

Gen•o•cide [n]: “the deliberate and systematic extermination of an ethnic, racial, religious or national group”



OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL ADVISER ON THE

PREVENTION OF  
GENOCIDE



United Nations

**“Far from being consigned to history, genocide and its ilk remain a serious threat. Not just vigilance but a willingness to act are as important today as ever.”**

— BAN Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General,  
60th anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention  
and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide  
9 December 2008

**“This is an impossible mandate that must be made possible. Genocide is one of the most heinous of crimes against which all of humanity must unite to prevent its recurrence and punish those responsible. However, for the same reason, it evokes denial from both the perpetrators and those who would be called upon to intervene to prevent or stop it. This is why our strategy focuses on early prevention, by responding to situations of concern before positions harden into denial.”**

— Francis Deng, Special Adviser of the  
United Nations Secretary-General  
on the Prevention of Genocide  
April 2010

## Mission statement:

**The Special Adviser acts as a catalyst to raise awareness of the causes and dynamics of genocide, to alert relevant actors where there is a risk of genocide and to advocate and mobilize for appropriate action.**

While this booklet focuses on the work of the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, it should be viewed in conjunction with the closely related work of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General who focuses on the responsibility to protect. In order to save resources, eliminate redundancy and maximize synergies and effectiveness, the Secretary-General has directed the two Special Advisers to work toward forming a joint office that will merge their functions and activities. This merger will result in changes to the conceptual framework, methodology and operational activities of the Office as described in this publication.

The work of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide has been supported and reinforced by the Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Genocide, whose members raise awareness about genocide and advocate for preventive action around the world. With the formation of a joint office, the Committee will be given a new mandate, title and composition to reflect the broader concerns of the Office.

## What is genocide?

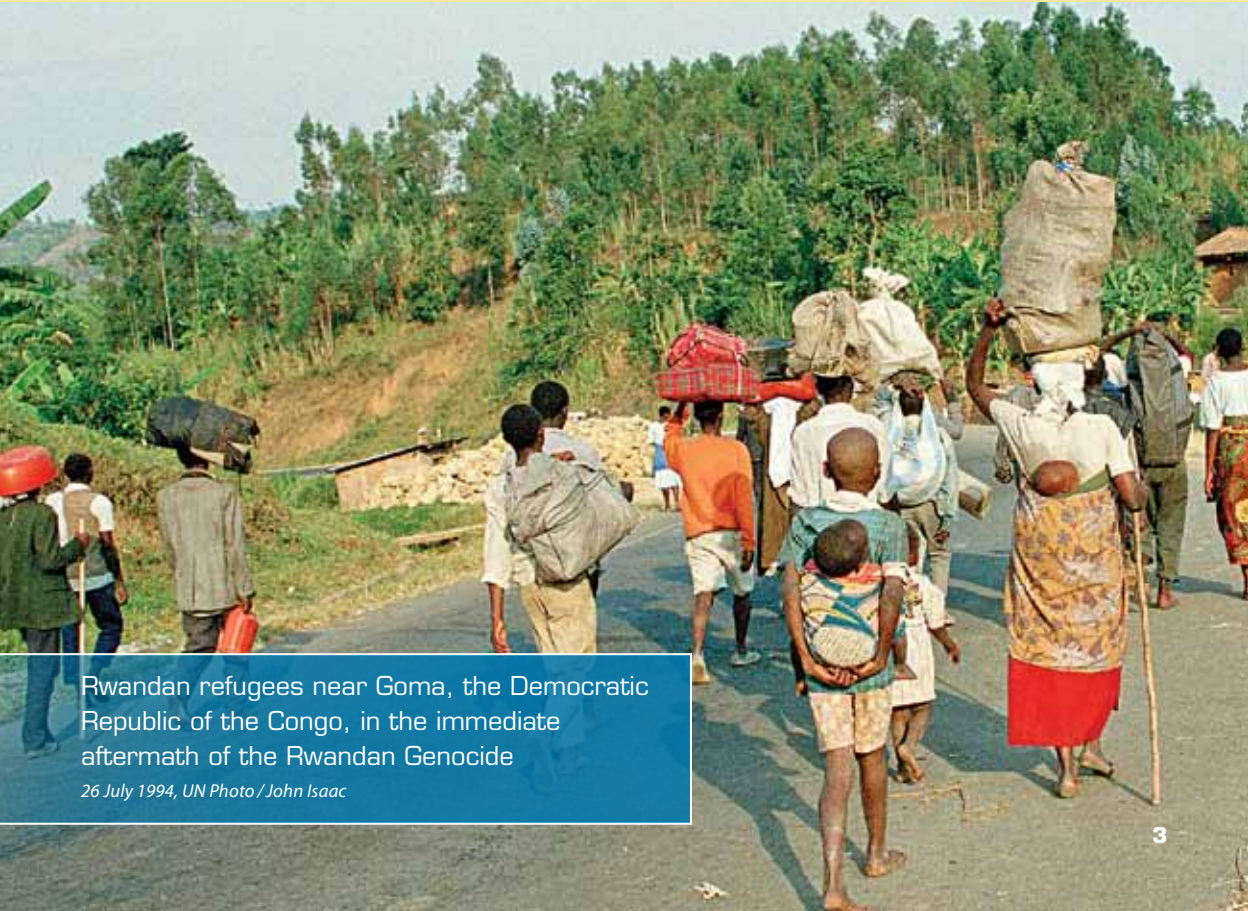
The 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (article 2) defines genocide as “any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group ...”, including:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

