



Protection Approaches

Preventing mass atrocities  
Could UK civil society be doing more?

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## About Protection Approaches

Protection Approaches works to improve the protection of people from identity-based violence. Through its Research & Policy and Learning & Outreach programmes, Protection Approaches seeks to strengthen UK understanding of and commitment to prediction, prevention and protection approaches to identity-based violence through research-led policy engagement and education outreach.

Protection Approaches was established to fill a gap in the UK's third sector, where attention on the specific threats posed by mass atrocities had been lagging behind civil society endeavours elsewhere. Protection Approaches is the only organisation in the United Kingdom that works to address the diverse challenges of identity-based violence, from hate crime to violent extremism and genocide.

In 2015 the Charity launched a programme tasked with enhancing UK contributions to predicting, preventing and responding to mass atrocities. We undertake in-house policy and analysis and work to assist the UK Parliament, Government, and civil society in strengthening their own approaches to prevention.

But it was never our goal to do it all ourselves. Protection Approaches believes the responsibility to protect people from identity-based violence, including mass atrocities, is a shared one that encompasses local communities, the private and third sectors, national and international leaderships.

## Organisations who attended the workshop

|                              |                                          |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Aegis Trust                  | Peace Direct                             |
| Adam Smith International     | Protection Approaches                    |
| APPG Friends of Syria        | Royal United Services Institute          |
| APPG on Human Rights         | Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice |
| Burma Campaign UK            | STAND                                    |
| Crisis Action                | United Nations Association - UK          |
| European Centre for R2P      | Videre Online                            |
| Eyewitness to Atrocities     | Waging Peace                             |
| Holocaust Memorial Day Trust | War Studies - Kings College London       |

# 1. Executive summary

The consequences of mass atrocities are far reaching and long lasting. Their human cost is catastrophic, their economic cost endures for generations and their impact is global. The challenge of preventing these terrible crimes is a complex one and requires collective commitment from societies, national governments, and international leaderships.

The United Kingdom can and should be a global leader in its contributions to the prevention of mass atrocities. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, a founding member of NATO, and a leading aid donor, the UK Government plays a critical role in steering global prevention and protection efforts, and has significant national capacity to integrate these commitments throughout its trade, development, defence, foreign, and domestic policies. Likewise, UK civil society should be leading by example, applying scrutiny to UK and international policy, and integrating a prevention 'lens' across its human rights and development activities. Instead, the UK could be seen to be falling behind others in its contributions to this urgent agenda.

The prevention of mass atrocities is a shared responsibility and no state, no community and no sector should be expected to shoulder that burden alone. This paper is concerned with UK civil society contributions. Drawing on extensive formal and informal conversations with civil society actors in the UK and abroad, in-house research, and a civil society workshop, this document provides a background to work being undertaken by UK NGOs in and around atrocity prevention, obstacles to more effective collective activity, and recommendations of next steps.

## Key findings:

- UK civil society is already contributing to the global prevention of mass atrocities however efforts remain disparate and disconnected
- The potential for UK civil society to effect greater change by coordinating collective activity and augmenting existing activities is considerable
- Resources available to support UK-based civil society atrocity prevention efforts are very limited and current capacity is overstretched
- Misconceptions and wariness of precisely what atrocity prevention is and how it can be pursued and/or supported by UK-based NGOs is the most pronounced obstacle to more effective collaborative and coordinated activity

## Key recommendations:

- More effective coordination or collaboration across UK civil society would facilitate resource-light, impact-heavy activities such as communication, semi-regular meetings, knowledge exchange and best-practice sharing, goal setting, and collective advocacy
- Any formal civil society network or mechanism resourced to view UK current and emerging policy challenges through a framework of atrocity prevention would UK civil society to act as 'first responder' to warning signs and initiate processes of sharing information, scrutinising policy, and communicating with other relevant stakeholders in the UK and abroad
- Increased resources to fund and support UK-based civil society atrocity prevention activity would therefore yield substantial and measurable results

## 2. What is atrocity prevention?

Mass atrocities provides a non-legal catch-all for ethnic cleansing, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. Atrocity crimes and identity-based violence can occur in peacetime or during conflict.

- **Genocide:** Acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group
- **Ethnic cleansing:** The deliberate and systematic forcible removal of a racial, religious, ethnic, political, or cultural group from a specific geographical area
- **Crimes against humanity:** Acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population
- **War crimes:** Acts committed during an armed conflict that constitute serious violations of international humanitarian law

