Written evidence from Protection Approaches

Executive Summary

1. As Covid-19 spreads, and as the social, political, and economic consequences of the pandemic deepen, vulnerable groups will be put in greater jeopardy in all regions of the world. However, these processes have increasingly worse impacts in fragile societies with on-going humanitarian crises or other dependencies on development aid. In these scenarios, society-wide crises like this pandemic can serve as a trigger or as justification for mass violence.
2. This submission speaks to the broad scope set out in the terms of reference and specifically the direct and indirect impacts of the outbreak on developing countries, and specific risks and threats (particularly relating to countries with existing humanitarian crises and/or substantial populations of refugees or internally displaced persons)

About Protection Approaches

3. Protection Approaches works to confront and prevent identity-based violence by developing and implementing innovative programmes that address all forms of hate. From Newham in East London to Bangui in the Central African Republic, we work with local communities, civil society organisations, policymakers, governments, academics and multilateral institutions to develop strategies that predict, prevent and protect all forms of identity-based violence. Protection Approaches convenes the [UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group](#).
4. Protection Approaches is a registered charity in England and Wales, charity number 1171433. For more information please see www.protectionapproaches.org.
5. This submission has been prepared by Dr. Kate Ferguson, Co-Executive Director and Head of Research & Policy at Protection Approaches. Dr. Ferguson is a leading peace and security expert, specialising in violence prevention and civilian protection. She is Chair of Policy at the European Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, University of Leeds, a member of the Centre for Science & Policy's Network for Evidence and Expertise at the University of Cambridge and Honorary Research Fellow at the University of East Anglia. Dr. Ferguson holds a PhD from UEA on the dynamics of modern mass atrocities, and an M.Phil in Russian and East European Studies from the University of Oxford.
6. For further details or questions relating to this submission please contact Kate.Ferguson@protectionapproaches.org

Atrocity Prevention and Covid-19

7. The prevention of identity-based violence and mass atrocities is not needed in some places some of the time but everywhere all the time. The Covid Pandemic should underline this truism, not undermine it. An established lesson of atrocity prevention is that moments of acute stress exacerbate existing structural risk factors of atrocities and create new ones. The coronavirus crisis will be no exception: without timely and effective preventative measures, the economic, social, and political consequences will likely take more lives than the virus

itself.¹ Minority and marginalised populations will be most at risk, including refugees, those who have been displaced from their homes.

8. As the virus spreads, every country in the world will experience identity-based violence as a result of the Covid Pandemic. This already includes widespread documentation of hate crime against people of Chinese and east Asian appearance across the global north, increased attacks against Muslims in India, and a worldwide rise in domestic violence.² Some states have been quick to mobilise the crisis to justify, or distract attention from, authoritarian power grabs. Hungary's government moved to freeze refugee applications within days of the virus reaching Europe and is seeking to end the legal recognition of trans people.³ In Brazil there are concerns that indigenous communities in the Amazon are in danger of being "wiped out" by the disease as the President continues to deny its dangers.⁴ In Myanmar and Syria there are concerns that the virus will be weaponised by the state against vulnerable displaced communities.⁵
9. The atrocity prevention and peacebuilding communities, and their associated architecture, must now be leveraged to ensure that the Covid-19 response has at its heart what decades of practice have taught us: Intersectional, inclusive communities are where resilience of all kinds comes from –whether in the face of a pandemic, economic crisis or identity-based division. This is as true on the global level as it is the national and local. We are therefore presented with a once in a century opportunity to respond to a worldwide challenge with a genuinely global and prevention-oriented response.
10. Unless identity-based violence and atrocity are integrated into local, national and global responses to the worldwide health crisis, the pandemic risks accelerating these trends – and atrocities that could have been prevented will occur.