The Convention confirms that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or war, is a crime under international law which parties to the Convention undertake “to prevent and to punish” (article 1). The primary responsibility to prevent and stop genocide lies with the State in which this crime takes place.

Genocide often occurs in societies in which different national, racial, ethnic or religious groups become locked in identity-related conflicts. However, it is not the differences in identity per se that generate conflict, but rather the gross inequalities associated with those differences in terms of access to power and resources, social services, development opportunities and the enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms. It is often the targeted group’s reactions to these inequalities, and counter-reactions by the dominant group, that generate conflict that can escalate to genocide.

Given that no country is perfectly homogeneous, genocide is a truly global challenge. Genocide may occur in times of peace, where groups are intentionally subject to long-term policies and practices affecting their ability to exist as an identity group, as well as in the context of both intra-State and inter-State conflicts.



Rwandan refugees near Goma, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the immediate aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide

26 July 1994, UN Photo / John Isaac

## The duty to prevent

The duty to prevent and halt genocide and mass atrocities lies first and foremost with the State, but the international community has a role that cannot be blocked by the invocation of sovereignty. Sovereignty no longer exclusively protects States from foreign interference; it is a charge of responsibility where States are accountable for the welfare of their people. This principle is enshrined in article 1 of the Genocide Convention and embodied in the principle of “sovereignty as responsibility” and in the emergent concept of the responsibility to protect. The three pillars of the responsibility to protect, as stipulated in the Outcome Document of the 2005 United Nations World Summit, are:

- (1) The State carries the primary responsibility for protecting populations from genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing, and their incitement;
- (2) The international community has a responsibility to encourage and assist States in fulfilling this responsibility;
- (3) The international community has a responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other means to protect populations from these crimes. If a State is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take collective action to protect populations, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

If the root causes of genocide revolve around inequalities between identity groups, preventing genocide begins with ensuring that all groups within society enjoy the rights and dignity of belonging as equal citizens. Early prevention therefore becomes a challenge of good governance and

equitable management of diversity. That means eliminating gross political and economic inequalities, and promoting a common sense of belonging on equal footing.



The United Nations Security Council, New York

23 November 2004, UN Photo / Ky Chung

# The role of the United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

In 2004, following the genocidal violence in Rwanda and the Balkans, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed Juan Mendez as Special Adviser to fill critical gaps in the international system that allowed those tragedies to go unchecked. In 2007, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Francis M. Deng on a full-time basis at the level of Under-Secretary-General. He also appointed Edward Luck as the Special Adviser who focuses on the responsibility to protect, on a part-time basis at the level of Assistant Secretary-General.

The Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG)<sup>1</sup> works to strengthen the role of the United Nations in preventing genocide by:

***Raising awareness:*** Creating knowledge and raising awareness of genocide prevention in order to enhance the capacity of the United Nations to analyse and manage information relevant to genocide and related crimes, and enable States, the United Nations system and civil society to work collectively towards preventing genocide. The Office:

- Assists regional organizations and governments to institute genocide prevention mechanisms, and engages governments on the nature of genocide and constructive ways of managing diversity as a preventive strategy;
- Organizes high-level UN conferences on genocide prevention, holds public briefings, conducts and disseminates case studies on management of diverse populations, and publishes expert papers on thematic issues;

<sup>1</sup> For the mandate of the Special Adviser, see letter dated 12 July 2004 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, UN document S/2004/567 of 13 July 2004.