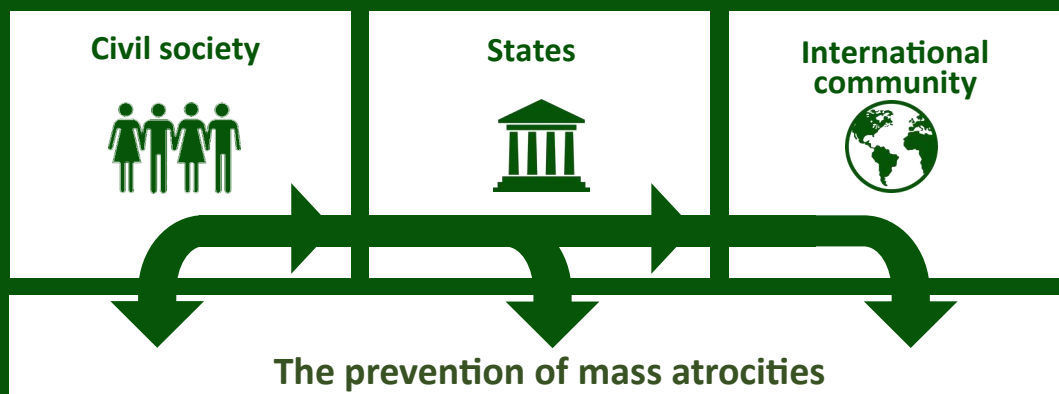
Although the victims and the ways in which atrocities manifest often look different, many of the processes that precede identity-based violence are the same. By understanding the common causes, risk factors, and drivers of these seemingly disconnected acts we can start to develop shared approaches to prediction, prevention and protection. Most manifestations of violence motivated by perpetrator conceptualisation of victim identity, from hate crime, acts of terrorism, to mass atrocities such as ethnic cleansing or genocide are best understood as processes rather than as singular events. And processes can be recognised and identified; processes can also be interrupted, diverted, and reversed. In other words, mass atrocities can be predicted and prevented.

While the prevention of mass atrocities has sometimes been seen as a very specific and often overwhelming goal it is an agenda that straddles many global challenges. In fact, atrocity prevention requires a holistic approach in which many actors, with different instruments and expertise, should play a role. The effective prevention of mass atrocities requires the collective effort of multiple stakeholders, through varied approaches. It inevitably overlaps with many other priorities including conflict prevention, peacebuilding, the prevention of violence extremism, and promoting social cohesion.

Atrocity prevention is not an agenda, vision, or strategy that seeks to displace others but rather simply advocates for the application of an additional 'lens' in decision making, whether at an individual level, within local communities, companies or sectors, or in Government. Viewing issues through what is often called an 'atrocity prevention lens' simply means ensuring that the central focus in decision making is how best to mitigate violence and how best to protect populations. Integrating such a lens to certain decision-making processes and working methods across UK civil society could help to harmonise existing efforts in related fields and break down conceptual barriers within the wider human rights sector currently inhibiting more joined-up approaches to preventing violence and protecting lives.

### 3. Rationale

Identity-based violence, including mass atrocities and violent extremism, poses one of the greatest threats to human security and global stability – and not only in the short term. Identity politics are deepening worldwide, the incidence of mass atrocities has been increasing since 2012, and the majority of today’s refugees are fleeing atrocity situations. It is estimated that by 2030 over half of the world’s poor will be living in countries affected by high levels of violence, and as the effects of climate change continue to force people from their homes, identity-based violence will likely become a common feature of resource-based conflicts. Rising occurrences of mass atrocities and worsening levels of human displacement will cause the existing crises of local and global social cohesion to deteriorate unless root causes are addressed. It is clearly in the collective interests of UK civil society to help do so.



The UK has a proud tradition of civil society advocacy, non-governmental and voluntary organisations, and a robust human rights sector. UK civil society makes world-leading contributions to international development, conflict prevention, higher education and research, and human rights advocacy. At the same time, the UK Government is the world’s third largest single state foreign aid donor, occupies a permanent seat at the UN Security Council and draws on considerable soft power. The UK’s capacity to lead by example, whether through state channels or its civil society, is considerable.

As the UK prepares to enter a new era outside of the European Union, at a time when the rules-based multilateral system is facing threats from many sides, British-based civil society will play a crucial role as the country seeks to renegotiate and articulate its new international identity. How the UK chooses to respond to the rising global challenge of identity-based violence will impact not only those populations who will face the threat of these crimes but also the very future of the post-1945 system, the UK’s continued role within it, and Britain’s global influence.

However, the UK and its civil society face an increasingly challenging landscape of growing need, rising hostility and competing agendas. The prevention of atrocities is not yet seen as an urgent or realistic priority. Despite broad consensus across British civil society in support of the post-1945 commitment to a world free of genocide, cognisance of mass atrocity prevention as a distinct and realisable goal remains low.



The UK's civil society, successive governments and the general public stand firm in a shared commitment to honour the memory of past atrocities. The UK can be proud of its genocide memorialisation and school education. Holocaust Memorial Day on 27th January each year honours the victims of the Holocaust and Nazi persecution, and genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur. The UK now also officially recognises 11th July as Srebrenica Memorial Day. In England, by law children are to be taught about the Holocaust as part of the Secondary history curriculum; the Holocaust is the only historical event it is compulsory to study. In 2010 the position of Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Post-Holocaust Issues was created, a Foreign Office appointment tasked with ensuring that the lessons of the Holocaust are never forgotten - not only in the UK but around the world.

By contrast, government engagement with civil society on the prevention genocide and other mass atrocities is less evident and the Foreign Office is more likely to communicate with international NGOs working on atrocity prevention rather than smaller, UK-based organisations. An exception was the first Foreign Office-Civil Society roundtable meeting aimed at strengthening dialogue on atrocity prevention in December 2016, organised by Protection Approaches, Waging Peace, and the Foreign Office. While the UK Government is proud to 'promote the advocacy and the institutionalisation of R2P activity in the international arena' it currently provides no financial support to UK-based civil society organisations that undertake such work. This is despite the fact that UK organisations are much more likely to understand the intricacies of UK national policy, nuances of domestic politics, and how the UK can better contribute to the atrocity prevention agenda.

One reason for the underdeveloped government-civil society dialogue in this area may be that the civil society space in the UK working in and around atrocity prevention is relatively new and disconnected.

