

What Does It Mean to Prevent Genocide? Alex Zucker IJ Central 17 Oct 2012 *Alex Zucker is Communications Officer of the Auschwitz Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, a nonprofit based in New York City and Oswiecim, Poland.*

Never before has the idea of preventing genocide been so widely discussed, and so popularly supported, in the United States. Thus President Barack Obama's creation, in April 2012, of the Atrocities Prevention Board, the first high-level U.S. government initiative on the issue. (...)

In the public discourse, however, there is still little agreement, never mind discussion, about what it actually means to prevent. With this in mind, there are four points I'd like to emphasize (based on the approach the Auschwitz Institute uses in our programs for government officials):

- 1) Genocide is a process, not an event.
 - 2) Genocide can be prevented.
 - 3) Military intervention is not prevention.
 - 4) Genocide derives primarily from within a society and therefore must be prevented primarily from within a society. (...)
- In 1996, Dr. Gregory Stanton, a U.S. scholar, developed a model of genocide consisting of eight stages:
1. Classification
 2. Symbolization
 3. Dehumanization
 4. Organization
 5. Polarization
 6. Preparation
 7. Extermination
 8. Denial
- Note here, again, only one of the eight stages actually involves killing—or “Extermination,” as it is called here.

Together these two definitions illustrate clearly that genocide prevention requires more than just putting a stop to ongoing killing. Yet most people in the United States continue to see military intervention as the primary means of preventing genocide. (...)

The point at which military intervention is required to stop killing, however, is one at which genocide prevention has already failed. To use an analogy that comes from a realm closer to home for most people: Preventing genocide by military intervention is like preventing alcoholism by walking into a bar and knocking drinks out of people's hands. (...)

With this in mind, here are two aspects of prevention we believe are key:

- 1) Like genocide itself, prevention is a process, not an event.
- 2) It is up to the country or society in which the genocide is taking place—with help—to take and maintain the necessary steps. For the solution to be effective and long-lasting, the impetus for this change must come from within. This brings us to two terms you hear a lot in our line of work: “toolbox” and “political will.” As Jonathan Prentice of the International Crisis Group noted, in a May 2011 speech, the toolbox for prevention is by now not only pretty well known, but also pretty full. He listed the following tools:

Early warning—by NGOs, the media, the UN, civil society

- Institution- or capacity-building
- Reducing economic inequities
- Security sector reform
- Strengthening legal protection
- Fostering inclusive governance

We at the Auschwitz Institute add two more items to the list: transitional justice and weapons control. But the main point is to implement these policies effectively. (...)

So one last point: Without accountability, there can be no responsibility. If there is not a single person—or single agency—in the government whose job is to prevent genocide, it is just too easy for everyone to pass the buck.

What, then, are we left with? To return to the question we asked at the beginning: “What does it mean to prevent genocide?”

It means 1) government decision makers 2) with identified points of accountability 3) committed to long-term solutions 4) using existing tools 5) viewing every situation through a “genocide prevention lens” 6) focusing their efforts on their own societies.

Nothing heroic about it. No drama. But this is not about Nielsen ratings. This is about saving human beings’ lives.

Read

[full post](#)

.