

Obama Announces Formation of the Atrocities Prevention Board Jonas Claes United States Institute of Peace

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On April 23, 2012, President Obama announced the formation of the Atrocities Prevention Board and other steps to help the United States prevent and respond to mass atrocities. USIP's Jonas Claes discusses the impact these initiatives will have on U.S. atrocity prevention efforts.

What is the significance of President Obama's announcement for the U.S. Government's atrocity prevention policy?

Since the Rwandan genocide, consecutive U.S. administrations have expressed their frustration about our collective ill-preparedness to prevent genocide and mass atrocity crimes. In today's speech at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, President Obama confirmed that atrocity prevention is "a core national security interest and core moral responsibility." The President's speech outlined an unprecedented effort to institutionalize normative commitments to atrocity prevention by creating a high-level interagency Atrocities Prevention Board. (...) Apart from identifying threats, the Board will oversee the development and implementation of atrocity prevention and response policy. The President's announcement also represents an important step in the implementation of the

Responsibility to Protect
at the national level.

How can this new interagency board contribute to the prevention of atrocities on the ground? Will the new board be able to prevent future Syria-type situations?

The creation of the Atrocities Prevention Board will not result in the immediate cessation of ongoing atrocities. (...) Over the long-term, the APB may enable the U.S. Government to move away from its traditional ad hoc approach to imminent or ongoing atrocities. When confronted with a specific atrocity context, the Board will assess the utility of available tools at the national and international level to present senior decision-makers with a range of integrated and timely response options. In addition, new tools will be introduced, including targeted sanctions against those using information technology to commit grave human rights abuses. (...)

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