Another could be that, unlike in the United States, the memorialisation of the Holocaust has remained somewhat separate from civil society and Government atrocity prevention activities. Existing national cross-sector commitments, networks, and activities of memorialisation rarely cross over with the national or international policy discussions on the prevention of atrocities. There are, of course, exceptions. But it has been interesting, for example, to find that among active civil society genocide education networks there is relatively low knowledge of the UN 'Responsibility to Protect' principles that, unanimously agreed by all member states in 2005, set out national and international responsibilities to protect populations from mass atrocities.

Whatever the cause, the UK could be seen to be falling behind other countries in how its civil society approaches mass atrocities. Despite many hard fought-for gains and the scale of the challenge, British civil society has hitherto failed to harness its capacity and harmonise its voices in support of what is frequently articulated as a shared and important goal: a world where the risk of mass atrocities is greatly reduced, and a world where the UK is leading by example in its contributions to their effective and timely prevention.

It was for this reason that in Spring 2017 Protection Approaches began coordinating a small network of likeminded NGOs working in and around atrocity prevention.

We now convene a UK civil society Mass Atrocity Prevention Working Group and are exploring ways in which the organisation and group can support wider civil society to more consciously engage with the agenda of mass atrocity prevention. In June this year we convened our first civil society workshop to test the appetite for a more focussed, collaborative approach, and to consider if Protection Approaches was the right organisation to take this forward. This paper seeks to tie together the outcomes of that workshop but is also informed by over 200 conversations with many other colleagues, allies, and 'atrocity prevention skeptics' from all corners of the UK. It is not comprehensive. There are perspectives that are missing. This assessment of UK civil society is only intended as a conversation starter, shaped by the networks Protection Approaches is building, and from the expertise that has been offered. Rather than proposing any reinvention of existing methods or simply being unrealistic we propose two basic goals:

- harmonisation across UK civil society to facilitate easy-to-achieve resource-light, impact-heavy activities such as regular communication, semi-regular meetings, knowledge exchange and best-practice sharing, goal setting, and collective advocacy.
- a more formal civil society network resourced to view current and emerging policy challenges through a framework of atrocity prevention would enable UK civil society to act as 'first responder' to warning signs and initiate processes of sharing information, scrutinising policy, and communicating with relevant stakeholders in the UK and around the world.



## 4. The workshop

While not always described as such, UK civil society already makes substantial and important contributions to the prevention of mass atrocities. There are many UK-based organisations whose work reduces the likelihood of atrocities, though they might not use that language. Protection Approaches has identified a growing group of UK NGOs and individual experts who are increasingly interested in or consciously contributing to the atrocity prevention agenda. To our knowledge, these actors within UK civil society had never previously been brought together nor their activities mapped to explore potential for collective or collaborative action.

The prevention of mass atrocities crimes is strengthened by the actions and decisions of many different actors but can require something different or additional to more traditional interpretations of conflict prevention, peace building and other overlapping agendas. We thought it important to consider the benefits of elevating the atrocity prevention agenda to a more prominent position in UK civil society, not as a means of replicating or replacing existing efforts within the broader human rights movement but to augment and strengthen the activities of a growing network of organisations whose work is too often seen as being unrelated.

On Thursday 7th June 2018, Protection Approaches held its first civil society workshop, convened over two 90-minute sessions, bringing together 30 people from 18 organisations we identified as working towards a world free from mass atrocities.

Participants were asked to articulate how their organisations currently conceive atrocity prevention, what percentage of their time is spent pursuing that agenda, and the ways in which their mission and/or activities contribute to that goal. In small groups participants were asked to consider all the different ways their organisations undertook atrocity prevention activities, and with which stakeholders. Very few prompts were provided by the facilitators as Protection Approaches staff were keen to listen and document participant perceptions of their own work, the work of others, and of the atrocity prevention agenda itself.

This physical map (p8-9) illustrates how different organisation's missions and activities overlap, intersect, and complement others. It provides, for the first time, an illustration of the extent to which UK civil society organisations are already contributing to this important agenda and even wider network of stakeholders already receiving or benefitting from these activities.

The afternoon session of the workshop began with some 'blue sky thinking', asking participants to consider what their ideal UK atrocity prevention sector would look like. Groups were then asked to identify the obstacles to their vision before problem-solving major challenges. The following pages set out the conversations that took place during the workshop, before turning to next steps for the sector, and how Protection Approaches plan to take these forward.



## 5. UK civil society contributions to the prevention of mass atrocities

**Advocacy and campaigning:** Advocacy and Campaigning makes up the largest contribution by UK civil society to atrocity prevention, both in terms of number of organisations and breadth of activities. Nearly 86% of the workshop participants considered themselves or their organisations as advocates of atrocity prevention in some form or another. Given that the UK is often viewed as a country without a substantive civil society community working towards this agenda, this might be viewed as surprising. However, most organisations seek to build support for specific causes, policies, or changes rather than the wider global challenge of preventing future crimes wherever they may occur.