- Conducts training seminars for government officials and UN staff and has developed a training manual on genocide prevention.

**Alerting:** Collecting information, in particular from within the UN system, on massive and serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law of ethnic and racial origin that, if not prevented or halted, might lead to genocide, and acting as a mechanism of early warning to the Security Council, through the Secretary-General, by bringing these situations to its attention. The Office:

- In close consultation with the UN system, maintains working files on situations of concern based on the Office's Analysis Framework, which identifies factors that, cumulatively, could lead to genocidal violence; maintains a database of information on possible precursors to genocide; and is working to define and track dangerous speech and draw up recommendations to prevent or limit its effect;
- Provides timely advice to the Secretary-General and, as appropriate, the Security Council, on situations of concern, through advisory notes and briefings.

**Advocating:** Making recommendations to the Secretary-General on actions to prevent or halt genocide. The Office:

- Advises the Secretary-General on preventive action;
- Mobilizes the UN system and other key partners, taking into account the urgency of a situation, and conducts advocacy missions to countries where the involvement of the Special Adviser is considered of particular value.

## The methodology of the Office of the Special Adviser

The Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide has developed an Analysis Framework that it uses to determine whether there may be a risk of genocide in a given situation. The Office encourages other institutions and organizations to adopt this framework in their analysis of the risk of genocide.

The following eight factors cumulatively increase the risk of genocide:

- Tense inter-group relations, including a record of discrimination and/or other human rights violations committed against a group;
- Weak institutional capacity to prevent genocide, such as the lack of an independent judiciary, ineffective national human rights institutions, the absence of international actors capable of protecting vulnerable groups, and a lack of impartial security forces and media;
- The presence of illegal arms and armed elements;
- Underlying political, economic, military or other motivation to target a group;
- Circumstances that facilitate perpetration of genocide, such as a sudden or gradual strengthening of the military or security apparatus;
- Acts that could be elements of genocide, such as such as killings, abduction and disappearances, torture, rape and sexual violence, “ethnic cleansing” or pogroms or the deliberate deprivation of food;
- Evidence of the “intent to destroy in whole or in part”;
- Triggering factors, such as elections.



A Bosnian Muslim woman mourns at the Srebrenica-Potocari Memorial and Cemetery for the Victims of the 1995 Genocide, Bosnia and Herzegovina

July 2010, AP Photo / Marko Drobnjakovic

## The role of the UN in preventing genocide

**“The prevention of mass atrocities demands a system-wide UN effort. Goals related to the responsibility to protect should also inform our development and peacebuilding work, not just our efforts in the areas of human rights, humanitarian affairs, peacekeeping and political affairs.”**

— BAN Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General,  
Stanley Foundation Conference on Implementing the  
Responsibility to Protect, Tarrytown, New York  
15 January 2010

If early prevention of genocide is a question of managing diversity responsibly, the Special Adviser’s mandate complements the core mission and work of the UN system as a whole. UN agencies, departments and programmes contribute to the prevention of genocide by, inter alia, supporting equitable economic development and the fair distribution of political power; promoting tolerance and respect for ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, and the protection of human rights; providing humanitarian assistance; and interceding to ensure peace, security and stability. The Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Special Adviser who focuses on the responsibility to protect work closely within the UN system to promote a culture of prevention.



Ambulances of UN peacekeepers in Vukovar, Croatia,  
during the war in Croatia

*1 July 1992, UN Photo/Steve Whitehouse*

## Punishing those responsible

Where genocide does occur, the International Criminal Court (ICC), which is separate from and independent of the United Nations, is empowered to investigate and prosecute those most responsible, if a State is unwilling or unable to exercise jurisdiction over alleged perpetrators. Fighting impunity and establishing a credible expectation that the perpetrators of genocide and related crimes will be held accountable can contribute effectively to a culture of prevention.



A hearing at the International Criminal Court, The Hague, The Netherlands

*February 2008, UN Photo / Marco Okhuizen*

## **Engage with the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide (OSAPG)**

The Office collects existing information on massive and serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law of national, ethnical, racial and religious origin that, if not prevented or halted, might lead to genocide. The Office largely depends on the United Nations system, Member States and civil society for information.

You can be of crucial assistance to the mandate by:

- Encouraging relevant partners to provide information to OSAPG;
- Encouraging use of the Analysis Framework;
- Working with OSAPG to raise awareness in all parts of the world of the causes of genocide and mass atrocities, and means of preventing these crimes.

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**You are invited to engage with the Office of the  
Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, see page 13**



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