Integrating indicators of identity-based violence into Covid-19 responses

11. The consequences of weak resilience in the face of the Covid Pandemic and the economic crisis that will follow are difficult to predict. As experts of identity-based violence, we are aware that moments of acute stress exacerbate existing structural risk factors of atrocities and create new ones. Certain processes and warning signs signal a society's vulnerability to divisive and hate-based behaviours. Where not already in place, these should be monitored in fragile societies with on-going humanitarian crises or other dependencies on development aid, and integrated into DfID programming and the work of UK missions as a matter of urgency.
12. While not exhaustive, these society-wide indicators include:
 - national level political or economic crisis
 - intergroup tensions or patterns of discrimination against identity groups
 - widespread, often competing, perception/s of grievance, threat, or inequality
 - sense of group, community or national insecurity

¹ [Atrocity Prevention and Covid-19: Opportunities and Responsibilities](#), Protection Approaches, April 2020

² [A New Covid-19 Crisis: Domestic Violence Rises Worldwide](#), New York Times, 14 April 2020

³ [Hungary seeks to end legal recognition of trans people amid Covid-19 crisis](#), Guardian, 2 April 2020

⁴ [Coronavirus 'could wipe out Brazil's indigenous people'](#), BBC, 6 April 2020

⁵ [Covid-19 will massacre prisoners on the Syrian regime's behalf](#), New Statesman, 9 April 2020; [One of the world's most vulnerable groups now finds itself confronting covid-19](#), Washington Post, 2 April 2020

- normalisation of hate speech, dehumanising language, and incitement to violence against identity groups
- revival of historic grievance, myths of collective victimhood, politicisation of national memory
- widespread disinformation, propaganda, and fake news
- widespread delegitimisation of expertise and intellectualism
- widespread lack of trust in the media
- widespread lack of trust in the Government
- widespread belief that the democratic process cannot lead to positive change
- removal of or failure to uphold human rights protections
- growth in number and legitimacy of groups who use violence or the threat of violence
- impunity for those who commit, incite, or threaten violence⁶

13. These indicators of hate are used all over the world to assess resilience of states and societies, yet they are found to be absent from many UK horizon-scanning processes, including the Joint Analysis of Conflict and Stability (JACS). These structural risk factors are made worse by crises, increasing the likelihood of IBV and mass atrocity. The Covid-19 Pandemic will be no exception; without timely and effective preventative measures, the economic, social, and political consequences will likely take more lives than the virus itself. Risk factors and indicators therefore need to be closely monitored, not only in countries where atrocities are already ongoing or considered more likely, but in all states.

14. The integration of atrocity-specific analysis into Covid-19 policies and decision-making processes will help maximise and coordinate contributions towards effective prediction and prevention as states respond to the pandemic and its consequences. This should include the insertion of indicators of risk particular to identity-based violence, including violent extremism and mass atrocities, into horizon scanning, next stage scenario mapping, and strategic planning.

15. Truly effective prevention, whether of disease or violence, requires an ecosystem. As communities, national governments, and international organisations wrestle with current challenges and prepare for worse to come they must do so together and holistically across issues rather than pivot to a narrow health-only response.

Leveraging Atrocity Prevention in Her Majesty's Government's humanitarian monitoring and response

16. While the UK, unlike many states, still has no formal national strategy or mechanism for atrocity prevention, the government's policy guidance is clear that the Minister for the United Nations has oversight of human rights and atrocity prevention.⁷ The FCO's Director of Multilateral Policy is the senior official responsible for these policy areas, and serves as the UK's 'Focal Point' for the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). Both offices and their teams are well placed to convene across Whitehall and with the country teams; raise questions; and share information, ensuring that those tasked with responding to Covid-19 and its consequences are applying an identity-based violence and atrocity prevention-sensitive approach.

