Early Warning for Protection: Technologies and Practice for the Prevention of Mass Atrocity Crimes Oxfam Australia May 2011   *The Early Warning for Protection conference was developed and implemented by Oxfam Australia in partnership with AusAID, the Asia-Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, The University of Queensland and the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect. Held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 3-4 November 2010, the conference brought together non-government organisations and civil society organisations working with communities under threat of violence, with United Nations (UN) actors and technology specialists to explore ways to prevent mass atrocities.*

Excerpts from Executive Summary:

The Early Warning for Protection conference brought together non-government organisations and civil society organisations working with communities under threat of violence, with United Nations (UN) actors and technology specialists to explore interdisciplinary ways to prevent mass atrocities. Conference participants analysed ways to identify early warning signs and signals and develop and implement effective early responses to those warnings. They also investigated the use of new technologies to facilitate early warning, early response, and community reparedness,

building on lessons learned by the disaster management community.

The conference was held within the context of the now well-established principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P). (…)

Three types of early warning mechanisms and systems were examined at the conference. The first is a more traditional form usually undertaken by an institution or organisation involved in information collection and analysis for the purpose of enabling early responses to emerging crises. This form is referred to as a formal or structural organisational early warning system. The

second is also well established but more organic and includes community-based informal mechanisms that have historically provided information between and to communities at risk. The third involves newly emerging systems that use real-time technology-based early warning. (…)

Regardless of which early warning mechanism is activated, an effective and appropriate early response is essential for an early warning system to work. Depending on the circumstances, responses will need to occur at different levels: local, national, regional and international.

At the international level, responses are guided through diplomatic negotiations, between states, and within international organisations such as the UN. Response to early warning can

also be instigated by pressure at a local or national level, and conference participants heard that

local dispute resolution was often the most effective form of protection for vulnerable populations. (…)

Several matters for further consideration were identified at the conference:

1. Conceptual clarity is needed regarding early warning for the prevention of mass atrocities, R2P, and protection more broadly. These concepts are closely related although the relationships are still not well understood.

2.The prevention of mass atrocities — at least structural prevention — does not fall neatly into

either development or emergency/humanitarian practice. However, there is a need for greater

convergence between humanitarian and development approaches to help prevent mass

atrocities, and protect vulnerable communities from the commission of these crimes.

3. There are untapped opportunities for collaboration between development and humanitarian nongovernment organisations (NGOs) and conflict early-warning practitioners — particularly those practitioners who are developing and using new technologies — although such collaboration is not without risk to humanitarian principles and practice.

4.The humanitarian community has much to learn from civil society organisations working

to support community self-protection, preparedness and prevention through conflict transformation. (…)

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