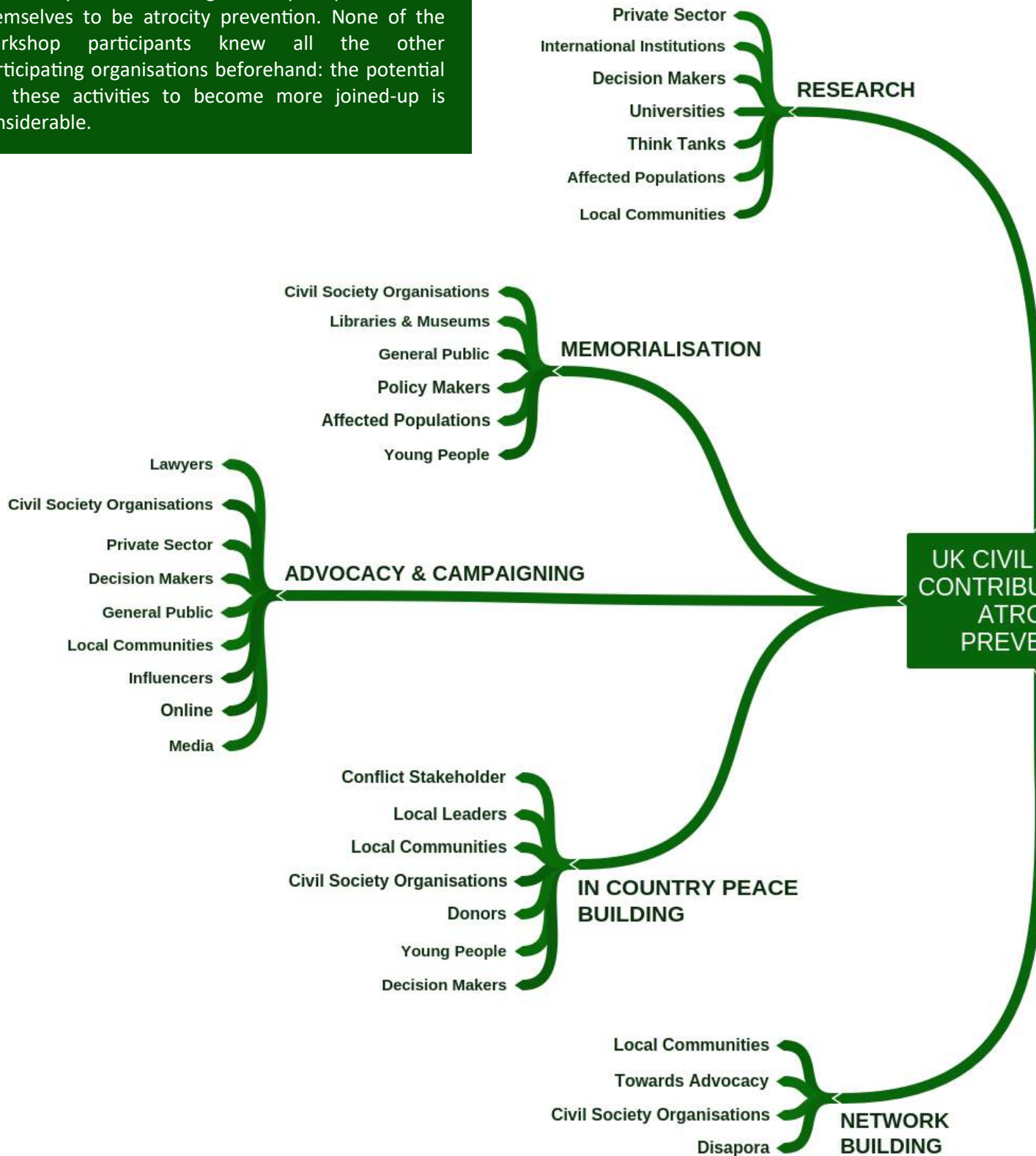
UK approaches to advocacy in this space are varied and encompass a wide spectrum of networks, duty bearers, and points of leverage. Organisations are already successfully engaging civil society organisations, policymakers, local communities, young people, affected communities, victims and survivors, the public, the media, academics and experts, and the private sector. However, these activities remain for the most part disconnected. The potential for joined-up atrocity prevention advocacy activities is substantial but currently remains largely unexplored.