⁶ These indicators are drawn from Protection Approaches' risk analysis framework and global best practice including: 'Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes; A tool for prevention', United Nations 2014; and 'Preventing Violent Extremism through Inclusive Development and the Promotion of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity' UNDP, 2016

⁷ [UK approach to preventing mass atrocities](#), HMG, July 2019

17. These activities must engage DfID, particularly those coordinating HMG's on the ground response to Covid-19 and its consequences. There is a danger that the humanitarian response will be pursued independently of the political, human rights, and violence prevention activity. Close coordination between FCO and DfID, and with DfID and relevant atrocity prevention and peacebuilding NGOs is essential.
18. The Covid-19 crisis has underlined this need for a national strategy on atrocity prevention; without one, the UK is unable to undertake the necessary risk assessments and will find it difficult to move quickly should risks escalate rapidly. We are therefore also recommending that HMG considers introducing a short-term internal alarm system or flag-raising mechanism for the UK's country teams to communicate rapidly rising atrocity risk factors to Whitehall.

Humanitarian monitoring and response coordination with civil society

19. In an open letter signed by over 50 NGOs from across the world to governmental partners on the importance of atrocity prevention during the Covid-19 pandemic, the case was made for governments to support civil society responses to the pandemic.⁸ Coordinated by Protection Approaches, the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide (New York) and Genocide Alert (Berlin) and signed by over 50 NGOs, the community of prevention expressed its concern that the current global emergency will hit the world's vulnerable and most marginalised the hardest. During this prolonged period of extreme need, the crisis also threatens the future of many of the very organizations that serve to prevent and protect those people from persecution and mass atrocities. As experts in the prevention of these terrible crimes, we urged and continue to urge governments around the world to show foresight in recognizing these risks, and leadership by supporting their domestic and international NGOs to meet this unprecedented challenge together.
20. Our shared responsibility to prevent genocide and other mass atrocities continues to be as essential as it has ever been. The critical nature of government support for and participation in the work of atrocity prevention by NGOs cannot be understated. The UK should ensure civil society atrocity prevention efforts not only remain robust but can also be expanded in this period of great need.
21. The Government should therefore adapt its funding streams in order to provide emergency general operating support to atrocity prevention NGOs; fund programming to address risk factors for mass atrocities that are accelerated by the pandemic and its consequences; provide easy to access, quick release funds for smaller NGOs and community-led responses to elevated risk factors of identity-based violence and mass atrocities; support the types of programming that we are able to implement in the midst of the pandemic, including, but not limited to online education courses, research projects and technical assistance programs; innovative cross-sector programming that sees the integration of atrocity prevention into COVID-19 responses.⁹
22. New means of communication could significantly impact common understanding of identity-based violence and atrocity prevention, help to narrow the gap between early warning and timely response, and even dismantle misconceptions of atrocity prevention and the

⁸ [Open Letter to the Governments of the World, 27 April 2019](#)

⁹ Ibid.

responsibility to protect as exclusionary or ‘western’ agendas. In addition, establishing virtual ways of working could dramatically reduce the atrocity prevention sector’s carbon footprint, reconciling how we work with our shared mission. This might mean channelling funding into providing internet connectivity to those who live and operate without internet access, which some studies have shown is a primary indicator of an increase in positive peace.¹⁰

Recommendations to Government

- Integrate indicators of identity-based violence into DfID’s health, humanitarian and other Covid-19 related responses, programme design, and scenario planning
- Leverage existing atrocity prevention structures and expertise within Government
- Provide emergency general operating support to atrocity prevention NGOs to allow us to continue our essential work
- Fund programming to address risk factors for mass atrocities that are accelerated by the pandemic and its consequences
- Provide easy to access, quick release funds for smaller NGOs and community-led responses to elevated risk factors of identity-based violence and mass atrocities
- Support the types of programming that we are able to implement in the midst of the pandemic, including, but not limited to, establishing new means of communication, network building, and delivery; online education courses, research projects and technical assistance programs; innovative cross-sector programming that sees the integration of atrocity prevention into COVID-19 responses
- Make flexible provision within all grants to enable atrocity prevention NGOs to accommodate the new reality of working in a period of restricted movement, high levels of staff absence, and amid a period of collective as well as individual grief, quick release funds available for local civil society efforts
- Consult with the UK Atrocity Prevention Working Group, convened by Protection Approaches

¹⁰ [Positive Peace Report, Institute For Economics & Peace, 2019](#)