



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

U.S. Department of State - Atrocities Prevention

Preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States.

– Presidential Study Directive 10, August 4, 2011

Addressing the causes and impacts of global instability and violent conflict are among the Department of State’s highest priorities. Mass atrocities - large-scale, deliberate violence against civilians - have devastating human impacts, and make peace and reconciliation more difficult to achieve. In order to effectively respond to potential mass atrocities, we must focus on and understand this type of violence, and ensure that our diplomatic approaches and programs address it. By engaging experts, improving our analysis, building the knowledge of staff and partners, and developing our understanding of the most effective diplomatic and programming responses, the Department is improving its ability to respond to potential mass atrocities.

Background

In August 2011, President Obama issued Presidential Study Directive 10 and subsequently approved several steps to strengthen the U.S. government’s ability to foresee, prevent, and respond to genocide and mass atrocities. The Study Directive led to the establishment of an the Atrocities Prevention Board (APB), a mechanism chaired at the National Security Council that involves senior officials from 10 agencies and offices across government, to support more focused monitoring and response to potential atrocity risks. The Department of State supports the work of the White House-led APB to identify priority countries, monitor emerging situations, coordinate with interagency regional and functional offices to monitor risk, develop and disseminate tools, and ensure that agencies utilize the full range of prevention or response capabilities. The APB, in turn, complements ongoing work of the State Department to address mass atrocity risk, such as through the Department’s annual human rights reporting and monitoring, planning and programming to prevent violent conflict. The Department of State also established an in-house Secretariat in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations to provide dedicated expertise on atrocities, analysis, and planning in support of APB priorities, as well as evidence-based, civilian-focused response options, including technical assistance and resources that can support an atrocity prevention effort.



The Department of State is honing its ability to effectively intervene at three stages: (1) Prevention: a long-term approach to countries at risk of developing characteristics associated with atrocities; (2) Mitigation: a focus on countries where atrocity risk is high, violence is escalating, and international attention is relatively low; (3) Response: timely use of expertise, diplomatic outreach, programs, political will, policy and media attention, and leadership to interrupt the imminent or ongoing threat of mass atrocities.

The Role of Diplomacy

Preventing widespread, deliberate violence against civilians requires a concerted global effort and an integrated, whole-of-government response that considers the full range of diplomatic options. Timely and effective use of our diplomacy and foreign assistance capabilities are central to any atrocity prevention strategy. The Department of State's capabilities lie in its deep country knowledge and on-the-ground presence through U.S. embassies and consulates, relationships with bilateral, multilateral, and local partners, intelligence and analytic capacity, staff expertise, program funding, and political and economic leverage.

Efforts to Date

The Department is focusing its efforts on atrocity prevention in three key ways:

Country work: Atrocities prevention is increasingly central to the State Department's policy approach in many high-risk countries. The State Department also considers and addresses atrocity risks in countries where early warning signs exist. Burma, Nigeria, CAR and Iraq are examples of countries in which the State Department increased its focus on atrocity prevention as a core component of the U.S. government's efforts. The Department utilizes a full range of diplomatic and program interventions to mitigate atrocities risk.

Further Integrating Atrocities Prevention: The Department of State's senior-level Anti-Atrocities Coordination Group is improving understanding of atrocities risk, the kinds of diplomacy and prevention programs that work, and is enabling atrocities prevention to become more routinely assessed across the Department. Current efforts include support to training, the development of data tools and analytics, strategic and budgetary planning for at-risk cases, disseminating lessons learned, and developing monitoring and reporting tools. Ongoing collaboration with governmental, non-governmental, Congressional, multilateral, academic, and international partners and experts amplifies these efforts.



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Partnerships: The Department of State is coordinating with and sharing knowledge with key partners including the UN Human Rights Up Front Initiative, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, international and local NGOs, European governments, the European Union, the African Union, and other regional organizations and international partners, while also working to strengthen partnerships across the U.S. government.