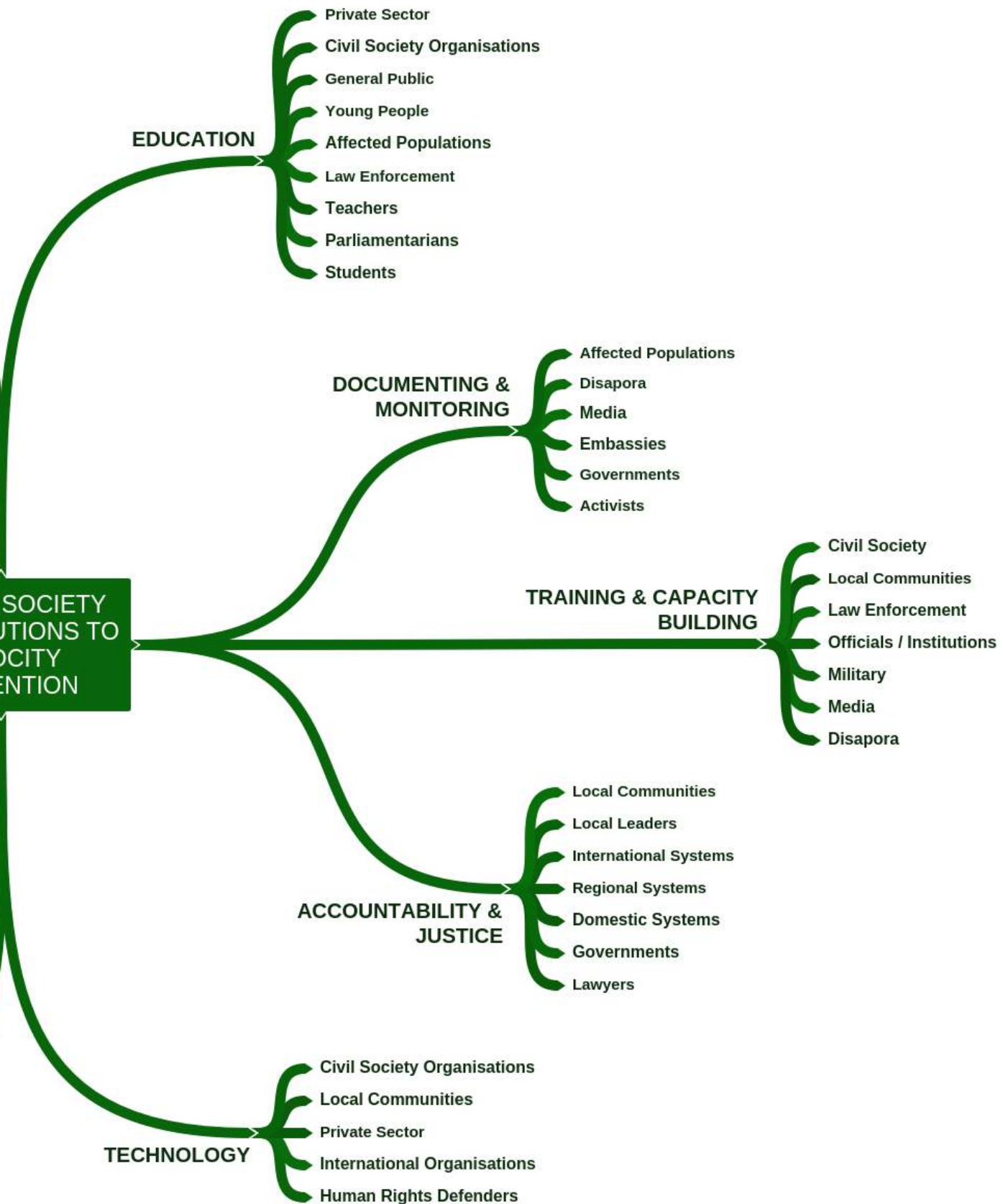
**Education:** Education activities on and around issues relating to mass atrocities appear to form the second largest contribution by UK civil society organisations to the agenda with 15 out of 19 of the participating organisations delivering such services. These activities reach the general public, school age and university students, young people outside of school environments, teachers, civil society organisations, parliamentarians, effected communities, law enforcement and other departments of civil service, members of the public and the private sector.

It was agreed despite some disagreement on what precisely constitutes ‘education,’ activities that provide or promote systematic instruction, especially at a school, university or structured environment, are integral to enhancing UK contributions to the prevention of atrocities, whether at home or abroad. Education activities are commonly used in the UK to raise awareness, share knowledge, perspective and experiences, and increase understanding of specific periods of history, current crises, strategies of prevention, resilience and citizenship.

There was consensus that effective long-term atrocity prevention requires a strong educational component with an emphasis on school curriculums to ensure children are taught how to engage with processes that commonly underpin atrocity crimes, such as prejudice, discrimination and extremism. However, there was also firm acknowledgement of the need for holistic education, global citizenship, and personal skill development to facilitate participation in democratic process to be better integrated in different sectors.

These branches represent the activities of the 18 participating organisations that they themselves see as contributing to the prevention of atrocities. The work of many other UK-based organisations might well fit within this map however they may also undertake activities that are not included. The value of this map, we hope, is that it reflects, for the first time, a breadth of UK civil society activities that are consciously acknowledged by practitioners themselves to be atrocity prevention. None of the workshop participants knew all the other participating organisations beforehand: the potential for these activities to become more joined-up is considerable.





**Research:** Research forms a large component of UK civil society activities in this area and is used to enhance approaches to prediction, prevention, protection and justice. Two thirds of the participating organisations undertake some form of research with and for the benefit of as many as eight user groups. Research on issues related to and informing the prevention of mass atrocities is undertaken alongside and involving UK and in-country community groups, affected populations including both victims and perpetrators, universities, international institutions, decision makers, think tanks, and the private sector. UK-produced research is currently being used to track risk indicators, monitor situations in the UK and abroad, scrutinise UK and international policy, gather evidence and examples of best practice, bring local view points and experience to local, national and international duty bearers, collect data to inform judicial, advocacy, academic, and other civil society activities.

The contribution to knowledge from the participating organisations is considerable and is already reaching or benefiting many different stakeholders from grassroots communities, UK decision makers, and international actors. However, awareness, even within the workshop, of each other's work was low, despite ready acknowledgment from most participants that their organisations would benefit from consuming and sharing other forms of research.

**Memorialisation:** While a smaller proportion of UK civil society organisations engage directly in the memorialisation of past atrocities these activities tend to be well resourced and have nationwide (and sometimes global) reach.

Many activities are coordinated around specific dates of commemoration but the memorialisation of past atrocities takes place year-round thanks to civil society organisations, survivors and their communities, libraries and museums, policy makers, schools, and the general public. The role and power of survivor experiences and perspectives in this particular area of civil society work was emphasised by all participants. The commemoration of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides remains somewhat independent of memorialisation activities for other mass atrocities. Similarly, many commemorative activities that successfully bringing together different corners of UK community, government, the media, and the private sector do not currently engage with many advocacy or policy-oriented activities that seek to implement lessons of the past to prevent atrocities in the future.

