

Ambassador Susan Rice at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Politico

Laura Rozen

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To commemorate the adoption of the 1948 Genocide Convention, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum welcomed Ambassador to the UN Mrs. Susan Rice. The Museum's Committee on Conscience has aimed to sensitize the general public at large to the problem of genocide. The Committee has also conducted outreach to policymakers on the Genocide Prevention Task Force, a blueprint to enhance the capacity of the US government to recognize and respond to threats of genocide and mass atrocity convened by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the U.S. Institute of Peace and the American Academy of Diplomacy. Below are excerpts from the question and answer session between Michael Abramowitz, Director of the Committee on Conscience and Mrs. Rice following her speech.

Abramowitz: (...)President Obama has repeatedly talked about Rwanda and talked about his determination to prevent and end atrocities like those that took place in Rwanda those taking place in Darfur. What concrete steps do you think the Obama administration is actually taking now to realize that commitment?

Rice: OK. Well, first of all, prevention is not only about warning and anticipating the potential for genocide or mass atrocities. (...) But it's also about aggressive, early and real diplomacy. And this administration has stepped up its efforts diplomatically to address ongoing and potential conflicts. So the president, as you know, has appointed a senior and special envoy for Sudan, General Scott Gration, whose role is not only to deal with Darfur, but to work to implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan and prevent that situation with respect to the North and the South from spinning out of control, which I think potentially we have to be mindful about, of that risk. He's appointed former Congressman and former Special Envoy Howard Wolpe as a special envoy for the Great Lakes region, including Congo and Burundi and that whole region, which has been a hotbed, as you know, of atrocities and genocide over the last two decades, to be actively involved in diplomacy in that region to prevent and resolve

conflict.(...)

We've also been very active, as was the previous administration, indeed, going back to the Clinton administration, in trying to build the capacity of states and regional institutions to engage and deploy for peacekeeping purposes. The Global Peace Operations Initiative, the African Contingency training effort, which is a successor to an initiative that I was very much involved in, in the Clinton administration, have together trained over 70,000 peacekeepers around the world, many of whom are deployed now in places like Darfur and Liberia and Chad and elsewhere.

Abramowitz: you've reflected upon this issue of preventing genocide, what can we do to strengthen the institutions of the United Nations (...) [?]

Rice: Well, first of all, I think there's growing recognition at the United Nations that what we're dealing with a continuum of conflict that begins at prevention and ends at peace-building and peace-consolidation. And there's a need to build and strengthen the institutional capacity across the entirety of that spectrum.

On the prevention side, the U.N. has set up mediation teams. It has better warning than it used to have. But, frankly, this is an area which the U.N. is still weak, and it's reliant on member states that are reluctant to provide full and real-time information.

It has gotten very active in diplomacy and prevention. The Department of Political Affairs is doing much of the difficult legwork in places that don't get a lot of visibility, places like Madagascar and Guinea and Nepal, where the risks of conflict and violence are real.

Then it is, obviously, the world's 800-pound gorilla when it comes to peacekeeping and the deployment of forces, over 100,000 U.N. peacekeepers now deployed in some 15 operations around the world, more than ever before. And the U.N. has substantially improved the quality and its capacity to deploy peacekeeping, but it is now so overstretched (...). So there are steps that have been taken, but there's much more that needs to be done. And I have made, as ambassador,

strengthening the U.N.'s peacekeeping capacity one of my core priorities.

And then, finally, on the peace-building side, which is an area where the U.N. has evolved some new mechanisms and structures, like the Peacebuilding Commission, which will come up for its five-year review in 2010, there are new mechanisms to try to consolidate peace through diplomacy, through security-sector reform, promoting and enhancing the rule of law, having accountability for atrocities. And these things are nascent, but they're very important and they are manifest from Burundi to places like Guinea-Bissau.

You talked about the Human Rights Council, where the function of the special rapporteurs is particularly important, to provide information and, indeed, even warning. But the capacity needs to be built along this entire spectrum of conflict. And I think while we can certainly point to -- to real progress, there are enormous gaps that obviously remain. (...)

See Susan Rice's full speech and comments.