**Network Building:** While there are few organisations leading such work in this particular area, networks are one of the few ways in which UK civil society organisations working in and around atrocity prevention come in to contact with one another. All but one participating organisation agreed that some component of their atrocity prevention activities are pursued through network building. The majority of these networks seek to connect relevant stakeholders with specific diaspora communities or affected communities. Domestic NGO and civil society networks either connect more established branches of the UK's human rights sector, such as peacebuilding, conflict prevention, memorialisation, or country-specific crises, or tend to consolidate around specific advocacy tasks related to the



broader goal of atrocity prevention but are not explicitly tasked with advancing the agenda as a whole. The Atrocity Prevention Working Group, convened by Protection Approaches, was highlighted by some participants as an important exception. The importance of strong, inclusive, well-resourced networks was repeatedly emphasised throughout the workshop and there was consensus that strengthening civil society networks is essential in this area.

**Human rights monitoring:** Eight of the participating organisations currently undertake or facilitate in-country human rights monitoring. Five work in and with one specific country of concern (Syria, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Burma, UK) while others have a more global reach. While the majority of these activities serve as a means of early warning and provide data for research and advocacy, documentation of violations is also undertaken to assist with subsequent accountability and justice processes. However, monitoring does not necessarily include indicators of mass atrocities or identity-based violence, information is not always shared among other civil society actors working on atrocity prevention, and lessons and best practice are not generally shared between organisations.

**Technology:** The application of technological approaches to the prediction and prevention of atrocities, and protection once violence has begun, accounts for a smaller component of current UK civil society activities but has a global reach. Technology is being used by UK-based NGOs to monitor situations of concern, to record and document human rights violations, to connect local perspectives with national and international duty bearers, and as a means of collecting evidence for future judicial and accountability processes. These activities are undertaken in collaboration with INGOs, local populations, the private sector, international organisations and human rights defenders, and engages policymakers and the public media. Technological tools and approaches are crucial to building effective prediction models and measuring indicators however it was acknowledged that there is currently little communication within the UK between organisations collecting data and research-led or policy-oriented organisations.

**Training and capacity building:** Over half of the participating organisations provide some form of training and/or capacity building as part of their atrocity prevention work. These services currently reach UK-based diaspora communities, in-country communities and local duty bearers, the UK military, the media, UK civil service and law enforcement, affected populations and other civil society actors. UK-based activities tend to address specific gaps in knowledge, policy or processes related to but are rarely explicitly acknowledged as atrocity prevention.

**In-country peace building:** Conflict prevention through in-country peace-building constitutes a well-established and comparatively well-resourced branch of UK civil society. However, despite the substantial overlap between conflict prevention and atrocity prevention this has not yet translated into more effective communication, collaboration or coordination across the UK human rights sector. Only five of the participating organisations currently contribute to atrocity prevention through in-country peace-building activities, although their reach is very international. Some organisations work only in one country while others work globally, advocating for

increased integration of local perspectives and expertise into atrocity prevention activities. However, many of these activities, the lessons learnt, any evidence of best practice, and the perspectives of the affected communities themselves are currently not often shared with other UK-based civil society actors working on the prevention of atrocities by other means.

**Accountability and justice:** The pursuit of justice and accountability is a crucial component of any local, national or international response to atrocity crimes and to their long-term prevention. UK civil society contributions to post-atrocity justice currently include working with affected communities in the UK and in-country, with in-country justice and accountability mechanisms, with lawyers in and out of the UK, as well as with UK regional and international judicial systems. Many of these activities remain independent of UK-based advocacy on and around issues of atrocity prevention however it was acknowledged that strengthening relationships between UK civil society atrocity prevention stakeholders and legal networks would be beneficial in developing advocacy around issues of post-atrocity justice.

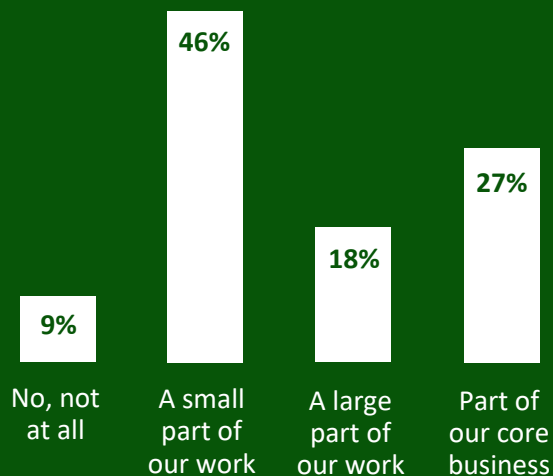
## 6. Challenges facing the UK's civil society atrocity prevention activities

UK-based organisations working towards a world free from atrocity face many challenges. The most conspicuous, however, is potentially the easiest to overcome. Many misconceptions and misgivings about what mass atrocity prevention entails – and by extension, who undertakes its activities – stem from the absence of a clear collective articulation by civil society organisations of the challenge and how (some components of) their work contribute to that goal. In the UK the prevention of mass atrocities is generally seen as both very specific and overwhelming. Atrocity prevention is also commonly understood by the general public, many (often influential) civil society organisations, and by Government as a reactive approach to rare, highly complex crises where the point of acute violence has already been reached. As a result, civil society atrocity prevention activities are frequently viewed in the UK, and therefore very often implemented, through the prism of individual situations where prevention has failed and atrocities have been or are being committed. Many continue to conflate calls for prevention with their fears of ill-judged armed intervention. The prevention of atrocities can therefore be seen as a desirable but conceptually challenging task.

Yet recognition that the prevention of atrocities requires the consistent commitment of many actors to slightly augment existing approaches to social cohesion, peace, security and stability is in itself relatively new –and not only in the UK. Moreover, as the outcomes of this workshop and Protection Approaches' recent activities attest, an atrocity prevention sector is emerging in the UK. It is a network with potential not only to work more effectively together but that could help integrate the lessons and approaches of effective atrocity prediction, prevention and response throughout the wider human rights community. Nevertheless, clear challenges lie ahead.

## Post civil society workshop survey:

**Q1.** Before the workshop, did you consider that the organisation you were representing engages in prediction, prevention or responses to mass atrocity crimes?



**Q2.** Did this opinion change at all after the workshop?



“ You have really got us thinking about more broad approaches to atrocity prevention generally rather than on Burma specific policy. ”

**Mark Farmaner**  
Director, The Burma Campaign UK

## 'External' challenges

**Funding:** Funding for atrocity prevention activities has been largely overlooked in the UK and, even during short-lived periods of interest among funders, has always been limited. This is despite the (mounting) evidence that investing in diverse methods of upstream prevention, prediction, and supporting innovative approaches of timely response saves lives and money, and can avert serious, protracted crises. UK-based organisations already engaging in this field have achieved impressive results with limited funds but few have secured funds to explicitly support atrocity prevention activities. This is partly a matter of language choice and the tendency to pursue activities that contribute to atrocity prevention but are not articulated as such. However, limited opportunities to apply for broader activities that address the challenge holistically as both global and preventable reinforces the disconnected, reactive, and somewhat ad-hoc nature of many UK civil society activities in this arena.

A specific challenge comes again from misconceptions and misgivings within the UK funding community of atrocity prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. The non-violence and Quaker funding community are considered particularly unlikely to support work explicitly labelled as atrocity prevention or designed to strengthen the UK's contribution to the Responsibility to Protect (even if the work in question is wholly rooted in pillar one or two contributions).

Funding challenges sit within considerable shrinking in the UK, Europe, and in the US of financial resources and political capital for human rights, community work, and international development. US withdrawal from multilateral arenas and cuts to budgets contributing to the prevention of atrocities around the world, in addition to worrying domestic policies, raises concerns in the UK around the future of US-based funding. Similarly, the UK's looming withdrawal from the European Union poses questions regarding the future of UK and European funding trends.

**Political will to end mass atrocities:** Public and political interest remains reactionary and rarely focussed on more than one or two ongoing crises at the same time. This is despite widespread public, political and media engagement with Holocaust Memorial Day and annual commitments to learn lessons of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. There persists a perception of a hierarchy of suffering in much public and political discourse where genocide and the prevention of that crime is considered paramount, achievable, and less politically risky. In turn, other crimes against humanity are treated as 'less bad', 'more complex' or 'political.' This stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of what mass atrocities are.

**Low public knowledge:** Basic familiarity of what mass atrocities are is low in the UK. Knowledge and understanding among the general public, in Parliament, in the media, and in some parts of Government of how mass atrocities can be effectively predicted, prevented and responded to is lower still. So too is knowledge and understanding of why the prevention of identity-based violence and mass atrocities requires additional components not always included in conflict prevention. However, again this is largely a case of language. Public concern for the gravest human rights abuses remains strong with members of the public more likely to engage with country-specific crises than the global agenda. While objectives of mass atrocity prevention in the UK do not necessarily require immediate sea-change in public opinion, absence of joined-up public pressure inhibits collective advocacy in civil society and in the political sphere.

**Multilateralism under threat:** International cooperative efforts to combat atrocities rely on a strong multilateral system and acceptance of international norms and the rule of international law. However, the system and its values are increasingly under threat as trends towards isolationism and nativism increase. It is incumbent upon the sector to actively engage in making the case for why the rules-based international order is in our collective and our individual interests and should be not only upheld but actively defended.





## 'Internal' challenges

**Understanding of atrocity prevention within the human rights sector:** In many ways wariness of the atrocity prevention agenda remains most deeply rooted within the broader human rights sector itself. This is a particularly UK phenomenon linked to two commonly held misconceptions: that the prevention of mass atrocities equals humanitarian intervention and/or that atrocity prevention is the same as conflict prevention. This mischaracterisation of both the vision and mission of atrocity prevention can, within the UK human rights sphere – whether among practitioners or funders – be challenging. These challenges represent a wider struggle in human rights towards joined-up, holistic approaches to global challenges, that pursue strategies inclusive of grassroots and international leaderships, are cross-sector, and make use of varied perspectives and tools. Typically, organisations working in and with states or communities affected by atrocity violence are less likely to hold these views. For those engaging in atrocity prevention, articulating or discussing the challenge with longstanding human rights stakeholders in the UK poses a considerable challenge and reinforces perceptions of the agenda as being marginal or controversial.

**No clearly articulated shared goal:** Conscious civil society contributions to the prevention of future atrocities are growing in confidence and reach. However, activities remain disconnected; many potential civil society allies do not see how their work constitutes to the goal or how the work of others could strengthen their own. Our research has found a desire for a clearly articulated shared goal and desired outcome in more concrete terms. For many, this is conceived as a set of clear asks for government. However, others simply suggest beginning with a clear and agreed definition of atrocity prevention.

**Resources:** The majority of organisations who participated in the workshop are small teams, most of under 10 members of staff, some under four. Six of the participating organisations are younger than ten years old, eleven under twenty. At a time of domestic and international political uncertainty, amid the growing need for services both in the UK and abroad, the emerging atrocity prevention branch of human rights activity faces both restricted funding opportunities and pressure to firefight rather than prioritise upstream prevention. Spare capacity to engage in even the most simple of activities is difficult. While all participants acknowledged at least some of their activities contribute to a shared goal of preventing atrocities, only three organisations (not including Protection Approaches) consider that goal as constituting part of core business. Therefore individual thought leadership and personal interest rather than programmatic strategy tends to drive collaborative conversations forward. Near-future network building and collaborative activities will need to be resource-light and impact heavy.

**Lack of diversity:** While the workshop served to highlight the many and diverse approaches to atrocity prevention being undertaken by UK civil society organisations, and in full acknowledgement that there are other organisations working towards this agenda in the UK who did not take part, the UK's emergent atrocity prevention space can at times seem unrepresentative and lacking in human diversity. Wide breadth of viewpoints, expertise and experience is beneficial to any endeavour, however can be challenging to ensure.

Q5. Would you be supportive of Protection Approaches taking networking and collaborative activities around atrocity prevention in the UK forward?



## 7. Where next?

The During the workshop, participants considered the principles that should shape next steps.

**Communication:** Sharing information, whether about donors or lessons and evidence of what works, should be the easiest way to strengthen relationships and coordinate efforts. Most civil society organisations communicate and collaborate with numerous networks; considering how to better connect these initiatives will help ensure efforts are not replicated. Communication builds trust and networks work best when they foster positive and inclusive relationships.

**Clarity** Articulating a common goal and collective strategy will facilitate a greater sense of unity and shared purpose. In the words of one participant it will ‘give a northern star to inspire collaboration,’ and help define a clearer direction for collective action. Mapping shared agendas and goals and understanding of how this corner of the human rights sector fits together will promote clarity of purpose and facilitate outreach. Detention Forum, a movement of 50 organisations, working together to challenge the UK’s use of detention was presented as a case of best practice and possible module.

**Collaboration:** Increasing joined-up activities and making collaboration within the working group more effective would not only enhance the contributions made by UK civil society to atrocity prevention but also indirectly help dismantle popular misconceptions of what the shared agenda entails. Collaboration and coordination will increase collective and individual visibility, and improve capacity through opportunity knowledge exchange. Speaking collectively on key issues in both public and private advocacy will embolden civil society efforts and increase the weight of our asks.

**Confidence:** Organisations and experts working in and around atrocity prevention need to be confident in articulating the need for additional work to be done or for current strategies to be augmented. At the same time, organisations working in this area must measure their own expectations and the expectations of those they work with and be realistic about what can be achieved. The UK’s civil society and its NGO community continues to become more diverse and remains strong in the face of an environment of growing demand and shrinking resources. Its great strength comes from its diverse approaches to varied as well as shared challenges, from the creativity of individuals and organisations, from its many voices. It is because of this diversity that its potential to influence and to leverage change is so considerable.

## 8. Our next steps

Following the workshop participants were invited to participate in an anonymous feedback and follow up survey. This tool, independently designed and analysed, was intended to measure support for Protection Approaches leadership in convening civil society activities in the UK. We were delighted that all the respondents were supportive of Protection Approaches taking networking and collaborative activities around atrocity prevention in the UK forward. Protection Approaches is now exploring how to facilitate greater and more effective communication, collaboration and coordination within UK civil society in order to strengthen and elevate civil society contributions to this shared goal. Increased investment in strengthening this network and facilitating cross-sector work is vital to enhancing civil society contributions to the prevention of atrocities and we are now actively seeking funding to support these activities.

Our commitment to our UK civil society colleagues is threefold:

**Leadership:** Protection Approaches is committed to taking these conversations and activities forward. Our Research & Policy team will take responsibility for the next steps in network building, coordinating strategy development, and information sharing however, working towards a more effective civil society activity on atrocity prevention will always be a shared endeavour. As the sector map shows, there is a breadth of expertise and perspectives that we as a network must trust in and recognise both collective and individual added value. Protection Approaches will strive to ensure that diverse voices from across the network are able to share in leading the direction and activities.

**Communication, convening and network building:** Protection Approaches will expand the Civil Society Atrocity Prevention Working Group and commit to communicating and sharing information via these channels more frequently. We will seek agreement on and publish a clear terms of reference for the group and its members and move towards a semi-formal structure where organisations can apply to join. All members will be profiled on a website database. Protection Approaches will also increase the visibility of the informal professional networking group, which is open to all who work in or around issues of mass atrocity prevention. In order to maintain momentum, semi-regular meetings, events, and activities will be scheduled.

**Help deliver a clear strategy for Government:** While it is clear that not all members of the growing network and wider sector would necessarily engage in policy-facing activities, there are many organisations who do; moreover this is an arena where more joined up thinking and coordinated activity could yield positive results. In response to recommendations during the workshop and requests made via anonymous feedback, Protection Approaches will initiate a process to clarify that common goal and collectively develop a strategy for advocacy activities. This will build on and strengthen existing activities of the working group, will draw upon the group's breadth of expertise and its collective reach.

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